

DON'T BE AFRAID!
Revelation 1:9-18

What frightens you? Is there something that really makes you afraid? Speaking in public ranks high for many. Getting sick, being incapacitated in some way, and, of course, the thought of dying--these can all be fearful things.

When we're young, it's the fear of the dark--and the fear of falling. We get a little older, and we fear going to school for the first time or later, going to Middle School. Parents fear for the safety of their children when they're very young, but also when they're just starting to drive, or date, or head off to college.

Someone very thoughtfully suggested to me that my hikes on the Appalachian Trail might possibly be motivated by a subconscious fear of getting older—and I resemble that remark!

A young boy called to wish his grandmother a Happy Birthday. He asked her how old she was--so she told him, 67. He was quiet for a time; then he asked, "Grandma, did you start at 1?"

You know, being a follower of Christ used to be kinda' scary. It still is in some places—in parts of the world where Christians are persecuted--and even martyred—because of their faith.

In our text for today, the Apostle John is writing to Christians who were fearful. They had endured long periods of persecution. Most of them knew fellow believers, leaders of the church, who had been imprisoned, tortured, or even put to death for refusing to renounce their faith in Christ.

They also knew, however, that their Lord had undergone the harshest treatment of all—and they understood that everything Christ suffered was for them. He hadn't glossed over the risks either—He had warned them that following Him could be costly.

Still, it was never easy. Knowing your allegiance to Christ could get you killed didn't lessen the burden any. So John is inspired to write this unusual book that we know as *The Revelation*.

He writes to encourage these early Christians and assure them that they are not alone in their suffering, that ultimately God

would overcome their enemies; and, at the same time, He would reward their faithfulness. Look, please, at **Revelation 1:9-18:**

⁹I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

We might think John was overcome with amazement in that moment, but Jesus knew that John was actually scared half to death. "I fell at his feet as though dead..." So did he pass out? I'm not sure. But whatever happened, John tells us that Jesus put His hand on him and said: "**Do not be afraid.**"

1. And this, friends, is one of the great messages we find in Scripture: **God does not want us to be afraid.** We don't need to think for long to come up with a list of verses where God tells us He wants His children free of fear.

In the **23rd Psalm, for example, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."**

As you know, the Psalmist is talking about the presence of the Good Shepherd; and later, when the angel announces Jesus' birth to a group of bewildered shepherds on a hillside, He says what? **"Fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people."** (Luke 2:10)

I love this passage from **Matthew 10:29-31**—"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

By the way, if we put this passage in its context, we would find that that's the third time in just six short verses that Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." He's trying to tell us something!

Later, in the account of Jesus' resurrection, the angel says: **"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's not here; he has risen, just as he said."** (Matthew 28:5-6)

Now, we could go on, but what the angel says to those bewildered women brings us right back to what Jesus said to John...as He tries to alleviate his fears: **"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."** (Revelation 1:17-18)

2. In these verses, we find several **reasons that Christ gives us for not being afraid.** If you're a Christian this morning, if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, then please take to heart what this is saying: you don't need to be afraid; and here's why:

A. Jesus says: **"I am the First and the Last..."** Let's think about this. In the first chapter of his Gospel, John wrote: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** He's talking about Jesus! Later, John continues, **"Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."** (John 1:1, 30)

At the dawn of creation--the world still formless--there was God, the Father, and God, the Son. The Heavenly Father worked through His Son to create. Dry land was formed. Vegetation grew. Fish filled the waters and animals began to roam the forests. Finally, as the crowning acts of creation, man and woman became living souls. Jesus is right there—at the first.

But not only is Jesus “alpha,” the First, He is also “omega,” the Last—meaning He will be there...when the period is placed on the last sentence of human history. He’ll be present also when your final chapter is written, and mine. He promises to come then and take us home. He is “the First and the Last” (Alpha and Omega).

B. Next, Jesus says: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!"

Jesus lived a life just like us. He worked, went to parties, laughed and cried, and even got lonely. His friends weren’t always there for Him, so He felt rejection. He got tired, hungry, and thirsty like we do. He experienced life as we experience it. He was tempted as we are tempted. "I am the Living One!"

So as we make our way through the Mondays of life, He understands. He knows. He’s aware of the pressures and the emotions that affect us because He’s experienced these things.

Jesus also died. Some translators render the phrase "**I was dead**" as "**I became dead.**" Even as Christ entered this world and "became flesh," He also chose to sacrifice Himself on a cross. He "became dead" for us. He experienced the pain...the loneliness and agony of death.

"But now I am alive for ever and ever!" Jesus said. Pilate won’t be able to issue his verdict again. The crowds can no longer mock him. The Roman soldiers can’t beat Him nor drive the nails into His hands and feet. He’s alive—and don’t miss this part—Jesus is alive “for ever and ever.”

C. Which brings us to this: Jesus says: "I hold the keys of death and Hades." We need not fear death because our risen Lord says, "I’ve got the keys."

Try to imagine Jesus...seated at the right hand of the Father in glory. He's holding a ring of keys--the keys of death and Hades. The word "Hades" simply means "the abode of the dead." There is only one set of keys, and Jesus has them. He used them on a few occasions while He was here.

Like the time when a man named Jairus came to Jesus and told Him that his little girl was sick. You know how daughters can wrap their daddies around their little fingers—she probably had.

She was just 12 years old, and her daddy loved her. Now she was struggling to survive. So this father comes to Jesus in desperation saying, "My daughter is sick. Please come and make her well again!"

As Jesus begins to make His way through the crowd to go to her, the Bible tells us that a woman with an issue of blood reached out and touched His garment...and she was healed. Jesus stopped to talk to her; but as the woman and her family were rejoicing, news came that the little girl had died.

Her daddy's heart was broken, but Jesus just keeps going. He enters her room. He picks up her lifeless hand and says, "Princess, wake up."

Jesus has the keys. He throws open the door of death and Hades. The little girl sits up, blinks her eyes, smiles a big smile, and hugs her daddy. She probably hugs Jesus too.

This happened on other occasions—with the widow of Nain...and Lazarus. That time, as Jesus stands before the tomb of His friend--with Mary and Martha and other friends and family close by--"Jesus wept." The closing of the door, the locking of the latches--even while holding the keys, the sadness and loss of this moment brought Jesus to tears.

But then He grabs His keys; and in a loud voice, He says, "Lazarus, come forth!" The doors of death and Hades immediately swing open, and Lazarus is alive!

Oh, and one more time, friends. They take the body of Jesus down from the cross. They put it in a tomb. The stone is rolled into place. Guards are posted. His body is locked away.

They didn't realize Jesus had the keys. Early in the morning on the first day of the week, He took out those keys one more time, and He unlocked death's door. Jesus was alive—and this time, alive for evermore!

As we share this supper together, let us remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for each of us. Use this sacred time to reflect deeply on His death.

But then, I want you to also remember the outcome. Remember who holds the keys of death and Hades.

We come to this table to renew our faith in Christ Jesus.

We come to experience afresh the joy and gratitude of realizing what following Christ means for our lives.

And then, we come to tell ourselves: "Self, don't be afraid. Your live is in the hands of Jesus—and He holds the keys! Don't be afraid."

THE LORD'S SUPPER