

Easter Day 2023

It's been a long Lent – a long time of reflection on the death of Jesus, of why he came and why he had to die ...but always with the promise that Easter was coming.

And now it's here - Jesus is alive! - praise the Lord! Alleluia

And this sure and certain fact, must make a difference to our everyday life, today!
As it says in 1 Cor 15:14 'if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

So, this morning we will look in detail at Matthews account of the resurrection.

But before I do, I just want to acknowledge that each Gospel account, brings different perspectives of this glorious day. They're not in conflict but focus in on different aspects.

In Mark's gospel, the women met an angel who said 'do not be afraid – you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth – he's not here – he is risen...(all very matter of fact). The angel then says 'Go tell the disciples and Peter'. The disciples and Peter –
Mark describes a beautiful moment of promise that Peter was forgiven for denying Jesus and was soon to be restored by the risen Jesus.

Easter day- the risen Jesus bringing the promise of restoration.
Is that what you need to hear today?

John's account says – that Mary Magdalene, on finding the empty tomb, ran to tell Peter ... and Peter and the other disciple, who Jesus loved, ran to the tomb... and finding it empty, saw, believed went back to their homes. (of course– that's what Jesus promised}
Mary, on the other hand, hung around desperate to see Jesus, and she was comforted by the angels and then she recognised the risen Jesus as he called her name. Mary.

Easter day – the conclusion of what was promised and the risen Jesus showing his saving-compassion for the weak and most vulnerable in society.

Do you get it? Do you get the resurrection? - or do you need to have a special encounter with Jesus today – calling your name?

In Luke – the women went back to tell the disciples and no-one believed them. Peter was curious and he went to see, whereas two others set off for their lunch date in Emmaus.

A man is raised from the dead and you can't cancel lunch?

Bless them...They struggled to understand – but Jesus understands who we are, and where we are with him, and doesn't give up on us.

Easter Day – The risen Jesus revealed in the breaking of bread.

Do you need to ask Jesus to open your eyes to him today?

Be expectant to meet with him at the breaking of bread as we celebrate Holy Communion today.

You see, Jesus **is** alive, he **has been** resurrected. Our response to this truth, will vary, but we are all called to live, live life with a **resurrection perspective**...

Live life, believing that there really can be bodily resurrection – not just resuscitation – but eternal, transformative, restorative, life-changing resurrection?

Without this understanding we can carry on living in the old world of sin and failure, going about our normal lives, untouched by the power of what happened that first Easter Day.

It's like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly and refusing to use the wings to fly.

Is your life transformed by the resurrection? Where are you, this morning ?

Luke does Easter resurrection as a meal on Sunday evening in Emmaus. John's Easter resurrection is Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene in the garden. Mark – well it's possible that someone had to add the resurrection account to complete Mark's gospel...

But Matthew? Matthew's Easter Resurrection is an earthquake.

When Jesus died, the curtain is torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split in two and the tombs broke open, and dead people walked the streets. As Jesus rose, there was a violent earthquake 'for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. – I love that last bit... It's like the angel came down in the midst of a great tumult, rolled back the stone and sat on it and said ta-dah! It's accomplished. Job done. He won.

We've all seen the power of earthquakes as we watched the devastation in Turkey and Syria. Houses crumble and fall. You can't miss it.

Matthew says Easter is an earthquake that shook, not just a little area around Jerusalem but with a power that sent shockwaves across the whole world.

Matthew, reminding us of the power of the resurrection, doesn't give an option. The resurrection happened.

You see, people so want to try to "explain" away the resurrection because the facts as they understand them say 'once you're dead, you're dead, that's it' But we're not given that option here. Jesus wasn't in a deep, drugged coma and woke up, the Romans were far too good at crucifixion to allow that to happen. The body wasn't stolen...the disciples risked everything, after this event because they knew Jesus was resurrected.

That day – that first Easter Day the whole earth shook....

You see, Easter resurrection is about God. And he's so much bigger than our minds ...that want to rationalise and explain things we don't understand. You see, rather than trying to explain resurrection, resurrection explains us...hold onto that...

Resurrection means so much more than just a dead body coming back to life – that's resuscitation, not resurrection. That's Lazarus, not Jesus.

Resurrection is more than just the "immortality of the soul," - some divine spark that endures after the end, that leaves our bodies after death. No! That's Plato, not Jesus.

Easter is about God;

And not God as an empathetic but ineffective 'good friend', or some 'calming inner experience', but God who creates a way when there was no way,

a God who makes war on evil until evil is undone,
a God who raises dead Jesus.... to show us who's in charge here.

When the angel appeared that first Easter morning – he was heralding something dramatic, something extraordinary, something unexplainable. God breaking in, finding a way to reset the world.

Like one ginormous reset button.

Who here has not been exasperated by technology – tablets, phones, or what about computers entering hibernation or freezing, or entering a mode where there's just a useless spinning cycle of nothingness.

God came on Easter morning and pressed the reset button for the world.
Resetting our endless spinning of nothingness...

God sent his messenger...an angel - to make us stop and reflect.
You see, when angels appear – dramatic things happen
back in Matthew 1 and angel shook Joseph awake one night with the news that his fiancée was pregnant.
(Talk about an earthquake!)

God did on Easter day what God did in a virgin's womb 33 years earlier.
God made a way when there was no way. God took charge.

The same angel who was sent to tell Joseph, "Name the baby, Emmanuel, God with us," was the angel who told the women, "Don't be afraid. He isn't here. He is risen."
Little 'God with us' grew up, got crucified, made the earth shake, and is on the move to take back the world.

Angels have appeared here at All Saints, maybe not an archangel and I am grateful that angels don't always bring literal earthquakes, but the ripple effect of their presence, herald a sure sign that God is on the move, revealing his kingdom.

In the fifties, in China, there was a devastating earthquake. But as a result of the quake, a huge boulder was dislodged from a mountain which exposed a great cache of wonderful artifacts from a thousand years ago. A new world suddenly became visible.

When the stone was rolled away, and the earth shook, we got our first glimpse of a new world, a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven.

- a world where death doesn't have the last word,
- a world where injustice is made right, and innocent suffering is vindicated, by a powerful God.

The women came to the cemetery to write one more chapter in the long sad story of death, one more episode of how the good always get it in the end. And evil wins in the end.

And then, and then — the earth heaved, an angel appeared, the stone was rolled away, Caesar's soldiers shook. The angel plopped himself down on the stone in one final act of impudent defiance of death,

and said to the women, "Don't be afraid. You're looking for Jesus? He isn't here. He is risen"

Then that angel turned to the soldiers and said, "Be afraid. Everything your world is built on is being shaken."

Nobody went away the same as they came.

So there we have it – Matthew reminding us that on this day, that first Easter morning everything changed.

Has your world been disturbed, disrupted, re-orientated because of God's great reset, that first Easter Day?

There are days when I just know. Days when God speaks through his word, speaks through others, through those serendipitous 'coincidences'...
but there are other days when life, just goes through the motion and I don't particularly connect.
There are days when I wonder why this world is still such a mess? Wonder about what the reset really did.
And then, and then – I meet Jesus at Holy Communion
And then I cry out. I believe, help my unbelief...

I am so grateful that there are 4 gospels, 4 accounts of the same event. People taking their time coming to the realisation. Even after they saw the resurrected Jesus, face to face, some still doubted....
And yet we are called to doubt our doubts, not doubt our belief.
We need to keep being reminded to maintain a **resurrection perspective**.

So as I draw to an end let me briefly remind us about three resurrection perspective.

Firstly, there is real power in the resurrection.

In fact, there is no power like this known to humans. If we think of the power needed lighting a city the size of London. Think of the massive power of a hydrogen bomb that can eliminate a city that size.
We have much power as humans to do good, and much to do evil. But with all that power, we do not have the power to raise someone from the dead. It took the power of the Godhead to raise Jesus, and that is but a portion of his power, as he exercises "all authority in heaven and on earth."

So, when we live, when you live, with a resurrection perspective, we must focus our lives so that we can tap into that resurrection power. We will then have the power to accomplish anything to which Jesus calls us—controlling our temper, overcoming addictions, remaining faithful to our commitments, maintaining patience with our children, with our other halves,
Whatever life throws at us, following the risen Jesus, includes the power to do just that.

The complete implications of the resurrection are incalculable.
But it sustains our faith and gives our lives hope and meaning:
Because, "love is stronger than death";
goodness and power are ultimate allies, not enemies;
life wins in the end;
Rather than trying to explain resurrection, resurrection explains us

Secondly, the resurrection transforms lives.

Just consider the before and after of the disciples.
Before they ran away, denied their Master and huddled behind locked doors in fear and confusion.
After, they were transformed from scared rabbits into confident saints, world-changing missionaries, courageous martyrs and joy-filled touring ambassadors for Christ.
Rather than trying to explain resurrection, resurrection explains us

And **finally** the resurrection defines us now – today!

The greatest importance of the resurrection is not in the past—"Christ rose"—but in the present—"Christ **is** risen." The angel at the tomb asked the women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Lk 24:5). The same question could be asked of us today.

We need to take our eyes off the past and release the potential in us, no longer held down by what might have been, but inspired by what can be, with Christ.

God came on Easter morning and pressed the reset button for the world. The world is about life, as it turns out, not death.. And the earth shook - Resetting our endless spinning of nothingness...

Kerry and family know that Christ's power, does this. Their lives have been transformed and they have publicly declared that **this** day, this Glorious Easter Resurrection Sunday - defines them.

You too can know this certainty in your life as you say YES to Jesus.

As you come up to the communion rail this morning – to receive communion or a blessing, I urge you to say YES to Jesus