

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera Qld

Easter Sunday – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

**MARK 16:1-8**

**HE IS RISEN!**

Christian author, Max Lucado, tells a story about a doctor in America who misdiagnosed a patient. He declared the woman to be dead. The family was informed, and the husband was grief-stricken. Imagine the surprise of the nurse when she discovered that the woman was not dead, but alive! “You better tell the family,” she urged the doctor. The embarrassed physician phoned the husband and said, “I need to talk to you about the condition of your wife.” “The condition of my wife?” he asked. “She’s dead.” “Well,” the doctor mumbled with embarrassment, “she’s seen a slight improvement.” Most, if not all of us, have had news of death which has changed our lives in some way from that point forward. But I would guess that very few would have had news like in this story, of a totally unexpected coming back to life. Sometimes in our grief we hope that they have got it wrong, especially if it was a sudden or unexpected death. But sadly, in the great majority of cases this doesn’t turn out to be the case.

Today, though, with Christians around the world, we do celebrate the announcement of an ‘unexpected’ resurrection. It is the news that for nearly two thousand years has seen Christians joyfully greet one another with ‘Christ has risen, He has risen indeed!’ It is news which has changed not just our lives, but our whole world. This is a day when Christians celebrate, rejoice, and proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us, has now risen, and that because He lives, we too shall live.

Easter Sunday, this service, we associate very much with rejoicing, in total contrast to the seriousness and solemnity of Good Friday. It seems strange then that the reaction of the first witnesses to the resurrection was the complete opposite to ours. Mark tells us here the story of the three women

who went to Jesus' tomb early on the Sunday morning after His death. They were going to anoint Jesus' body, but when they got there, they found not the body of Jesus, but a messenger who told them that Jesus was not dead, but instead very much alive. What was their reaction to this news? Not rejoicing, but instead fear and silence. These women were witnesses to the one event which has had more of an impact on human history than any other, yet they were afraid to talk about it. Even the shepherds who were given the news of Jesus' birth overcame their initial fear to tell everyone about it. But from these three women who were the very first to hear the news, 'He is risen', there is only fear and silence.

What is going on here? Why is their reaction so different to what we might expect? We might think that we would give anything to be in their position, to be the first ones to be able see and tell about Jesus' empty tomb. Maybe the reason behind the women's silence was that because of their fear, confusion, and sadness over the events of the last three days, they failed to take in and understand what had happened; their view had been fogged over. There is a story that at the close of the Battle of Waterloo, upon which hung the destinies of Europe, people in Britain were anxiously waiting for news of the result. Back then the only way of receiving quick communication was from signal lights flashing across the English Channel. As the report of the battle was being transmitted, a fog moving over became so dense that only part of the message was received. So, the message read: 'Wellington defeated.' The British people were devastated, it seemed that everything was lost. Some time later the fog lifted, and the blinking lights repeated the message. Now the full message said, 'Wellington defeated the enemy'. The full message changed the British people's mood and their destiny. The three women at the tomb couldn't see properly; their fear and lack of understanding meant that they saw only their crucified Saviour, not also their risen Lord.

Can things also come in and fog over our view of the news of this Easter morning, so that we see not 'Christ defeated death and the devil', but just, 'Christ defeated'. Certainly, in the news with stories of war, abuse and violence, corruption, and the many horrible ways human beings can treat one

another, we sometimes may well ask, 'what did Jesus' victory really mean?' In our own lives we have our fears, our cause for sadness, sometimes grief, our worry about the future for ourselves and our loved ones, worry and uncertainty which can bring in a fog for us. We may also see things which seem to be eroding the standing of our Christian faith in our society, things which make us feel rightly or wrongly that we are in the minority because of our faith. The fog may then also come in over what we see.

The fear and uncertainty of those three women was there even before they arrived at the tomb. On the way there they said, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance for us?' In their haste to go and properly prepare Jesus' body for burial they had forgotten what we might see as being a major detail. But still, they pressed on. And when they got there? The stone had been removed, and an angel was waiting to give them the good news. Mary, Salome, and Mary had been worried about an obstacle between themselves and Jesus, but it had already been removed for them.

Jesus' resurrection also ensures that any obstacles between us and Jesus have also been removed. Our obstacles might be our guilt, our doubts about our faith, our worries or uncertainties, our sadness or grief over things which have happened. But, just like He moved the stone away to show that Jesus had risen, God has also now removed any obstacles which can come between us and Him when He raised Jesus from the dead. God has made sure that there is nothing which can keep us from coming to Him. Here is the really great news of the Easter event, here is why that empty tomb is so important; God has done everything needed to restore our perfect relationship with Him. All of our sins, our guilt, our fears, our weaknesses, our doubts, these are all forgiven because they have been given to Jesus in His death, and we have been raised to new life with Him.

And God continues to make us certain of this, to push away the fog and uncertainty which hides our view of Jesus and this good news, by making us His own in our baptism; an unbreakable bond of love from His side. By coming to us and giving us forgiveness of sins and new life in Holy Communion; joining us to His death and His resurrection as we share His body and blood. And by giving us His

Word which reminds us of His great love for us and of His promises, just as it does by once again reminding us of the good news of the resurrection. For us, the stone is rolled away, and with it the fog too, as the messenger says to us, ‘God has raised Him to life, and He isn’t here.’ Your sins are forgiven, your guilt is removed, your fears have been soothed, because Jesus Christ who died for you now also lives. And He has opened the way once and for all for us see Him clearly and come home to the Father.

Because He lives, you too shall live. Here is the great message of Easter. We can now see it clearly, so let’s sing it, let’s tell of it, and let’s rejoice and take comfort in it. May this great news proclaimed from the empty tomb not fill you with fear, but give you joy and comfort. The reaction of those first witnesses was initially fear and uncertainty, but as the message sank in they became bold witnesses as they went out living in this good news. May the light of this great news now shine in our lives also, as we too rejoice and share in His life. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Try to imagine yourself at the tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning. After all you had seen, all you had been through, all you knew at that time, how would you have felt when you found Jesus’ body had gone? And then reflect on how different our reaction to this news is as those who look back on it knowing the great news of His resurrection.
- What does Jesus rising again mean for the world? How has this event changed history, and how does it continue to change things today? Is it an influential event even for those who don’t believe it actually happened?
- What does Jesus rising again mean for you? How has it changed your life? Think about what Jesus rising for you means in how you face and deal with what you go through each day.
- Do you know of any people who need to know the great news of forgiveness and new life which is waiting for them in Jesus? Perhaps they have moved away from this faith, or maybe they have never had a chance to know it. Is God calling you in some way to be a witness of your faith to them?

Pray: thank God for raising Jesus to new life, so that we can now have new life in Him. Ask God to keep this news at the centre of our lives each day, and to be witnesses to others in the ways He calls us to do.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
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