

May 7, 2023 – Easter 5 (A)
Week 5: Reflections on the Resurrection

During the Easter season, Sermons That Work is pleased to present reflections from some of the newest bishops of The Episcopal Church on the resurrection of our Lord. Check back each week for a brief exploration of how Jesus Christ’s rising from the grave changes everything. To listen to this reflection, scan the QR code on this page and subscribe to the Sermons That Work podcast.

“Don’t Panic” is written in large, friendly letters on the cover of the book, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, a fictional, electronic encyclopedia that is the centerpiece object in a novel of the same name written by Douglas Adams. The angel at the tomb in Matthew’s Gospel says essentially the same phrase in their greeting: “Don’t be afraid.” Immediately after this in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus also begins his resurrection encounter with Mary and Mary saying, “Do not be afraid.” As Douglas Adams employs “Don’t Panic” to invite his reader into wonder and anticipation in the story of his novel, so we are invited deeper into our own story, to wonder what threats confront our resurrection witnesses when both the angel and the returned Jesus begin with “Don’t be afraid.”

What had Mary and Mary to fear? Was it the bright, otherworldly appearance of a heavenly messenger? Angels have been known to startle mortals. Was it that the teacher they loved and had seen murdered on a cross was now miraculously alive? This would have been enough. Ghosts and zombies still arise in human fears, particularly if it’s the appearance of a beloved. But the angel and Jesus know the deeper fears Mary and Mary have and the future fears they will face.

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“Don’t be afraid” addresses their deeper fear that this encounter could turn out to be just a fragile dream – that after such joyous news, the proverbial rug could be pulled out from under them, leaving them worse off than before. This phrase addresses their fears that after sharing the Good News of New Life, they will most likely be laughed at and humiliated, rejected by those to whom they speak their exuberant joy.

Of course, none of these fears are mutually exclusive. “Don’t be afraid” addresses all of Mary and Mary’s fears, all at once. Such resurrection encounters remind us that Grief and Revelation are cumulative. We humans experience our fears, our griefs, our hopes, and our new discoveries in an ever-expanding continuum.

In Christ’s resurrection encounter, we are offered the pain and joy of experiencing a multiverse of realities, all at the same time. Because ours is not a fictional novel but rather a story grounded in the original witnesses who heard him, “Don’t be afraid” is spoken directly to us, inviting us to trust the one who stands before us saying these words. This invitation on holy lips comes to us through the cumulative continuum now two millennia on, still speaking directly to our multi-layered, multi-generational fears, right now, in our time and in our space.

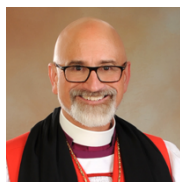
The resurrected Christ meets us in a welcome that addresses all our fears. His greeting does not ignore but includes all the crucifixions we have endured and all the resurrections we have known, including his. With Mary and Mary, we run on with layered feelings in us, both fear and great joy. And we run, ever trusting in the one who leads us, always, from panic to peace.

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*This reflection, “Don’t Panic,” was written by **the Rt. Rev. Matthew Cowden**, Bishop of West Virginia. Cowden previously served as rector of Saint Michael’s Episcopal Church in South Bend, Indiana. His joy is in raising up the next generation of priests as potent pastors and powerful preachers.*



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