

### “Places of the Passion: the Garden Tomb”

**Job 19: 23-27** 23 “Oh that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, 24 that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! 25 I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God’ 27 I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

**Romans 8: 15-18** 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

**Matthew 28: 1-11** 1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. 7 then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ Now I have told you.”

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly, Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him. 10 then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” 11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

**[NOTE 1]** “and for fear of Him the guards trembled and became like dead men.” (verse 4) “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid.’” (Verse 5) “So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear.”(verse 8) “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid’” (Verse 10). Easter is supposed to be a time of great joy, hallelujahs, flowers, music, and celebration. Easter, however, begins with fear—great fear! What’s up with all the fear? Before I wrote this sermon I had never noticed how much fear the Easter story started with.

Here is my working definition of fear. False evidence appearing real. That's it. False evidence appearing real. What is the false evidence appearing real on the first Easter? Jesus had been beaten barbarically, maimed mercilessly, and buried haphazardly, so His ministry? Over. His movement? Finished. His cause? Done. All hope? Lost. That's the false evidence that appeared to be very real to Jesus' followers. Easter begins with great fear—great fourfold fear! False evidence appearing very real.

**[NOTE 2]**

My goal, this morning, is to replace fear with faith. What is faith? Forsaking all I take Him? Who is Him? Jesus our Redeemer! Jesus, our redeemer, creates beauty from ashes. Remember that!

We begin with fear because that's how the first Easter begins. I just read the four passages to you from Matthew chapter 28. As much as we try to deny it, fake it and stuff it, we all live in in some kind of fear—false evidence appearing real. A grizzly bear is behind every corner and it's just a matter of time until he leaps out of the shadows, bares his ugly fangs, and chew us up—along with our family, our friends and all of our finances!

Fear whispers incessantly, "There's trouble out there!" So, we don't sleep well. We don't whistle while we work. And when others whistle while they work? We give them the look. You know. The look! That, "are you that naïve?" look. We scold them, "Haven't you read the news and heard the reports and seen the studies? Airplanes fall out of the sky. Bull markets go bearish. Terrorists terrorize. Good people turn bad. The other shoe will drop. Fine print will be found!"

Fear attacks us with two words – What if?" What if I don't close the sale? What if I don't get the bonus? What if she doesn't love me? What if my kids have crooked teeth? What if their crooked teeth keep them from having friends, a career, and a spouse? What if they end up homeless, sitting on a street corner, holding a cardboard sign that says, "My parents never fixed my crooked teeth"?

Fear twists us into emotional pretzels, makes our eyes twitch, our blood pressure rise, our heads ache, and our armpits sweat. We numb our fear with six-packs and food binges and too much TV. We express our fear with volcanic anger and silent stares—we're experts at both.

Help is on the way! The Isenheim Altarpiece is located in France. This sixteenth-century altar piece was created for a monastery that cared for people with skin diseases. That's an important point! Christ has a skin disease in the painting—showing patients that Jesus understands and sympathizes with their fear. The people at the monastery were afraid that their skin disease would kill them. What is it for you? It may not be a conscious thought, but way back in the recesses of your mind, what are you afraid of? What do you think will kill you? Teenagers? Taxes? Cancer? Loneliness? Depression? Debt? Divorce? Dementia? Jesus understands!

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knows all about fear. In the altarpiece, Mary is collapsing in anguish into the arms of John, Christ's beloved disciple. A mother's greatest fear has come true—she witnesses the death of her son, her dear son Jesus!

John the Baptist also appears on the altarpiece. He is holding a lamb, symbolizing the sacrifice of Jesus. Beheaded by order of Herod Anitpas in 29 AD, John the Baptist couldn't have witnessed Christ's death. The artists include John to remind us of what he said of Jesus recorded in John 1:29, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

That's another important point! What looks world-ending is life-giving! What looks world-ending is really life-giving! Yes. Jesus is the Lamb of God. But also yes! He takes away the sin of the world! Your sin. My sin. Our ugly, rotten, putrid sin. That's because Jesus is a Redeemer. Remember? A redeemer creates beauty from ashes. What looked life-ending and world-ending on Friday is life-giving today!

The Isenheim altarpiece has two painted wings that open and close over the central painting—like doors on a cabinet. When the wings are closed, the altarpiece shows the crucifixion. Christ hanging on the cross, His body discolored by a greenish hue. His wounds covering a suffering body. Suffering. Rejection. Death. Death on a cross! It's Friday ... but Sunday's Coming, no Sunday is here!

The outer wings of the Isenheim Altarpiece are opened for Easter and Christ bursts forth from the tomb! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed!) Okay, that caught some of you thinking about the ham in the oven for Easter Dinner. Christ is Risen! (Christ is Risen, indeed!) Death has no more dominion over Him! Jesus is the resurrection and the life! In the painting, Christ's hands are raised in blessing. Behind Him, in orange and startling yellow, a sun rises against the sky. Swirls of yellow, white, red and blue garments adorn our Christ.

But the most amazing feature of this painting of the resurrection are the rubies. The artists placed rubies in Christ's hands and his feet and His side. Rubies from scars! Jesus, our Redeemer, creates beauty from ashes and rubies from scars!

The disciples' rejection and desertion? Finally rubies! The flogging and mocking? Finally, rubies! The nails and the spear? Finally, rubies! Why? Death has lost its power! Sin is forgiven! Hope is eternal! The victory is won! What looked world-ending is finally life-giving! That's what we celebrate today!

And Jesus said it would happen! Five times in Matthew's Gospel Jesus says He will rise from the dead. Five times Jesus says, "I must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day be raised." Five times Jesus says that!

Still the disciples chose fear over faith! They abandoned Jesus on Thursday evening. Only one stands at the cross on Friday. And on Sunday they all hide behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. It's so easy to choose fear, false evidence appearing real, over faith, forsaking all I Choose Him.

Just ask Grisha Siklenko. In 1960, an amazing event occurred in a tiny village in the Ukraine. It's so amazing many question it's truth. Grisha Siklenko appeared one day, much to the shock of his friends and neighbors. Everyone thought Grisha had died in World War II. Actually, the night he marched away to war he snuck back home where his mother had made a hiding place for him under a manure pile. And so, for 18 years, Grisha Siklenko lived under a manure pile. In the Winter, he nearly froze to

death. In the summer, he nearly suffocated to death. Finally, in 1960, Grisha walked out of the manure, expecting to be prosecuted, punished and placed in prison. But his fears were groundless. The statute of limitations had long since expired. Fear does that. We end up living in manure. Then guess what happens? Life stinks! Life really stinks! How smart is that!

Wouldn't you rather live by faith? Then here is the angel's promise for you. "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said!" (Mt 28:6) "Just as Jesus said!" We can trust what Jesus says! Jesus says, "I took away your sin. I conquered death. I'm alive bodily and eternally. And I'm coming again to perfect your body and restore the entire creation! Fear ... be gone! Live by faith!

Do you know what the most frequent command in the Bible turns out to be? What instruction, what order, is given repeatedly, by prophets, by angels, by Jesus and by apostles? What do you think? "Be good"? "Be holy"? "Don't sleep during the sermon"? just kidding. The most frequent command in the Bible is, "Don't fear." "Do not be afraid! Three hundred and sixty-five times! One for each day of the year! And why is that? Because living in fear is like living in manure. Everything stinks! [NOTE 3]

Faith—forsaking all I choose Him. Him? Our Redeemer! Jesus creates life from death; joy from sadness; and beauty from ashes. And remember the rubies! The Five rubies! [NOTE 4] The thing that makes Christianity different from every other world religion is the empty tomb. Guess where Muhammed is? In the grave. Guess where Ghandi is? He's in his grave. Buddha? in his tomb. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young? In the tomb. Where is Charles Taze Russell? In his tomb! Only Christianity, only Jesus has an EMPTY TOMB!

[NOTE 5] Do you have small children? Don't fear! Grandchildren? Don't fear! Do you have teenagers? Don't fear! Has everything gone terribly wrong this month? Don't fear! Are you sick? Don't fear! Is your heart absolutely broken? Don't fear! So what are you going to do about this? Forsaking all others, choose Jesus today! Please make the time to write down one thing that you will do this week to live more in faith and less out of fear! Let these six words sink into your insidest inside, the core of who you are! "I know that my Redeemer Lives!" (Say it with me) What else is left to say but this, "Forsaking all, I choose Him!" (Please say it with me). Hallelujah! Let's pray ... AMEN

**Sermon Notes for “Places of the Passion: The Garden Tomb”**  
**Based on Matthew 28: 1-11, Job 19:23-27, & Romans 8: 15-18**  
**Given at Doster Community Church April 9 EASTER 2023**

- I. Notice that the first Easter begins with a lot of fear. How do we turn fear into faith?
- II. Fear=false evidence appearing real and Faith=forsaking all others I choose Him, Jesus Christ!
- III. The most frequent command/instruction found in the Bible is “Do not fear” “Do not be afraid!” It occurs 365 times, one for each day of the year.
- IV. Jesus is the only one to rise from the dead. The only world religion with an empty tomb, is Christianity. Jesus is alive!
- V. So, what are you going to do about it? If it doesn't change the way you live your life, if it isn't turned to action, this was just a nice speech. Do not fear! Forsaking all, choose Jesus! Please take the time to write it down. What will you do this week to live in faith instead of fear? Write an “I will \_\_\_\_\_” statement. Let it make a difference in your life.