

“From Terror to Joy”

Luke 1:34-35, 24:36-49, 1 John 3:1-3 & Psalm 34:4-10, 46:1-7, 61:1-4

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

One summer on the farm my nephew, Pete, and I were building a road. For the base of the road, we were using rocks the size of a softball to a little bigger than a bowling ball. We gathered the rocks from a large rock pile by the woods. We threw the rocks into the bucket of a Bobcat skid steer, then dumped them onto a wagon pulled by a tractor. I was nineteen and Pete was nine. All day we were moving rocks. On top of the rock pile was a large boulder approximately six feet in diameter and four feet thick. It probably weighed around ten tons. We did not have any equipment big enough to move a boulder of that size. We had moved so many rocks that the boulder was now perched on top a tower of smaller rocks about six feet high. It looked a little precarious so before we started this load, I rammed the boulder a few times with the Bobcat skid steer but it was solid as a rock. Pardon the pun. We had gotten all the easy rocks, so we gathered rocks closer to the boulder. Pete was crouched down with his back to the boulder throwing rocks into the bucket. All of a sudden, the tower of rocks shifted and the huge boulder slid down upon Pete pinning him in a fetal position. Terror gripped me immediately for I knew I could not move the big boulder. I heard the groan of air rushing from Pete's lungs and his face and arms were becoming speckled with red dots. The terror grew as I realized he would be dead before I could get help. I had to free him quickly but I knew I couldn't move the boulder. Perhaps I could dig out the smaller rocks around him and then underneath him, but I would have to keep the boulder from shifting more as Pete was the only thing keeping it from sliding to the bottom of the pile. I hopped on the bobcat skid steer and slowly started it. It was a temperamental machine. If you didn't start it just right, it would flood and you when need to wait about 10 minutes to start again. I didn't have that kind of time. I got the bobcat going and wedged the bucket under the boulder on one side of Pete. On the other side I wedged in two pry bars. With the hope that the boulder was secure enough to not fall further, I quickly began digging out rocks. In a few minutes I was able to free Pete and laid him flat on the ground. I could hear the air slowly flowing back into his lungs like after someone gets the wind knocked out of them. After a few seconds, Pete regained consciousness. I unhooked the wagon, loaded him in the tractor, and raced to the farm. My dad saw us coming and yelled, "Slow down." Then as he saw Pete's red speckled skin, he told me to call the hospital and have an ambulance meet him half way. After the call, I stood shaking in terror with adrenaline coursing through my body.

The disciples were in terror. Terrified that they will be hunted down and crucified like Jesus. More terror gripped them as suddenly someone stood among them. But this was impossible, the door was locked and they had people on the lookout. No one warned them of anyone approaching and there was no noise. Who was it? As they began to run in terror, their fear-filled eyes saw this was not an earthly person rather a ghost. Adrenaline, terror, and fear coursed through their bodies.

My terror was transformed into joy as I learned Pete would be fine. The red speckles all over his skin were caused by the pressure of the rock bursting his capillaries. There was no internal damage not even a broken bone or sprain.

The disciples' terror was transformed into joy as they realized they would be fine, for that someone who suddenly appeared among them, was the risen Jesus. Jesus invited them to touch him. Then Jesus hugged them. Jesus sat down and ate a piece of fish with them.

In Jesus, we get a glimpse of what our resurrected bodies will be like. They will have physical qualities able to speak, listen, touch, feel, hug, and eat food. We will have enough physical resemblance that we will recognize each other, yet at the same time we will be spiritual able to pass through locked doors.

The disciples in their joy were wondering about resurrection. What does it feel like to be resurrected? How does the fish taste? What is heaven like? How do you travel through a wall and what does that feel like?

Jesus takes the disciples even deeper. Explaining how every form of terror will be transformed into joy. Jesus said, **Luke 24:44 "Everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."** Everything must be fulfilled. What an incredible gracious statement everything in scripture about Jesus and us must be fulfilled. Jesus' grace and love for us. Jesus saving us from every predicament. Jesus' salvation from every

sin. Jesus' establishment of the Kingdom of God. All those stories of messed up, troubled, confused, and sinful people who God healed and restored is just the beginning for everything will be fulfilled. Everything, absolutely everything, will be transformed, healed, redeemed, and fulfilled. Our story, our terrors will be turned into joy.

Jesus transformed their deepest terror into joy. Perhaps for Peter it was his terror from denying Jesus three times. Jesus transformed that terror into the joy of him being the rock upon which the church is built. Perhaps for James and John it was their terror of being abandoned, left out, being jobless. Maybe that is why they asked for a special spot to serve Jesus when Jesus established the glorious kingdom of God. Jesus filled them with joy as he commissioned them to make disciples. Perhaps Mark was shy, terrified to speak, yet Jesus gave him joy as he inspired him to be the first one to write a gospel. Each disciple had their own terrors that Jesus was transforming into joy.

Jesus said, **Luke 24:47 "The repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in my name to all nations."** Repentance is a reorientation, a turning from terror to joy. What terrors do you need to let go of and let Jesus transform into joy?

Sometimes one is terrified more by their emotional terrors than their physical terrors. What are your terrors? Is there something that keeps you up at night? Are there words or encounters with someone that haunt you? Have you done things that trouble you? Is there an anxiety that plagues you? Is your subconscious wrestling with a terror? Jesus will turn them into joy. Jesus will even take the terrors that you created by your mistakes, anger and sin and transform them into joy. Let go of all your terrors. Open yourself to God's gracious healing.

Counselor, David Seamands, summed up his career this way: "Many years ago I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among Christians are these: first the failure to understand, receive and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and second the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness and grace to other people. We read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that's not the way we live. The good news of the Gospel of grace has not penetrated the level of our emotions."

My Hebrew teacher, Rolf Jacobsen, said, "Every single day we are being resurrected. In a very real way, we die in our sins every single day. Our lives are dead and worthless through our constant sin and rebellion. However, in the act of continued forgiveness granted to us through God's grace, we are reborn new, forgiven resurrected humans. This is an actual resurrection. Our sins kill us, but God's forgiveness makes us alive again and again."

Pastor Cathy Kolwey shared this prayer this past Monday. "It is Monday, Holy God. But many of us find ourselves in the still dark places of an empty tomb, for no one has become the body of Christ for us—in our empty moments, in our lonely fraught. We are still left longing for recognition, for a word of comfort and promise. For when we turn our hearts to the world O God, we are still waiting for understanding of just what resurrection means. Innocents still wake to the ravages of unjust war, strangers are still marginalized from community, neighbors still divided across lines of faith, race, and privilege. And so, we turn our hearts to prayer, anchoring ourselves once again in the hope that clings to us, even when we do not recognize it for ourselves. And we cry out Rabboni, teach us, just one more time to recognize you in our midst. Hallelujah. Amen."

Jesus told the disciples, you are witnesses of these things. The disciples were witnesses of Jesus' physical resurrection that they were to proclaim. Yet Jesus' physical resurrection is just one part. Jesus also told them to be witnesses of other resurrections such as the power of grace to forgive every sin, the power of the Holy Spirit to move us from terror to joy and everything written in scripture for it all must be fulfilled.

Each disciple was to be a witness of repentance, a witness of how God changed their life and turned their terrors into joy. Perhaps John had the terror of being unloved, until Jesus filled John with the joy of knowing that he will always be loved by God. Maybe that is why John filled his gospel with descriptions of God's love for each of us. John's epistle states, **1 John 3:1-3 "See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. Beloved, all who have this hope in Jesus purify themselves just as God is pure."**

How will our terrors be transformed into joy? How will we experience God's love? How will we be purified? Jesus said, **Luke 24:49 "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as God promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with the power from heaven."** Luke used that last phrase to grab our attention for it is almost the exact same expression uttered by Gabriel to Mary after she inquired. **Luke 1:34-35 "But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin. The angel replied, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."** Jesus promises to empower us all with the Holy Spirit who makes that which seems impossible reality.

In time, Jesus will turn your every terror into joy. We are Jesus' witnesses called to proclaim that everything in scripture will be fulfilled. Called to proclaim our risen savior and the glorious eternal life that awaits us in our resurrected bodies. Called to proclaim the forgiveness of sin. Called to proclaim the love and grace of God who is turning all our terrors into joy.

The psalms are prayers that often start with a person venting about their predicament, naming their terrors, and ending by proclaiming that God's love will resurrect all. A reading from select psalms: **Psalm 61:1-4 NLT** "O God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer! From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me. Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings!"

Psalm 46:1-7 NLT "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! God's voice thunders and the earth melts! The Lord of Heaven's Angels is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress."

Psalm 34:4-10 MSG "God met me more than halfway, God freed me from my anxious fears. Look at God; give God your warmest smile. Never hide your feelings from God. When I was desperate, I called out, and God got me out of a tight spot. God's angel sets up a circle of protection around us while we pray. Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—how good God is. Blessed are you who run to God. Worship God if you want the best; worship opens doors to all God's goodness. Young lions on the prowl get hungry, but God-seekers are full of God."

We you read the psalms notice that fear, suffering, hate, destruction is communicated in temporal language. God's grace and glory, our deliverance, safety, abundant life, and resurrection is communicated in forever language. Often our deliverance is communicated in tenses that indicate that deliverance has already happened even though the psalmist is still in the predicament. This reveals that God's promises are steadfast, sure, and guaranteed, for everything must be fulfilled.

Luke 24:36-49 NLT "Jesus suddenly was standing among the disciples. "Peace be with you," Jesus said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! "Why are you frightened?" Jesus asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As Jesus spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then Jesus asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. Then Jesus said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And Jesus said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of Jesus' name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things. "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as God promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." Every terror will be transformed into a joy. All of God's glorious promises will be fulfilled. Amen