Do not be afraid Easter Matthew 28:1-10

In the last few days news has come about an earthquake near Orange in NSW. Apparently although it measured about 4.3 only a slight shaking was felt, even by those close by. We all remember the devastation in Japan when a magnitude 9 quake unleashed the tsunami which in turn caused a nuclear melt down at a power plant in Fukishima. Knowing all about tectonic plates doesn’t make the experience sound anything but terrifying.

In Matthew’s gospel, as Jesus dies the earth shakes and the rocks were split in two. In Matthew’s gospel, it’s an earthquake that heralds the announcement to the women of Jesus’ Resurrection. This day, the first day of the new week, the first day of new life, begins with the earth quaking and an angel bearing news. The women who come to the tomb, Mary Magdalene the other Mary have been close by. They were witnesses to Jesus’ burial sitting, we’re told by Matthew, opposite the tomb as Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ body there, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and rolled a great stone across the tomb sealing it closed. These women were prepared that day for grief and mourning, the work of it, the heart of it, the need of it. The tears and ripping of it.

Instead, the very ground on which they stood shook them into the new world. Every part of creation realigned, re settled. Every former understanding shaken into the shape and the pattern and the glory of God’s new day. Jesus’ Resurrection Day. And in the face of everything that had gone before, betrayal, danger, death- the first words the women hear from this shining presence are these. “Do not be afraid.”

Reassurance. Comfort. Promise.

And then the news. “I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has been raised as he said. “And then an invitation, “Come, see the place where he lay.” And then an instruction. “Go quickly and tell his disciples,” “He has been raised from the dead, and is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

So, they go, and on the way, they meet not an angel but Jesus himself. Matthew’s gospel tells us that these women touched him, they must have bowed down because they touched his feet- he who had washed feet just a few days ago, was now, I would guess, having his own washed in tears of wondering belief in this new world order. And then another word of Comfort. This time from the risen Lord Jesus, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my other disciples to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Today we witness to the faith of that earth-shattering encounter.

This written witness to Jesus’ Resurrection wasn’t penned gospel story by gospel story with the aid of a media advisor following Jesus on a campaign trail. It’s the story told by women and men emboldened by an empty tomb and an angelic presence. It’s the story told by Jesus’ disciples of glimpses, moments of recognition. It’s the story of witnesses to the living love of the Risen Lord Jesus and, of being seen by that love and transformed. It was written about encounters with the Living Lord, of eating with him, talking to him, being sent by him. It was and is still the story of invitation to ‘come and see’. The story of Jesus ‘resurrection was told not as some kind of happy ending to a gruesome blockbuster, but from the birth of the Easter victory, an empty tomb, the risen Lord. This story was born from Easter faith and hope.

21 centuries later here we are, Jesus ‘disciples continuing to tell his story, witnessing to the power of his life and death and resurrection. It is the story which moves us still to invite people to come and see’ – it’s the story which moves people to give their lives to serve washing feet, seeking justice, proclaiming love in the name of Christ, after the pattern of Jesus’ life. It’s the power which enables us to live forgiven and forgiving people. It is the hope of reconciling peace, or relationship restored of freedom to love and absence of fear,

It’s the story of communities like this one lived all around the world meeting week by week, people like us for whom coming to church is easy and people for whom going to church is risking death, to break bread together in the feast of God’s new community of resurrection faith.

So, what does it mean for us this Easter when the sound of world leaders threatening war seems to be getting louder? What does it mean for those of us whose world has already been hit by the earth-shattering reality of loved ones sick and suffering, of relationships that are broken, or a new experience of unemployment or the grief of a loved one dead this past year?

Is it possible that the picture of an empty tomb, angelic being and two women might be a clue for us too?

Can you hear the words of that angel speaking to you for the next steps that you can take inside the world wrapped in God’s love? “Do not be afraid” Can you hear those same words spoken by the risen Lord to the women as he met them running to tell their friends the news? “Do not be afraid”? Can you let them settle into your heart and mind and life and unfurl inside the sure faith that in Jesus God has known every fear and that death has been conquered. Can you reach out in the earth-shattering faith of Christ to whisper with the wind blowing across every graveyard the Easter news. Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen!