

We've all had those conversations, the ones where no matter how it twists and turns you just have that one thing that you *can't let go*. There's something there that you are determined to hold on to. We had one of these conversations in Bible study this week, and it took me a hot second to figure out just why exactly I couldn't let this one thing go, but as you will see...I got there. It all centered around four little words in our gospel this morning, "fear and great joy." We had a great back and forth on whether or not it is possible to be fearful at the same time as you are filled with great joy, and for some reason, I just could not let go of the belief that yes, yes you can. My thoughts continued to spin long after Bible study was over and then it hit me. For the last couple of weeks, my plan for this morning, to ease back in to this whole preaching thing, was to do the fair thing. Since so many of you over the last six weeks have shared your hearts, your minds, your experiences of faith, I figured fair was fair and that it only made sense that today was my turn. And that's when I realized, as I've been thinking about my faith journey, those four words are a great summation of it, fear and great joy—that has been my experience of faith, a paradoxical journey that has brought me here, where it continues daily.

Since this is my story I suppose I have to start it truthfully, I was born, much to my sisters' teasing delight, in Toledo, Ohio, though let it be

unequivocally stated that I am *from* Michigan, and I was born, as the Synod kids love to call it, a ladle Lutheran. My dad grew up walking to church with my aunts, because they decided as a sibling unit that church was something they wanted to do even though it wasn't my grandparents thing, and my mom grew up going to the church that I grew up in, right around the corner from my grandma's house. St. John Lutheran Church has always been my home, I was baptized there, took my first communion there, was confirmed there, and gave my first sermon there, at the ripe old age of 12. Faith was always this innate part of our family life, even if we didn't talk about it much. We were not a family that said grace before every meal, we didn't read the Bible together, but somehow, there was always a sense that more than anything, church was home, church was family, this was where you would be loved and seen and welcomed.

And this is where that first nugget of *fear* and great joy comes in. I loved going to church as a kid, I loved Sunday school, loved VBS, even if I hated getting up early for it—as you can see I knew what I was about from a young age. To fully display my nerdiness, I would get my mom's Bible out at home and stand at our bay window and pretend I was reading the lessons. I was probably like 8 years old, and eventually my parents said it was ok if I signed up to read. I was so excited. I did it a couple of times, and loved it.

And I know I've shared this story before, but it's vital to my journey. I loved it until the Saturday night my pastor called my parents and said "some people" had complained about me reading because I was too young, and so maybe we just didn't come to church the next morning and they'd say I was sick. God bless my dad, who said no no, we'd be there, and my pastor could explain why I wasn't reading. I loved my church family, I loved church, there was the joy, but the fear crept in, what if there wasn't the kind of love there that I imagined. Who would tell a kid they couldn't read in church? Folks wonder why I will always go to bat for our kids and their lives here, this is why. I never want another kid to feel the absolute anguish I felt standing in the hallway of our house and my dad telling me why I wasn't reading the next day.

Then a couple of years later, everything about my life changed. My parents divorced, in a move that was entirely a shock to me, and all the ideas I had about what my life was like shattered because so much of it had been a front. My dad disappeared from the picture for awhile, and my sisters became my lifeline, my northern stars, my everything, as they still are today. I have never been more scared of what came next in our lives. But at the same time, that fear was coupled with a crazy amount of joy going on in my church life. We got new pastors, a clergy couple fresh out of seminary, and

they were...like bolts out of the blue. At one point our congregation was the fastest growing rural congregation in the ELCA. Marty and Angela changed my life, my faith, Angela especially, because for the first time ever, I saw a woman in the pulpit. A woman in the pulpit who when we were planning our youth service for confirmation looked at me and said I was going to preach. I don't remember what that first sermon was about, but talk about fear and great joy. Standing in the pulpit of a congregation that once wouldn't let me read, preaching the gospel, and realizing...I could and not only could I, but I loved it. The Holy Spirit started working her magic fast.

I felt the call to ministry from that point, and I was excited, except for well, my uncle, a lifelong Lutheran who would always tell me that women weren't cut out for being pastors, except for the members of my home church who would refer to Angela as "the pastor's wife" even though she herself was a pastor, except for the countless times I had 1 Timothy thrown in my face that said I needed to be silent in church. I was joyful for what I felt God working in me, but I was terrified at how hard it would make my life, and why my gender was apparently a qualifier on my skills to proclaim the gospel. That fear has lessened over the years, but the moments still happen, when my presence as a woman is a reason for a mistake or a misstep, rather than the fact that I'm simply human and we all mess up.

There's a lot more that happens from that first point of discernment to now. The professor who told me I was too smart to be a pastor. The joy I felt every time I came home from college and sat at St. John and felt at home. But there are two last parts of my journey I want to share before we tie this in to Easter, because this is a sermon after all, and well I know I haven't done this in awhile, but we'll get to the resurrection.

In the spring of 2016, my oldest sister sat me down in my room in her house and I was convinced she was going to tell me something horrendous, that was how scared she seemed. What she told me was that she wanted to go to seminary, that she had felt a call to be a pastor for longer than she knew how to express, but she never could because she loved Lisa, my not yet, but soon to be sister-in-law who had been in my life since I was five. Jenn told me that she had hit a point where her call was stronger than her fear of coming out and so she was going to. I was overjoyed and ecstatic and livid and terrified. Terrified for what the church would do to my faithful, beautiful, wonderful sister all because of who she fell in love with, and livid that she had had to hide who she was for so long. While my sister was in the midst of this faith explosion, mine was simmering in rage. How could this church I have loved, had been ordained in, keep my sister so hidden in the closet she never told anyone she felt a call to ministry? Fear

and great joy, a fear that still exists for her everyday, and an overwhelming joy that this is the happiest I have ever seen my big sister in my whole life.

The last piece is a story I've shared before in some ways. In March 2018, I sat in the chapel at Duke University at the Why Christian conference put together by Nadia Bolz-Weber and Rachel Held Evans, terrified that my faith was broken. As a congregation, we had gone through a traumatic and awful death and it had shaken me to my core to the point that I had no idea what to do. After three days of hearing speaker after speaker explain why they were still Christian in a wild world, I was starting to feel a little flame of mine, but I was still scared it would never come back. As I was walking back from communion at the end of our last worship service, the words of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" rang through the sanctuary. "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it..." and I burst into tears. Tears of fear, tears of joy that even when I was struggling God was there, holding me, guiding me. There are a lot of things that have happened between then and now, a global pandemic for one, but it is that moment that carries me when my faith ebbs, when I was at my lowest, the Holy Spirit found a way, she always does, and that...that is resurrection.

Over the last six weeks that is what we have been hearing, stories of resurrection. Over and over again. Faith found where you were maybe

confused, but your son felt at home. Faith found in a comic book. Faith found in the poverty and grace of Costa Rica. Faith found in confronting racism and boldly being yourself as God made you. Faith found in going from seeing God in nothing, to seeing God in everything. Faith found in ice cream cones. That's what this morning is about, resurrection comes in all things, when we least expect it and when it seems most impossible. When the tomb is sealed, when Jesus has died, when all feels dark, resurrection breaks that stone away, the linen cloths are revealed, and the words ring out, "Do not be afraid," he is risen. There is fear and great joy there, fear that whoa boy that means our God can do *anything*, which is a lot to take in, and great joy that yeah our God can do *anything*, and bring life into the darkness, into the hopeless, into the emptiest of spaces.

We all bring our own journeys here to this place this morning. You could be at a moment of great joy, you could be at a moment of fear, you could be at a moment of both. Into all of those moments, God brings resurrection. There is nothing that is out of the reach of God, nothing too far gone or too lost that it cannot be found and brought back to life. It's terrifying to trust that God can do such a miraculous thing, but man does it feel good too. Wherever your journey finds you this morning, may you hear the words, do not be afraid...for resurrection is yours...rejoice. **AMEN!!!**