

Do not be afraid!

On that first Easter morning,
 First the angels say it
 According to all four gospels.

But that's not enough.
 Then
 Jesus says it again
 when he greets the disciples
 as their Risen Savior
 in the upper room.

Do not be afraid!

In Greek the verb is a tense of continual action:
 Not
 "don't become afraid"-
 but
 "stop being afraid."
 Just stop it!

Of course,
 Fear is an appropriate reaction on the part of those first disciples.

They had seen so much that unholy week-
 The raising of Lazarus from death,
 Then the adulation of the crowds on Palm Sunday.

The week culminating in the arrest,
 Bloody torture and death of their beloved Rabbi,
 Yeshua.

In this earliest gospel,
 The gospel of Mark,
 This fear is more even apparent than in Matthew.

There,
 the earliest manuscripts
 All end with this sentence:
 "So the disciples went out and fled from the empty tomb,
 for terror and amazement had seized them;
 and they said nothing to anyone,
 for they were afraid."

The manuscripts didn't stay that way long-
Very quickly people added less ominous
And more appropriate endings-
"They all saw Jesus and rejoiced etc"
That sort of thing.

But the original versions
To me seem to be the most realistic.

After all,
we are used to hearing the Resurrection of Christ
Proclaimed as good news:

Christ is Risen, alleluia!

But we have the benefit of 20/20 hindsight
and over 20 centuries of meditation and mediation
Of what this singular
Earth shattering event means.

What is there for US
to be afraid of
in this resurrection story this morning?

Let's go back to that moment today.
Let's stand with the Apostles,
Mary Magdalene, the other Mary,
Peter and John
And all the others.

We peer into the open gaping hole
Of that rock hewn tomb,
Smelling of dampness
of death
and decay,
now empty.

Let us peer into that dark space,
With those first followers of Jesus' way,

Indeed with all of us
who,
Orthodox and Roman Catholic and Protestant alike,

this morning
Bend our heads
to peer into that empty tomb.

What do WE see this morning?

Like those first followers,
we look death in the face.

We peer into the eyes of the Syrian refugees,
We encounter those who are ill,
the poor and homeless,
the lonely,
of whom we are all a part
because we all share a common humanity.

Bravely,
In the face of so much death,
Let us lay aside our fears this morning.

With those first folk
Gathered at the darkened tomb,
Let us ask ourselves,

In a world where God is Risen
and on the loose,
What could happen next?

The life changing nature
Of this moment is captured best in Jan Richard's poem
Risen:

(C Jan Richardson janrichardson.com)

Risen

For Easter Day

If you are looking
for a blessing,

do not linger here.
Here is only emptiness,
a hollow,
a husk where a blessing used to be.

This blessing was not content

in its confinement.

It could not abide its isolation,
the unrelenting silence,
the pressing stench of death.

So if it is a blessing you seek,
open your own mouth.

Fill your lungs with the air this new morning brings
and then release it with a cry.

Hear how the blessing breaks forth
in your own voice,
how your own lips form every word
you never dreamed to say.

See how the blessing circles back again,
wanting you to repeat it,
but louder,
how it draws you,
pulls you,
sends you
to proclaim
its only word:

Risen.

Risen.

Risen.

Amen.