

Have you ever tried to translate a sentence from one language to another? It is not the easiest task in the world. Some words just do not translate well and to try to find an “exact” meaning in the other language is often difficult. This is especially true when we look at the word *fear* and try to bring it from Greek in Mark’s Gospel to its English equivalent.

Quoting from Eugene Peterson in Christ Plays in 10,000 Places, “...*fear is the most frequently mentioned response to Jesus’ resurrection. We’re afraid when we are suddenly taken off guard and don’t know what to do. We are afraid when our presuppositions and assumptions no longer account for what we are up against and we don’t know what will happen to us. We’re afraid when reality without warning is shown to be either more or other than we thought it was. Fear-of-the-Lord is fear with the scary element deleted. The ‘fear not’ doesn’t result in the absence of fear, but rather its transformation into ‘fear-of-the-Lord. But we still don’t know what’s going on.*”

We struggle to find the right word. What does it mean “to fear”, “to be afraid” as it relates to our Scripture lesson in Mark? What do the words associated with fear mean? As we have said, it is not always easy. This is affirmed from the number of different translations of the Greek word for “fear” in this text.

We begin in verse 5 where the angel tells the woman not to be _____ (alarmed, amazed, dumbfounded, bewildered, terrified). What word does your translation use? These words are all from various translations in this 5th verse of “fear”. Before deciding, let’s look at what is happening. The women are on their way to the tomb to finish the job they started on Friday, they must finish anointing the body of Jesus for proper burial. The Sabbath prevented them from finishing the task and now, very early in the morning, they head back to complete the job. They are doing it out of love and devotion. If they can do nothing else they can make sure that he has the proper burial. As they walk to the tomb they only have one thought, “Who will roll the stone away?” They know the tomb has been sealed with a large stone and it may be too heavy for them to move. Their mission is faced with one large obstacle, the stone. They are not discussing resurrection but the reality of a blocked entrance that keeps them from their task.

As they approach the tomb the stone is already rolled away. Someone has been there before them. Once inside they discover “*a young man dressed in a white robe.*” It is someone, but not Jesus. His words to them are words of hope, “*Don’t be _____, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they have laid him.*” Here we find the same word used in verse five. It is probably best translated “amazed”. Do not be amazed. The other words fit. We would be alarmed, dumbfounded, bewildered, terrified. But amazed is probably what is really meant.

Why should they not be amazed? Something has happened beyond imagination. Their world has been turned upside-down. The one they sought to anoint in burial has risen from the dead. Their instructions are to go and tell the other disciples what they have just encountered. Jesus is Risen! Should we/they not be amazed? Is there more to Jesus than they had expected? Were they not amazed at the feeding of the 5,000 or the other healings, miracles that Jesus performed? Now God has spoken with a message of redeeming love – Christ is Risen from the dead!

Then in verse 8 we have the women leaving the tomb with terror and amazement. Other translations use trembling and excitement or as in the NIV, trembling and bewilderment. What does this mean? Their whole world has changed. How can we describe this feeling of terror and excitement? I thought and came up with what I think is

a close illustration. What examples might you think of for – terror and amazement? Well, mine is the groom just before the wedding march! (Brides are usually more settled). But the groom, their knees are knocking, their heart is beating and their palms are covered in sweat. There is a sense of terror in their face and yet, there is also a sense of absolute amazement.

The women have come with a job to do and now they leave trembling with amazement of what has happened.

Mark has them telling no one. Well, who would listen to them? They are just a group of emotional women. (Think of the day and how women were treated before you start throwing things at me!) What proof do they have? Only the words of a “*young man dressed in a white robe.*” Yet, the body is gone. They could not complete the job they had come to do. Something has happened...they have discovered the fear-of-the-Lord. What does it all mean?

The Isaiah reading reminds us that there are many things in the world that bring fear. Most morning news headlines bring bad news. We have lived through various stages of “terror” alerts. Tomorrow or Tuesday when many college students go back to class their minds will be thinking of the tragedy at Northern Illinois University on Friday and will wonder if their lecture hall is safe. We know how societies have used fear to keep people in order. God’s words to Isaiah are that he is not to fear the fears that men produce. He is not to worry about their threats against him. Rather, he is to fear or to be in awe of what God can do. God says that Isaiah’s fear should be the “fear-of-the-Lord” type of fear/awe we find in Mark’s Gospel. If you follow me and my directions then you will be at peace. Only God alone can provide the peace, security and hope that we all seek and yearn for.

They leave the tomb afraid. But afraid of what? They have been caught off guard. So, they leave filled with amazement, fear, bewilderment, some type of intense emotion. What does this all mean? Remember they were still expecting the Messiah to set up an earthly kingdom. How is the Resurrection of Christ going to play out in the coming days?

They don’t know what to say. I remember a friend, a police officer. He was called to the scene of a horrible crime. It was an event so horrific that even the newspapers refused to describe it. He could not speak of what he found. He left the scene terrified and bewildered.

The women are afraid of what all this means. They and we enter into the area of the unknown, or as Eugene Peterson writes, “*But they still don’t know what’s going on.*” He is not here; He is Risen from the dead.

In some ways is this not how we approach each day of our lives in Christ? We approach each with a certain element of the unknown in our lives. We are not sure what will happen. Normally we don’t think much about it...but there are those times when we, like the women, are filled with terror and amazement.

I thought of this yesterday. As I was preparing for Jim’s funeral I thought of the emotions that would be present at the graveside. We would leave with a sense of fear and the unknown about our future – and yet there would be an assurance that for Jim all was well. It was the faith he believed and the faith he lived...Christ is indeed risen from the dead!

May God renew in us this day that sense of fear, of awe, of amazement and of hope. Something great continues to happen in God’s world – It is, “the fear-of-the-Lord. It’s beyond amazement!