

EASTER SUNDAY

4/4/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Defeater of death!

Christ is risen!

Creator of community!

Christ is risen!

Way of hope!

Christ is risen!

Promise of wholeness!

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Opening Prayer resurrection Christ: risen, Risen Christ hope: Easter

The stone has been removed from the tomb;

the power of death is at an end.

The grave clothes have been abandoned;

fear and hesitation are over.

The Risen Christ is encountered (in the garden);

the community of faith will be restored.

Christ is once more with his friends;

**hope is alive, new horizons beckon, oppression and
injustice are shattered. Amen.**

HYMN 380 Yours be the glory, risen, conquering Son

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoV5w2Qfag>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of new life;

Hear our joyful cries of hallelujah,

as they echo from the empty tomb and resonate throughout the world.

May they ring out into the cities and towns of all nations,

into deep forests and rugged mountain tops,

through canyons and river flats.

Let all the creatures of the earth,

feathered and furred,

armoured and leathered,

and those that dwell in the depths of the sea,

join our song.

You are alive,

with us and within us,

you abide in all the earth,

abundant and bountiful life is assuredly ours.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Living God, this is a day full of the extraordinary,

yet extraordinary things are hard to grasp.

When the amazement of God's Easter moment
immobilises us and leaves us dumbfounded:

Be with us.

When we are afraid that the tomb empty is an ending not a beginning:

Forgive us.

When the terror of stepping into the unimaginable stops us from moving ahead into this miracle of grace:

Gently urge us on.

When, because of our discomfort, we put the kybosh on mystery:

Appeal to our inner knowledge of you.

When scepticism means our hallelujahs are forced from tight lips and hard hearts:

Stir our souls with joy.

When we fear that a love that can conquer all is impossible:

Reassure us.

When the audacity of faith in resurrection is a bridge too far:

Open our hearts to recall the promise that nothing is impossible to God.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The promise of Easter is that there is no stone locked in place blocking our way into relationship with our eternally loving God,

All obstacles are rolled away, and we are invited into the assurance that God's forgiveness endures beyond anything that would separate us from God.

Open your hearts to the wonder of God's love and grace and let it guide your way.

READING

- **Mark 16:1-8**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.
² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they

went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

HYMN 376 I know that my redeemer lives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tMqpruzpv0>

SERMON

How many of you like to watch soap operas on TV?

Do you like a good ‘who dunnit’ movie?, or a love story?

How about going to a show like Cats?

We all like happy endings to stories no matter what sort of show it is. The problem for me with soap operas is that they never seem to get anywhere. One commentator said that in most soaps you can pick up where you left off 12 months later with little development of the story line in the meantime. I am not a big fan of those mystery series on TV with a nebulous ending. We like answers and certainty. Watching a whole TV series which leaves us hanging until the next series to me seems very unsatisfactory.

It is a very human characteristic to want a happy ending, like there was in the movie Grease! In this respect the church has taken to Easter story with Jesus’ resurrection and made a happy ending. However, if we look carefully at Mark’s Gospel this is not actually the case.

Let’s look again at the overview of the end of Mark’s Gospel.

Jesus has suffered horrendous torture and an indescribable death on the cross. Almost immediately his body is whisked away by a person called Joseph of Arimathea. This is very unusual as it was normally the family’s responsibility to prepare the body for burial in their own way. So, this stranger comes along and manages to get permission to put the body in a new grave site with a stone rolled across the entrance. Mary and the family

and the disciples seem to be completely side-lined. In chapter 15, it says: "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching and saw where the body of Jesus was placed."

What about all those faithful disciples?

They were terrified and had run away.

Did they experience any happy ending?

They had gone into hiding in an upper room locked away from everyone, they were shattered!

Jesus was dead. End of story! Or was it???

Now was the time to prepare the body after death. But there is some difficulty with this idea. How would the women get past the large stone which was sealing the tomb?

The women arrive at the tomb to find that the stone has been moved and there is no sign of the crucified Christ. A young man is sitting there and once he had delivered his message they ran away like frightened animals. They were too afraid to speak to anyone else..

So here they are, depressed, frightened, full of anxiety running away from a scene that they had not fully comprehended. There is no joyous celebration about the resurrection, rather there is fear and confusion. What had happened?

This is where Mark's Gospel ends. No celebrations. They don't understand what is happening. Mark simply says: "So they went out and ran away from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid."

Surely any reasonable story teller can come up with a better ending than people running away in fear. It is a bit like the end of each week's episode of 'Days of our lives,' everything is left up in the air. After all Mark would have known about Jesus resurrection and appearance to his followers when he wrote the Gospel. Why end with everything left hanging?

If there is a reason for this sort of ending, what is it? The women start this passage moving gingerly towards the tomb. By the end they are in full flight. But the women are not the only people in this passage. They had come seeking the body of Jesus but instead encounter a young man with a message for them. In verse 6 he says: "Jesus has been raised. He is not

here. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee.”

Jesus is on the move! He's gone and they are told that He is on His way to Galilee. So, if the women wanted to see him again, they needed to get going too.

This is where the sudden ending becomes a beautiful twist. Jesus is already on His way to meet them in Galilee. And it is in these words that the whole story pivots back to the start of the Gospel. In Mark 1:9 we hear: “Not long afterwards, Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee...”

This is where we are pulled back into the whole story in Mark's Gospel all over again. We have read the whole Gospel through to the unsatisfactory ending and then we are bounced back to the beginning. We have read about His teaching and Jesus healing ministry and His wealth of parables, along with the many spectacular events that He was part of and now in the resurrection we are taken back to the start of the Gospel all over again. It is not an ending but the shortcut to the constant renewal of the Jesus story.

In the light of the cross and resurrection we are then drawn back to re-read the Gospel again in the light of all those events. It is a never ending story taking us on a circular journey. Just when we think we have caught up with Jesus and know everything Jesus moves ahead of us back to the start in Galilee.

Jesus is always on the move and can't be tied down. This is the wonder of following the lectionary as a congregation. We move through the seasons of the church year, Resurrection, Pentecost, Advent, Epiphany, Lent then Easter and we start it all over again with a slightly shifting focus over a three year cycle.

Every year we come back to Galilee and the story starts over yet again. We change with every cycle and the messages we draw are informed by our changing circumstances in life.

So long as we think we have understood the story, we haven't really got it at all: we need to go back to the beginning again and see what fresh insights God wants to give us. Every time we get to the end of Mark, we are told to go back to square one, go back to Galilee, and experience the miracles of grace again and again and again.

And as we do that, as we keep moving on, chasing Jesus, trying to catch up with him, so we will experience that grace in our lives and deepen our knowledge of what resurrection is really about.

You see, the resurrection is not some static story that happened in history 2000 years ago. The resurrection is a dynamic movement - an experience of grace that each one of us is called into again and again and again.

And none of us are left out of this. God wants to reveal His resurrection power to each one of us.

You may be sitting here today thinking “That’s alright for him to say: he’s got a dog-collar on! If he knew about my past, or what was in my mind, or the secret things of my life, he wouldn’t be so sure that God’s grace was for me.”

Well you’d be wrong! And here’s how I know...

Look again at the words of the young man to the women...“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee”.

“Tell his disciples *and Peter*...”

It is so significant that Peter gets singled out by name. No disciple had failed Jesus as much as Peter. No-one had fallen as short as Peter had. No-one felt as bad as he did. And yet Peter is singled out: “Go and tell the disciples and Peter...”

This is a clear sign that *even Peter was forgiven by God*. He had been singled out for God’s grace. And the message is clear: if even Peter can be forgiven, then there is no sin too big for God to deal with.

There is nothing that you and I have ever done in the past that God cannot forgive. There is no shameful secret that cannot be brought before God or that needs to remain hidden from his glorious, grace-filled light. Whatever your past – whatever your present situation - God can forgive anything. Absolutely anything.

If He can forgive Peter: He can forgive even you: He can forgive even me.

So let’s think about this. OK!

I think we are getting closer now to answering the question we started with...Why does Mark end his Gospel like this?

Why does Mark end the Gospel so enigmatically, with the women running away - afraid to tell anyone about what has happened?

Actually, I think the answer is really simple...

It's because Mark's Gospel isn't finished.

The Good News of Jesus Christ can't end in silence. Mark is waiting for *you and me* to finish the story!! He is waiting for *you and me* to go out and tell people the Good News.

The women in the story run away in silence - but *someone* has to proclaim the Gospel, *someone* has to continue the Gospel. It's up to you and me to complete the story...

I said earlier that the resurrection is a story about dynamic movement: the women are moving, Jesus is moving. Now the question is this: how are we moving in this story?

Are we going to run away and hide in silence, knowing that Jesus has been raised from the dead but too frightened to tell anyone about it? Or are we going to complete the story and go out to proclaim the Good News of the resurrected Christ to the people of our community and a wider world in need?

If we won't – who will?

The young man in the story presents each one of us with an incredible challenge as we sit here this morning: "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here."

This is the truth of the resurrection. This is the truth of the Easter Story. The truth is that Jesus has moved on. He has gone ahead of us. Our task is to play catch up: to chase after him. He is going back to Galilee. And we need to follow him there.

We need to go back to the beginning. We need to soak ourselves in the Scriptures. We need to soak ourselves, again and again, in a profound personal experience of Jesus - his healing for you, his miracles for you, his life-changing teaching for you. And we need to proclaim our experience to a broken world.

The resurrection is not the end of the story. We need to finish it.

In the Celtic Christian tradition, the symbol for the Holy Spirit is a wild goose. And it's a beautiful symbol because no matter how carefully you

might creep up behind a wild goose and try to catch it and tame it, it will always fly away from you.

Jesus is like that too. We cannot tame Jesus and turn him into a 'happy ever after' story. We must each spend our lives chasing him and following where he leads.

We are not on a wild goose chase. We are chasing the wild goose. And there is a huge difference between the two...

And so, this morning, we don't shout "Alleluia" because the story has ended. We shout "Alleluia" because the story continues - and you and I are partnering with God as the scriptwriters.

Where will you take the story from here? It's up to you...

HYMN 390 Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Through the goodness of God, new life is on offer today, and so these gifts that we offer are dedicated to bringing new life to all those who are recipients of them.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Christ redeemer,

We know that Easter is not about a singular person,

or a group of people that lived long ago,

we know Easter is for all people and for all of creation,

for your love and salvation extends to all places and throughout time.

As our voices sing of your empty tomb,

may our hearts and lives become vehicles of your living word,

as we speak of and live out your good news.

As we know forgiveness,

may we forgive others,
As we know compassion,
may we act compassionately,
As our lives are restored,
may we be agents of restoration and reconciliation,
As we embrace joy and peace,
may we be bearers of joy and peace to the world.

God of love,

Christ risen,

May you be known through our lives.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 511 Let us break bread together with the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwdFOMeyFwc> (I know that the words are not the same as ours.)

COMMUNION

Christ our Lord invites to his table
all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another.

Be present, risen Lord Jesus,
as you were with your disciples,
and make yourself known to us
in the breaking of the bread;
for you live and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,
our Lord and God,
for you alone are worthy.

In time beyond our dreaming

you brought forth life out of darkness,
and in the love of Christ your Son
you set man and woman at the heart of your creation.

You have revealed your glory
in the One who humbled himself.

You have exalted him to your right hand
where he lives for ever to pray for us.

.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels
and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

To Adam and Eve, children of dust,
you gave the world and its wonders,
but we misused your gift of freedom:
we reached out rebel hands to be like you.

We bless you for your mercy,
for you never cease to call our restless hearts

until they find their rest in you.

Again and again,

you raised up men and women to speak your word,

to guide, to challenge and convert.

At the last, Father,

you sent Jesus Christ,

child of your love, God with us.

Born as one of us,

he lived our life and died our death,

offering us, both now and forever,

eternal life with you.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up to death,

he took bread, gave you thanks,

broke it and said:

This is my body which is given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

When the meal was ended, he lifted the cup,

and again giving you thanks,

gave it to his friends and said:

This cup is the new covenant

sealed by my blood.

Do this, whenever you drink it,

for the remembrance of me.

And so, in remembrance of all you have done for us,

we take this bread and this cup,
and offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice,
made worthy by the perfect offering of Christ
our great high priest.

By your Word and Holy Spirit,
bless these gifts that we may truly share
Christ's body and blood,
and become, by grace, his body given
for the sake of the world.

For through your Spirit,
the whole earth makes its prayer
in sighs too deep for words,
longing for the day of freedom:
for in hope and by faith we were saved.

Accept our thanks and praise, good Father,
through your Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ,
with whom and in whom,
and by the Spirit who dwells in us,
we worship you in joyful song:

Jesus, Lamb of God,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world,

grant us peace.

Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER

Blessed be God who calls us together.
Praise to God who makes us one people.
Blessed be God who has forgiven our sin.
Praise to God who gives hope and freedom.
Blessed be God whose Word is proclaimed.
Praise to God who is revealed as lover.
Blessed be God who alone has called us.
Therefore we offer all that we are
and all we shall become.

Accept, O God, our sacrifice of praise.

Amen. Accept our thanks for all that we are.

Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

HYMN 537 Let us tongues and talents employ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aGWmCan-40>

BENEDICTION

The stone is rolled away,
the grave clothes are strewn in an empty tomb.

Christ is risen!

God invites us into God's eternal realm,

Go into the world with the assurance that love abounds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw1sjc3JVrw>