



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Resurrection Sunday, April 12, 2020

by Garland F. Pierce

Do Not Be Afraid

Matthew 28:1-10

28:1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

28:2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

28:3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

28:4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

28:5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

28:6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

28:8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

28:9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

It's a theme throughout the bible, starting with its first book, Genesis. Abram heard these words as did Hagar. Moses uttered a similar message to the Israelites while hearing even the same from God. Likewise, Joshua uttered the same and was reassured with these words from the Almighty. Ruth heard them. Jonathan said them to his friend and brother beloved, David. Commanders encouraged their troops with them. Elijah comforted the widow with the same. David said them to his son, Solomon. The psalmist sings them. Proverbs inspires and instructs with them. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah prophesy with them. Angels visit and encourage Joseph and Mary with these same words even before Jesus was born. Jesus utters them to his disciples, "Do not be afraid."

The Marys hear the same phrase from the angel on that first Easter morning, before they understood what had happened or can contain their grief, collect themselves, get their bearings, and regroup after such horror, loss, and fear. "Do not be afraid." The soldiers keeping guard of the tomb had become paralyzed with fear until they were like dead men. The women managed somehow to press on even in the midst of sorrow and fear. Death and resulting fear had been lurking around for days, if not for months, and years—the threat of the Roman government over poor and oppressed people, prophecies by Jesus of his impending departure, betrayal, trials in a broken criminal justice system, beatings, all culminating with a public execution of an innocent man who personified hope and the kingdom of God. A rushed burial in a borrowed tomb with a scattered, self-isolating family and community, hardly enough left to properly mourn. Mary, a grieving mother, and the other Mary, a mourning friend, are met that morning with, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

Death is always with us. Fear is a natural and human response. Perhaps this is why "Do not be afraid" is uttered so often. This Easter feels different for most of us. Death is not just something dramatized and retold during the Good Friday service. Fear is not just something distant or abstract. This Easter, we feel it. This Easter, we see it. This Easter, we are keeping tally, keeping track, keeping distance, and keeping vigil. Death is literally in the air; and, we are afraid. We need to hear the angel's words, "Do not be afraid, he was dead; he has been raised; go quickly and tell his disciples."

That is what these women did! They ran and told, with fear AND great joy! We are Easter people in the midst of a pandemic who have been called to bear witness that Jesus, our Savior, is no longer dead but ALIVE! In the midst of this pandemic which has taken life, destroyed life, changed life—we must tell the good news with fear AND great joy! As these Marys are on their way to do as they have been instructed, they see and encounter the Resurrected One, who repeats, "Do not be afraid, go, tell."

So, Easter people, how do we go? How do we tell? At this time, our faithful response is staying at home. Our going may be virtual. Our telling maybe via phone or social media. Our going and our telling of the good news may be through our words and actions of caring and love even from at least 6 feet/1.829 meters away. Our going and our telling might be in our writing and our speaking truth to power. Fear alone might cause us to hurt, to hoard, to isolate, or to think of only ourselves. However, fear AND the great joy of Easter cause us to go and to tell. Fear AND the great joy of Easter cause us to declare in the midst of death and the threat thereof, "Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah! AMEN!"

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, then honestly share or reflect on any fears you currently may be experiencing. You may wish to repeat this phrase, “Do not be afraid; Christ is Risen; God is with us!” Likewise, share or reflect on those things which bring you joy today. You may wish to repeat this phrase, “Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!”

PRAY: O Lord Most High, who are not the God of the dead but of the living, we unite this day in thankful joy in the remembrance of the spirit’s triumph over death. We bless You that out of this dust and out of these mortal conditions You are striving to raise immortal souls into a diviner fellowship, and to establish them forever in the heavenly dwelling places. Help us to set our affections on things above, so that we may finally know the riches of that inheritance which You did manifest through Your son, our Lord, whom we remember this day with joy, and with Him may we be deemed worthy of the crown of immortality. AMEN. (from AMEC Hymnal, 782)

ACT:

1. Has someone been responsible for bringing joy to you (maybe through a kind word or act); tell them thank you (calling, writing, texting, etc.). Do you know someone who is experiencing fear(s); contact or reach out to them and given them an encouraging words inspired by the Easter message.

2. Refer to the children and family activities that accompany this devotion.

Song:

Amen, Amen
AMEC Hymnal, #172

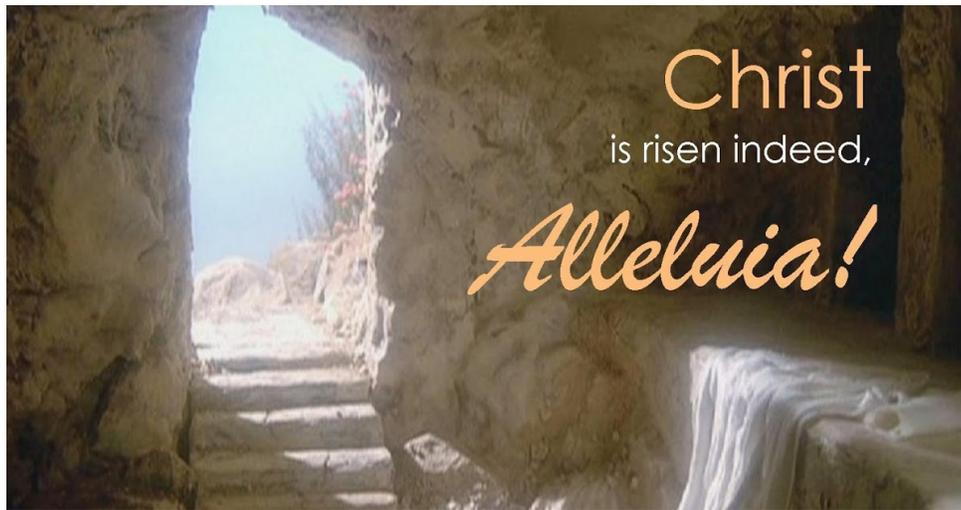
Refrain

A-men, A-men, A-men, A-men, A-men!

1. See the lit-tle ba-by (**A-men**) ly-ing in a man-ger (**A-men**)
on Christ-mas morn-ing (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
2. See Him in the tem-ple (**A-men**) talk-ing to the el-ders (**A-men**)
how they all-mar-velled! (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
3. See Him at the sea-shore (**A-men**) preach-ing to the peo-ple, (**A-men**)
heal-ing all the sick ones! (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
4. See Him in the gar-den (**A-men**) pray-ing to the Fa-ther (**A-men**)
in deep-est sor-row! (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
5. See Him on the cross (**A-men**) bear-ing all my sins (**A-men**)
in bitter ag-o-ny, (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
6. Yes, He died to save us (**A-men**) and He rose on Eas-ter, (**A-men**)
now He lives for-ev-er! (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)
7. Al-le-lu-ia! (**A-men**) Je-sus is my Sav-ior (**A-men**)
for He lives for-ev-er! (**A-men, A-men, A-men!**)

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, Easter lilies, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.