

**The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon
for the Easter Vigil – April 4, 2026
Matthew 28:1-10 - “Don't Be Afraid? Easy for You to Say!”**

O God, may the finger of your Spirit stir through the clutter of my words to point to a new understanding.
Amen.

In the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, went to the tomb. In other gospels, there is talk about the women bringing burial spices to prepare the body. But Matthew knows better. He knows that Jesus' body had already been anointed, meaning he didn't need further anointing for his burial. So, in Matthew's gospel, it simply says that the women were going to see the tomb. To me, it's like any other time someone would go visit the grave of someone they love who had died.

The women, the two Mary's, went to see the tomb. When they got to the tomb there was a great earthquake, and an angel came and rolled back the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. The guards were afraid, and it seems that the women were too because the first thing that the angel said was, “do not be afraid.” The angel then told them that Jesus was not there, but rather that he was alive. The women are told to go and tell all that they have learned. As they go on their way, they encountered Jesus and he also says to them, “do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid.” Easy for Jesus to say! Can you imagine what these women were going through?! They came to the tomb because they loved Jesus, and they came filled with grief and sadness, filled with a sense of loss both for their friend that was gone and also for all that he represented to them. Can you imagine the despair these women would have been feeling? If you have ever grieved the loss of someone you loved, then you know that grief, sadness, and despair would have been the least that these women were feeling.

And to discover that Jesus is not in the tomb?! So now on top of all that sadness, grief, and despair, they're feeling fear, too! Fear for what has happened to his body. Fear of the strange being that is there in front of them. Fear to really believe, to let hope back into their hearts, that maybe Jesus really was alive.

So often, throughout the bible, we come across these words of assurance, “Do not be afraid.” Typically, these words are said by an angel, it's kind of their calling card. It is how you know you are being visited by an angel. Luke's account of Jesus' birth and Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection contain these words of reassurance which seem to wrap the entire gospel narrative in those words, “Do not be afraid.” These are among the first words uttered by Gabriel to Mary when he tells her she will bear a son named Jesus. Then, an angel uses these same words to reassure Mary Magdalene and the other Mary when they find the tomb of Jesus empty and the earth shaking.

Fear is a powerful emotion and can affect people in different ways. For some, fear is empowering because it gives the person the adrenaline they need to move forward, to try something new, to go on an adventure, etc. For others, fear can be paralyzing, debilitating, and can make you run away. I'm sure you've heard of fight, flight, or freeze. The fight response is your body's way of facing any perceived threat aggressively. Flight means your body urges you to run from danger. Freeze is your body's inability to move or act against a threat. A new one I learned is fawn, which is your body's stress response to try to please

someone to avoid conflict. For me, fear plays terrible tricks on my mind. It locks me into place, makes me freeze up, and often takes away opportunities. If I am full of fear, I am more likely to run away than to go and tell.

As a child, when you are gripped with fear, there is often someone who can help – parent, grandparent, sibling – someone to say the words, “do not be afraid.” And as a child, it is easy to believe those words of reassurance, to take great comfort from them. Fear is bigger for adults, more complex, and those words of reassurance are harder to come by. As adults, we live with enormous responsibilities and complex realities. If we hear the words, “do not be afraid,” we are often suspicious of the sincerity behind those words. Think about a time someone told you, “Do not be afraid. There is nothing to worry about.” When someone says to us, “do not be afraid,” the words often feel like empty platitudes. Something like, “there, there.”

And yet, here are these angels, to Mary at the beginning of Jesus’ story and to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, coming to say just that – “do not be afraid.” These are not words of assurance that nothing will go wrong but, rather, assurance that whatever may happen to us, God has the power to strengthen us and uphold us; that no matter our fears, God will never leave us to face them alone; that nothing is stronger than God’s love and God will always get the last word.

The angel tells the people, “Do not be afraid.” This command concerning fear is on-going. We should never be afraid anymore! Jesus has won! Do not allow fear to keep you from sharing what you have seen here. Do not let fear keep you from hoping, and from what it means that the tomb is empty, and from what you know now to be true, even if you are having hard time understanding it.

The women are invited by the angel to come and see that Jesus is not here in the tomb, and then they are told go and tell. Because “come and see” must always be followed by “go and tell.” It’s a part of the good news! We are to go and tell the ways that God has shocked us into bewilderment, caused us to hope in our hearts that there can be new life. We are called to tell where we see God’s love and grace at play in our world and how God’s peace has attended us in times of sadness and grief.

The Gospel that began with a man afraid to marry his disgraced betrothed and a fearful king who tries to kill potential rivals ends with overwhelming joy. Jesus’ command to the women becomes a command to all of us:

Stop being afraid!

God has defeated death.

Rejoice, and share the good news!

Amen.