

In Matthew's gospel, an earthquake comes as the angel of the Lord rolls away the stone at the tomb, and then sits on it. The earthquake has a divine origin -- the upheaval comes from God breaking into the scene. This earthquake, too, holds the promise of change, turmoil, and disruption.

This earthquake also creates a dramatic change in life -- a startling "before" and "after." The guards "quake" with fear, and surely won't forget this moment. The angel instructs the women not to be afraid, as if that were possible. Life for them is now divided into a new "before" and "after," just as it must have been by Jesus' death a few days before.

This radical reshaping of our lives *is* cause for fear, if we take the resurrection seriously. Even in covid-19 lockdown we celebrate an Easter like none other in living memory, and when we see the worldwide death numbers continue to climb then we should be afraid. An old movie the "FLY" instructs: "Be afraid... be very afraid." Like the earthquake, (and we have had enough knowledge of these in New Zealand in the past decade," the resurrection divides our lives into "before" and "after." If the tomb is empty, then God has a claim on our lives that breaks us open to something dramatically new. For that we should be afraid, because Easter reminds us how far God will go to make us into new people.

After hearing from the angel that Jesus has been raised from the dead, the two women leave the tomb with "fear and great joy." The mixture of joy and fear fits every moment when the divine is revealed to us, and where we meet the holy face-to-face. When the women meet Jesus himself, he greets them with a word translated as "greetings", which sounds like the start of a business letter or a board meeting. But to be technical for a moment the word shares the same root as "rejoice," so Jesus' early morning greeting might also be translated as "Rejoice!" Now joy can replace fear, in the fullness of Easter.

Easter's earthquake breaks our lives open, until it's not possible to go along as we have been, or to live like nothing has happened. Easter's earthquake ruptures our lives, and re-forms us into Easter people. The world's earthquakes and other disasters may be breaking news on television and the internet, but this is Easter news breaks us apart, and makes us again into God's people. Like all earthquakes and Covid-19 this earthquake at the death of Jesus, involves fear, disruption, and change, but this one also holds the gift of God's joy.