

## The Resurrection of our Lord + April 24, 2011

Recently, I discovered a video on “YouTube” called Resurrection Sunday Dance. It took place last Easter and it involves hundreds of people participating in a well choreographed dance at a public square in Budapest, Hungary. Perhaps you’ve seen it. It’s an amazing sight. And to think, it wasn’t all that long ago that such a public display of faith was possible in Hungary. I was moved at what I saw in this Resurrection Sunday Dance. Obviously, others were as well. Plans have been made for this dance to take place all over the world today. In fact, one is scheduled for Sacramento. Isn’t that a great way to celebrate Easter? With a dance! Our response to the Resurrection is nothing less than unbridled joy and when we express that joy in something like a dance and do it in public that gives witness and testimony to the very heart of our faith. Easter made known in grand exuberance and unbridled joy.

Don’t you imagine the earliest witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection having this sense of unbridled joy? I imagine joy permeating the life and ministry of the earliest Christian community and those original witnesses to the Resurrection ... but not at first. *Not at first.* At first the visitors to the tomb were filled not with joy but with fear.

The way Matthew tells the story, the death and resurrection of Jesus was so life-altering and world changing that it shook the earth. Matthew’s Gospel say there was an earthquake both at the point of Jesus’ death and at the resurrection. Once Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb an earthquake takes place and an angel from heaven rolls the stone back from the tomb and sit on it. His appearance was a little out of the ordinary. And it all caused fear. The guards shook as much as the earth and fainted. And you can well imagine that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were terrified. Who would not be at such circumstances? No, at first they did not break out into a dance.

So, the angel says “do not be afraid” and gives them the good news that Jesus is risen. They may go and tell the others for their fear has been turned into joy. But is it unbridled joy, full on joy? Not quite. Matthew tells us that the women ran from the tomb both joy and fear. *“They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy.”* Not fear alone or joy alone but both. Fear and joy mixed together. How is that possible? Can we experience both fear and joy at the same time? Well, I don’t think it requires a great stretch of the imagination. My hunch is that we now that feeling that experience of fear and joy working simultaneously.

Several years ago, I got to see, finally, the Grand Canyon and as I peered into that great big beautiful hole in the ground, I must confess I was feeling both joy and fear. Joy at the beauty of it all and fear of falling over the precipice and at the same time I felt that sense of fear that could be identified as awe over the magnificence of God’s design.

When did you last know the feeling of fear and great joy? Many times it happens when we embark upon a new adventure. Did you feel both when you started a new job or experienced the birth of a new child? I remember a day in late October 2006 when I surprised Britt with a proposal: Will you marry me? I can honestly say I was overcome with great joy and fear. Great joy because for the first time in my life I had fallen in love and a sense of being more than a little scared because I was about to enter into something that would change my life. Plus, I entertained those other questions like “What am I getting myself into?” Yes, I was excited and happy and sacred all at the same time. Before popping the question I remember my heart racing and the feeling that it was going to beat out of my chest.

Fear and joy simultaneously. They often go together especially in the face of something new and a future unknown. Can you imagine what it must have been like for those women at the tomb? God raised Jesus from the dead. Cause for great joy and at the same time, disorienting to say the least. And the way Matthew tells the story, this event changes the world, shakes up the earth, and signals the end of an old age and the beginning of a new age. For the women who went to the tomb, you can imagine the joy and

the fear. Everything had changed and was about to change. Suddenly, they were part of something grand and greater than themselves. So they run from the tomb to tell the others with adrenaline running through their bodies, excited, energetic at once joyful, struck with awe and to a great degree terrified. This resurrection was grand indeed.

Easter is so grand that it takes 50 days to celebrate. No, Easter does not end after today. Easter is a 50 day feast. So every Sunday when we come here for worship we will continue to sing Easter songs, behold Easter sights, hear Easter scriptures. It takes at least that long to unpack something as grand and life-altering and world changing as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We cannot define it or control it but we have the opportunity to allow the Resurrection of Christ to define e us and to fill us with awe and wonder.

Early Christians describe the 50-day feast as a most joyous space. Or maybe we could see it as a 50 day dance. A dance of unbridled joy or, maybe more realistically, like those women who went to the tomb; our joy is often mixed with a little fear. There is the fear of awe and there is also that real fear of being part of something can't control. The fear of the unknown. Why, where will the Risen Christ take us if we open ourselves to ... how might our lives change?

The Resurrection is God's Yes to the Cross. The world said No to Jesus. The powers that be could not stand Jesus and what he did and brought to the world, but God looked at this suffering and dying one said, "Yes ... this is who I am!" So, God raised Jesus from the dead to vindicate the way of self-giving love. By raising Jesus God said YES to welcoming the outcast, to forgiving sinners, to feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, to the work of peace and reconciliation in a world torn apart by hatred and division, to the ministry of mercy. Peter said it so well in the sermon from the book of Acts: God shows no partiality. The love of God isn't discriminating. God doesn't show favorites. God's love is uncontained and extends to all. That's the love that the Resurrection says yes to and makes possible. In a few moments we will affirm our baptismal vows. We will say yes again to the way of Jesus and renew our commitment to practicing Resurrection. By saying yes, we join our Yes to God's yes. Yes, we want to be part of God's mission of reconciling and healing a broken world.

Does that cause great joy for you? Does it strike with a little bit of fear? Both? To be part of something as grand as the Resurrection certainly engenders both of those things if we are to be honest. The promises we make are not little. They are rooted in great joy but they signal great commitment, too. But, here's the really good news for you and me and all disciples struck with both fear and joy: The women ran from the tomb and it is none other than the Risen Jesus who meets them on the way. They take hold of his feet and worship him and what does he say? "Do not be afraid." *And Jesus says to same to us.* To you and to me. DO NOT BE AFRAID. Here we are again worshiping Jesus and his message to us is the same as to those who knelt down to worship him. Do not be afraid for I am with you and I love you and I go before you. I lead the way. I am the author of a brand new way of living. Resurrection living. Fear not.

Easter, you see, does not so much celebrate an empty tomb as it celebrates the presence of the Risen and saving Lord who comes to us in bread and wine and the community of believers. Jesus' constant presence and surprising newness is our greatest gift and treasure. Trust him. Follow him. Worship him. And join the dance these 50 days and the rest of the year and, indeed, in all our days as we shout out: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!