

Easter

Mark 16:6

March 31, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Easter is the Cure for Thanatophobia!

What is it that scares you? Spiders? That's arachnophobia. Tights spaces? Claustrophobia? Centipedes? Heights? Being in an airplane? Speaking in public? Maybe you are scared of an IRS audit. Maybe you are scared that the person next to you knows some secret about you. Maybe you are scared to stand before God who knows everything you have ever done. The fear of death is described by sociologists with a Greek, thanatophobia.

I do not spend much time on Facebook, but in one of the groups I follow, someone recently posted, "Where do we actually go after death? Is it dark in that world? Who else is afraid to go?" It generated a lot of responses. Here are just a few:

- Your neurons stop firing and you stop breathing. Once your brain is dead, that's it – lights out! My only fear is that my dog is left behind and would be in a shelter.
- When I sleep, or during general anesthesia, it's like I just stop "being." It's emptiness. I'm totally scared that death should be just this endlessly. I hope we just become floating conscious energies mingled in the universe.
- I go by my Hindu belief that death is a matter of my soul changing bodies and starting fresh.
- Dust to Dust, we die and turn into soil.

Or, as Elton John sang, we're just a candle in the wind that gets snuffed out.

There is a lot of confusion about death and what comes next. There was a lot of confusion on that first Easter morning as well. The women headed toward Jesus' tomb before the sun rose were confused about how they were going to roll the stone away. Then they were confused when they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. Peter and John were confused when they saw the grave clothes lying there, but there was no body inside of them.

As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, I think we can identify with the women. It is easy to be confused, troubled and upset by many things in life. So many things scream for our attention and we can feel overwhelmed. Life seems to get harder and harder. People seem to have

come more distant and quick-tempered. It's confusing when some take advantage of us and hurt us. Or, just as painful, they can completely ignore us because they do not care about us. It's easy to wonder if our lives matter at all and we can feel worthless. Our bodies grow older and slower. Physical and mental health seem elusive. The death of loved ones continues to rock our world. As we get older, we get closer and closer to the day that we will die. You might boldly say, "I am not scared of death." Good for you. But how would you feel if I told you that you were going to die before you got home after church? You would be apprehensive, scared, afraid. To one degree or another, we also suffer from thanatophobia – the fear of death.

I do not have a full-color travel brochure of heaven to show you what is waiting for you after you die, but I can point you to God's Word. The Bible is God's absolute truth to us. I could speak for hours about the trustworthiness of the Bible, but that's for another time. For now, I'll simply say that every prediction in the Bible has come true while all sorts of archeological find verify what the Bible says. You can not believe everything you hear in the news or on the internet, but you can believe everything that the Bible says. You can trust it.

The angel at the tomb said (:6), "**Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.**" This is not some sort of make believe. This is not some sweet sentiment like, "He's not really gone as long as we remember him and share his love." Easter is not some fairy tale like, "They lived happily ever after." The resurrection is not legend. It really happened. Easter is factual history. Even as Jesus stood in front of his disciples on Easter evening (Luke 24; John 20), they had trouble believing it. Jesus invited them to touch him to see that he was bodily alive. He had flesh and bones. He was able to eat. He was not a ghost. He was able to walk and talk with them. Easter is not just a hazy hope that things will get better and people will be more loving. If Christ remained dead, he is a fraud and a failure. But Christ has indeed been raised. The reality is that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be—the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Jesus is not a lifeless loser, but a loving Lord.

We commemorated Jesus' death on Friday. Jesus died because he got blamed for all of our sins as he hung on the cross. He was our substitute. What should have happened to us – separation from God and death – happened to him. But since Jesus is true God, he was able to come back to life. Maybe think of death like a dark prison filled with cruel and

unusual punishment. That's where we were headed because of our sin and guilt. We can all think of things that we have done wrong, times where we have fallen short of God's standards and ours. We get frustrated with our own failures. Our consciences nag at us, often bringing things to our minds that happened years ago and we feel guilty about it all over again. In order to rescue us from the prison of death, Jesus submitted himself to death. It's like he let himself get locked up in the prison of death. On Easter morning, he broke the prison doors off their hinges. The shackles of sin have been unlocked. Those who follow Jesus will also leave death behind and come back to life. Easter proves that our sins are forgiven and our guilt is gone. It proves that there is a physical life after death for us. Easter gives us confidence that God is smiling on us, that he will help us through each day and that he will safely escort us through the doorway of death to eternal life in heaven where we will have a glorified body. No more aches or pains or problems or pills or politics. No more doctors' visits. No more stress or anxiety. No more sorrow. No more tears.

I feel sorry for people like Brian Johnson who has a bad case of thanatophobia. He is a 47-year-old "tech mogul" who spends \$2 million a year as to achieve the body of a teenager. A team of doctors are constantly monitoring his health and performing all sorts of medical procedures to try to keep him from aging. What a waste of money. Eventually he will die, but he does not know Jesus as his Savior. How sad. What Brian Johnson is hoping to accomplish with \$2 million a year, Jesus gives to you for free. Listen again to the world's most famous Bible passage, John 3:16, "**God so loved the world [which includes you], that he gave his one and only Son** [Jesus, who died for us], **so that whoever believes in him** [not whoever is better than most or who gives more money to charity or does more for the church or anything else], **shall not perish** [spend eternity in hell], **but have eternal life** [will come back to life and live forever in heaven]." Jesus already saved you. Salvation is already complete. There is nothing more for you to do. Simply celebrate it!

A few weeks ago, someone in Florida won the \$36 million Mega Millions lottery. Someone did, but no one knows who. The person with the winning ticket never stepped forward. The deadline passed and \$36 million dollars slipped through someone's fingers. Do not be like that fellow, or lady, who lost a great opportunity. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, you have been given something worth so much more than \$36 million dollars or even perfect health. You have been given a new life. When you were baptized, you were connected to

Christ. Since he died, was buried and then rose, you also will one day die and be buried. But you will also rise with a glorified body.

Death might seem scary to us, like walking into a deep, dark tunnel with no light at the end. But Jesus went through that tunnel for us. Then, he came back and told us that you have nothing to fear. He says, "Follow me. I am the way, the truth and the life." You can trust him. Easter is the cure for thanatophobia and any other fear you might have. Jesus is who he said he was and did what he said he'd do. Your faith in Jesus rests on a rock-solid foundation. If Christ had not been raised, our faith in him would be useless. But this morning we rejoice to see and hear that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.