

**28** *After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' <sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*

In the movies, if a character says, "Trust me, everything will be OK" my reaction is- oh no it won't! **DO NOT** trust someone who firmly says, 'Trust me.' It never turns out well.

When we are told something by a person we trust, who has the authority to speak, we are more likely to believe them than somebody we don't know, or somebody who really doesn't know what they are talking about.

Who do you trust when you want to find out what's happening with the coronavirus pandemic? Do you trust the medical experts and epidemiologists, or the social media posts that recommend gargling with hot water or taking an untested drug?

When the two Marys saw an angel rolling back the boulder that stood in front of the tomb, the first thing he said to them was "Do not be afraid." If the great burly guards had passed out in terror, the Marys must have been pretty frightened!

But this was an angel, a messenger from God- so they trusted him. He didn't need to say, "Trust me- I'm an angel"; it was obvious he had the authority.

Jesus' mother Mary was also visited by an angel who told her not to be afraid; and then he told her she was going to have a miraculous baby. When he was born, an angel told the shepherds in the field to go and see the baby; and this angel also said, "Don't be afraid".

As we know, Mary said 'Yes' to God, and eventually she gave birth to Jesus. The shepherds did go and visit them. They believed what the angels told them.

So back at the tomb, the two Marys ran off to tell the others what they'd heard, and they bumped into Jesus; and what did he say? "Do not be afraid."

Why would they have been afraid? They had seen their beloved Master cruelly killed and buried. They had been grieving ever since, and maybe wondering who the authorities might come after next.

Then they saw this shining angel appear with such power that the earth shook and the guards fell down; and the angel showed them an empty tomb.

As they left, they ran into Jesus- risen from the dead, warm and real and smiling at them, telling them they didn't need to be afraid any more.

When God tells us not to be afraid, in the words of an angelic messenger or Jesus, it doesn't mean that nothing can go wrong- because often things DO go wrong. It doesn't mean everything will turn out fine, or work out for the best, because if we are honest- it often doesn't.

Recently we have heard plenty of news to cause us to be afraid. The dreaded virus has spread throughout the world at an incredible rate, thousands of people have died, and it may well be that the worst is still to come. Doctors and health experts can't say 'Do not be afraid'; we NEED to be afraid in order to take the threat seriously. We may not feel particularly afraid of catching Covid-19 ourselves, but we must be seriously scared of giving it to other people who may be more vulnerable.

There's an old song that says, 'What the world needs now is love- sweet love', which is as true as it has ever been. We need to know that we are loved; we need reassurance that someone cares about us; and we need to love one another, even though that means staying at home and not meeting together.

What we can hold onto is that whatever may happen to us, whatever the days and weeks ahead may bring, God has the power to strengthen and hold us. Whatever we may have to face, we do not face it alone; nothing we encounter is stronger than God's love.

The only one who has the authority to give us this reassurance is God. God's Son is the only one who has faced death and can tell us- there is eternal life. The worst that can happen, happened to Jesus; and he came back to tell us, Do not be afraid.

This Easter, let us take Jesus at his word. He knows; and he has won the victory over death.

The Lord be with you.