

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday April 5th 2026 – (Year A. Easter Sunday)

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Boronia Road Uniting Church

Bible passages: Acts 10:34-43 and Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSVUE)

“Do not be afraid”

PREAMBLE (early introduction to theme)

Throughout our Lenten journey over the last few weeks we have journeyed with Jesus – though the mountain tops and valleys, the wilderness, the crowds, the road to Jerusalem, the upper room, the garden, the courtyard, the hill of Calvary, and today we arrive at the empty tomb, as the two Mary’s did early on that Sunday morning, and we take in all that it means to us who follow Jesus. The forgiveness, the hope, the grace, the new life. For the two Mary’s, their experience of angels, earthquakes and a risen Jesus was pretty frightening. But twice they heard the words, “Do not be afraid”. Their fears may not have suddenly disappeared, but we do see the fear being transformed into joy. How does the message of this Easter Sunday transform our fears into joy? Can we really trust God when he says, “Do not be afraid”?

MESSAGE

I’m wondering if anyone here would consider themselves an ‘adrenaline junkie’. You know – someone who loves to do daring and scary things just for the thrill of it. I’ve got a hunch that we lose a bit of that desire as we get older. Recently our daughter got married and they went to the Gold Coast for their honeymoon. They were only there for five days, and they went to four theme parks. That’s four days of thrill-seeking roller coasters and other scary fun park rides. I’d say they were adrenaline junkies.

When I was in my early thirties, I was probably just like that. Not anymore. Sophie and I also went to the Gold Coast a couple of years ago. We were there for a whole week and never went near a theme park. What we did was long breakfasts and walks on the beach. The closest we got to adrenaline was renting some e-bikes!

Adrenaline, of course is a natural thing produced in our bodies in response to danger or excitement. It’s a type of hormone that quickly energises our system for the ‘fight or flight’ response. Like if you’re out bushwalking and a grizzly bear steps into your path, a burst of adrenaline will help you fight the bear or run very fast. My personal suggestion is that the ‘run fast’ option is probably better in that case.

So, adrenaline is a good thing. It’s helpful. That is, unless it stays in your system too long. It’s designed for short term use only – like when you get a sudden fright. And it’s probably okay if the roller coaster ride only goes for a few minutes. If, however you are stressed or afraid of things for too long, adrenaline can stay at high levels in your system, and it becomes toxic and damaging. That’s not good.

I’m focussing today on the problem of fear. Fear is a natural and normal response to danger. But if we stay fearful (about anything), it can rob us of joy and peace in life. If it lingers on too long it controls and affects us in unpleasant, even damaging ways – physically and mentally. Fear can become toxic.

The two Marys in today’s gospel story are two very important people in Matthew’s passion narrative, featuring three times at key moments in the story of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus. (Matthew 27:56, 27:61, and 28:1) In today’s story they get up early on the Sunday morning to check the tomb of Jesus.

Suddenly they are confronted by all these incredibly fearful things. A violent earthquake. A dazzling angel rolling back the stone and then talking to them. Hearing shocking news that Jesus' body wasn't there anymore and then bumping into the risen Jesus himself as they rushed back into town. Their adrenaline levels would have been through the roof.

In the midst of their fears, they twice hear the words, "Do not be afraid". First from the angel (v5) and then from Jesus himself (v10). *Do not be afraid.*

I'm convinced we need to hear those words today, more than ever. There are so many things in our personal lives, our society, our world in general, that cause us to have stress, worry and anxiety. So many things make us afraid.

Let's talk about the war in the Middle East for a moment. I can't even imagine the fear experienced by people directly affected by the death and destruction all around them. That would be frightening beyond belief. But it has a ripple effect all around globe, as we are experiencing. I don't know about you, but this war scares me. What if it doesn't end soon? What if it spreads? What if Australia gets involved? What if the economy gets a whole lot worse? What if. What if. What if.

And Jesus says, "Do not be afraid". Easier said than done, I reckon. How, on this Easter Sunday does the gospel of resurrection speak into our fears? Does the good news really have the power to transform our fears?

In our other reading from Acts 10 we have a good example of the power of the gospel to transform lives. Peter, like the other disciples had his fears. He was afraid of the events of that Sunday morning, just like the two Marys. It wasn't until later on that his fear turned into joy and a bold courage to preach. The good news that Jesus was alive transformed his fears. In Acts 10 the transformed Peter shares his own testimony of the transforming power of the gospel with a group of Gentiles at the home of Cornelius. The result of him sharing the gospel was that everyone in that house was transformed.

But we learn something else here from Peter. He had believed that God favoured the Jews above the Gentiles. But in sharing the gospel with the Gentiles, he underwent yet another personal transformation in his own understanding that God shows no partiality. (v34). My point here is that the good news of a risen Jesus has the power to keep transforming us - including our fears – not once, but repeatedly as we walk with the Lord.

And this transformation in us can transform others around us, as Peter experienced. It happens through our words and our actions. Small acts of love and kindness, help to turn fear into peace and joy in others.

On that Sunday morning, we see something of this transformation in the two Marys. Their fear was being transformed into joy that morning. As they hurried away from the tomb, they were still frightened, but there was a new joy blossoming within them (v8).

How can the good news of Easter create within us today a blossoming of a new joy in our hearts? Or to put it another way, how can it transform our fears into peace and joy? Let me share just a few promises about this that we find in scripture:

1 – God is with us

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you" (Is 41:10) Later in Isaiah, he says it again, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you" (Is 43:5). Whatever happens to us, we can know the presence of God. He is always *with* us.

2 – God wants to receive our burdens

If fears burden us, God invites us to give those burdens to him. Psalm 55:22 says, “Cast your cares on the Lord, and he will sustain you”. And the words of Jesus: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28)

3 – God wants to give us peace

Jesus gives this promise to his disciples just before his death: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). He wants to give us peace.

4 – God wants us to know his love

We hear those well known words from the Apostle Paul: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Nothing in our lives, or in this world that is fearful in any way can separate us from God’s love.

These are just a few of the bible’s promises about fear, and that’s just the tip of the iceberg! Now I know, from my own experience, that having faith does not magically take away all my fears. Fear is still often there. But I know it’s possible to find peace and joy, often right in the midst of those fears.

The central message of this Easter Sunday is, as Paul states, that: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). All the fears in our lives are kind of like little ‘deaths’, in the sense that fear tends to ‘kill off’ our peace and joy. But the victory of Jesus over death means that our own struggles in life, including our fears, don’t ultimately determine who we are, and don’t have the final say.

My encouragement to you today is to allow the message of this Easter Sunday to speak right into your own fears. Hear the reassuring and comforting voice saying, “Do not be afraid”.