

## Fear Not! Week One April 4 Easter

Again, happy Easter!

I want to start with a question:

what ways have you found to cope with all the upset of the past year?

I have to confess I've watched more TV than I did before COVID.

In January I started watching a show on Disney + called 'Wandavision'.

### **SCREEN: Wandavision graphic**

Wanda is Wanda Maximoff, a superhero in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

If you saw the Avengers movies,

you know that Wanda's life was filled with grief and loss:

the death of her parents, her brother, then her partner, named Vision.

Wanda also has guilt, feeling that she should have been able

to help those she loved in their moment of greatest need.

Unable to process her fears, her doubts and her grief

Wanda uses her superpowers to take over the town

of Westview NJ - trapping all it's citizens in an illusion she has created that looks identical to the TV sitcoms Wanda grew up watching.

So one episode of Wandavision resembles the show 'Father Knows Best',

another 'The Brady Bunch' - shows I grew up watching.

Shows that always end on a happy note with every problem solved in 30 minutes.

### **SCREEN: blank red background**

Okay, I admit, this is an unusual beginning to an Easter homily,

but on some level, I think we can all relate to Wanda.

This past year, we've all been grieving in different ways.

For some of you, that grief has been very intense and tangible:

you lost someone you loved.

Others of you are grieving the loss of your job.

Maybe you've been grieving your kids' loss of normal schooling, sports or other activities.

Maybe there've been moments when you felt trapped,

wondering how you'd make it through and what the future holds.

And all of this loss - all this grief and fear -  
may have caused your health to suffer.

And I think we can all relate to Wanda's desire to  
escape life's harsh reality through denial, isolation, or fantasy.

So, grief, anger, confusion and fear....

we're all dealing with this to some extent this Easter.

### **SCREEN: Fear Not! main screen**

Today we are beginning our Easter message series titled, Fear Not!

In the scripture readings for the next month,

God will tell us what to do when we experience fear.

To begin, let's acknowledge just how powerful an emotion fear can be.

Unlike a superhero like Wanda, when we're afraid,

we don't have the power to create a fantasy world.

How does fear affect us?

Well, if unchecked, fear keeps us from being good people,

not to mention good Christians.

And that's because when we are racked with fear,

we are at our worst.

Fear can paralyze us, literally shut us down emotionally.

Fear can make us selfish and defensive -

remember people hoarding supplies when the pandemic began?

Fear can make us suspicious and distrustful of others.

The end result of dealing with fear over a long period of time

is that we become angry, bitter and isolated.

The followers of Jesus experienced all of this with his death.

On Palm Sunday, they walked beside him as he entered Jerusalem.

The crowds sang Hosannah and called him king.

Then it all went south.

Just a few days later, he was gone,

put to death in the most horrible way they could imagine.

Not only did they have to deal with the loss of their friend,

they also had to confront their guilt about abandoning him in his hour of greatest need.

So what did they do?

They ran away - they went into hiding fearful that the same thing that happened to Jesus might happen to them.

But then on Easter, Jesus rose from the dead.

He appeared to his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit.

They were able to face their fears and share the Good News with others.

What helped them to be so bold and courageous?

What enabled them to 'fear not'?

Two things:

first, I'm sure they recalled how for three years,

Jesus kept telling them over and over, *do not be afraid!*

Like the very first time they met Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.

When he called them to abandon their nets and become fishers of men he said to them,

*Do not be afraid!*

Later when they found themselves in a boat in a terrifying storm,

Jesus spoke those words again: *Do not be afraid!*

At the Last Supper, with their future uncertain and his own death just hours away,

Jesus again reminded them, *Do not be afraid!*

And on Easter morning after Jesus rose from the dead he

spoke those exact words to Mary Magdalene: *Do not be afraid!*

Which leads to the second thing that enabled them to fear not:

the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

The resurrection was proof that the God who seemed defeated by sin on Good Friday rose on Easter Sunday as God of the living and the dead.

It was also proof that God did not abandon them as they'd feared.

When Jesus appeared to them they realized that

he was not going to hold their betrayal against them.

They truly had nothing to fear!

That's how they could move beyond their past and succeed in their mission.

## **SCREEN: blank red background**

We need to be like them.

Whenever we find ourselves questioning, doubting or fearful, we need to remember Jesus's words, *'do not be afraid.'*

And like them, we must never forget that he triumphed over everything that can scar us - fear, suffering, betrayal, guilt and death.

Like them, we need to realize that no matter what happens, Jesus is with us....always....Jesus is in control, and Jesus has a plan.

That's the remedy for fear.

That's how you and I can 'fear not'.

This Easter, if you're struggling with your own fears and doubts about life and the future, begin by first acknowledging them.

They are real, they are valid.

After the year we've lived through, we've all struggled and are rightly skeptical.

Like me, you may have found yourself asking questions like,  
*If Jesus conquered sin and death, why is the world still so messed up?*  
*Why do some people march under the banner 'Jesus Saves'*  
*but promote hatred and division?*

Okay, the world is not perfect, the past year laid it bare in tragic ways.

So how do we face these inconsistencies that can lead us back to doubt and fear?

What are our options?

## **SCREEN: Denial**

### **Surrender**

### **Make a difference**

The first option is denial.

This is what Wanda chose.

Denial means you simply refuse to see the reality of the world around you - just shut it out.

In denial you are putting blinders on and pretending what's there isn't there.

The second option is to see how bad things are,

but then surrender - decide, *'there's nothing I can do'*

and give in to apathy and indifference.

Or, there's a third option which is to make a difference.

Making a difference is what the disciples of Jesus chose to do.

But in order to do this, they had to find the courage that Christ offered them, and then go out and live their faith.

For you and I to make a difference, we'll need to do the same.

We will need to find courage in Christ and then live our faith for all to see.

And one essential thing you will need for this to happen is seeing yourself and others through the eyes of Christ.

**SCREEN: you are loved, forgiven, chosen**

Meaning you see yourself as a child of God,

as someone who is loved, forgiven, and chosen.

It means believing that Jesus died and rose for you!

You personally.

And then you can move beyond your fears, your doubts - anything that has you isolated - so you can live boldly and courageously in the world.

You will make a difference

by letting other people see your love, your compassion and your faith.

The people you live with, work with, and go to school with.

Your family, friends, neighbors, even strangers.

In just a few moments, I will invite you to renew your baptismal promises.

It's an opportunity for you to recommit to the life God wants for you.

And committing to bringing Easter joy and hope to others so that they can fear not.

**SCREEN: Fear Not main screen**

Join us for each week of this series as we explore

how Christ teaches us to not be afraid,

to trust that he is with us always,

leading and guiding us to new life. Amen. +