

You know the young man dressed in the white robe is from God not because of what he is wearing...notice who wears the white robes in this place...but because of what he says.

Do not be alarmed, he begins, which is a gentler version of how God almost always begins when talking to someone in Scripture, whether Joshua or Mary or those familiar shepherds on Christmas Eve.

Do not be afraid is God's longstanding biblical pickup line, no doubt because the presence of the holy is a bit overpowering, a lot more glory than subtlety.

But it is not the presence at the tomb that troubles the women, but the absence.

They arrive armed with spices and final respects for a life that suddenly isn't final any more.

The young man's words backfire; instead of calming down the women, his news panics them even more.

They go from startled to terrified, from *alarmed* to three alarm fire.

They run away, scared speechless.

They must believe him.

A living Jesus is a whole lot scarier than a dead one.

Following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., poet Carl Wendell Hines wrote:

*Now that he is safely dead, let us praise him,
build monuments to his glory, sing hosannas to his name.*

Dead men make such convenient heroes:

They cannot rise to challenge the images we would fashion from their lives.

And besides, it is easier to build monuments than to make a better world.

Of all those who would rise and challenge, of all those who are safer dead than alive, surely Jesus would be one to keep dead.

Some would argue the church has done a fair job of it over the years...and why not?

Jesus told us to love our enemies, then made plenty of them for himself, and loved them.

Jesus summoned his disciples to take up the cross and follow him, even to death, and to reorient and reprioritize life in such a radical way that the kingdom of God is first, that the wellbeing of others should trump our own, that money and power and possessions and all the stuff we care and worry so much about are secondary fluff compared to the urgent, mysterious, searchingly truthful love of God.

To live in our world as Jesus does ranges from silly to suicidal; it's not an accident or a surprise that he died early and alone.

The political and religious authorities agreed that everyone was better off with him dead, with his spirit and ideas safely filed away for decay and decoration.

It is easier to build monuments than to make a better world, which may be why God's church so often spends more of its treasure on buildings than on beings.

Religion is far more palatable and manageable than resurrection.

Dead rituals and rules are far easier than a living God.
Good Friday makes a lot more sense than Easter; Good Friday is alarming, but familiar.
Easter means anything is possible, and such wild possibility is terrifying,
especially if the vanguard in charge of it all is the one who loves his enemies,
frustrates his friends, and seeks first the kingdom of God.

The thought of Jesus alive again is so terrifying that the women say nothing to anyone,
and (writing in Greek) Mark ends his story right there, mid-sentence, without a
period to close his thought, a sentence with the stone rolled away.
Our last unresolved picture in Mark's long story is of the women running away, not doing
at all what the one from God told them to do.

They look for all the world like the men did earlier.

One betrayed Jesus, one denied him, and all of them ran away from him in terror.
They were all covering their own backsides, and who among us can blame them?

We do the same; we seek first the kingdom, the power, and the glory of our own
precious selves.

That is why the thought of Jesus alive is so terrifying even now, to us.

We cannot measure up to the life and teachings of this Christ, and even if we
could, and maybe we can, who would want to?

Really, let's be honest, for us it's all about us...our entire orientation to everything that a
risen Jesus exposes as an empty lie.

Following Jesus is too hard; the cost is too high, the cross is too possible.

Better to have Jesus in a nice tomb, actually or intellectually, than to have him on
the loose in Galilee or wherever we live, stirring up all kinds of chaotic and costly
goodness, doing new things, making new enemies, loving more unlovable people.

You know, people like Peter...

the boneheaded fisherman with the foot in his mouth and implausible deniability,
the strong, blowhard coward who runs away at the first cockcrow of trouble.

Or like the women, the ones with so much more courage than the men, who still
themselves are too scared to transmit a simple message.

Or like us...sinners in white robes and bright dresses, cowards in new clothes who are
happy to visit a dead Jesus in a well-manicured mortuary chapel but scared out of
our minds to follow a living Jesus into the streets of Chicago.

So we come to praise him, to sing hosannas to his name, quietly hoping that he will stay
safely and politely dead.

But he is risen, he is alive, and he is looking for his disciples, and Peter.

We can leave him; we all can and do deny and disappoint and desert him; we can
all flee from Easter danger and say nothing to anyone...but even when we Peter
out, the story gets out, and the story goes on, and eventually this risen Christ we
cannot yet see will find us all.

And he will say to us in all his terrifying glory, *Do not be afraid.*

I love you.

I forgive you.

The past is gone, the future is open, and the present is ours.

I am going ahead of you; come, follow me.

Eventually, when Easter happens to us enough, maybe we will...