

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

12th April 2020 – Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

A NEW HOPE

At the end of the Battle of Waterloo between England and France, on the 18th June 1815, England had a series of semaphores, signal flag posts, set up from France, on ships across the English Channel, and then around England so that the result of the battle could be quickly spread when it was decided. As people in England waited for the result of the battle which would decide the fate of their country, the signal began to be relayed by a ship in the channel; ‘Wellington Defeated’. And then a thick fog descended over the channel and the signal stopped. For 2-3 hours this message of defeat was relayed around England and people were in gloomy despair; they would now be citizens of Napoleon and the French. But then, when the fog finally lifted, the signal was repeated; ‘Wellington defeated Napoleon’. The despair quickly returned to rejoicing!

Have you ever had that experience; either receiving bad news which turned out to be false, or being in a situation which you thought was going to change everything for you, but an unexpected good outcome resulted? That feeling of being taken right down to what you felt were the depths of hopelessness and despair, but then unexpectedly being lifted back up again by a new and unexpected hope.

Every year when I read the accounts of what happen on that first Easter Sunday, that’s how I believe the disciples and Jesus’ other friends would have felt; Good Friday all was lost, Easter Sunday an unexpected new hope is with them. And this year, I kinda feel I can relate to them a bit more than usual; they spent the time between Jesus’ death on the cross on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday locked away, in isolation, because of fear for their own personal safety. Mmm, very relatable at the moment, isn’t it?

But then, the events of Easter Sunday morning change everything for them, don’t they?

Over the years there has been a lot of debate and argument about the truth of Jesus' death and rising again. Still today theories about the 'hoax' of Easter include claims such as Jesus didn't really die, but was merely drugged by the wine given to Him on the cross; His body was stolen by His followers who then invented stories about His resurrection appearances; and the list goes on. Like all debates about events which are recorded in the Bible, in the end they can neither be proven nor disproven, and the same can be said about many accounts we read from past history, even the story I told at the beginning of this message. When it comes to the miraculous accounts from the Bible, even the greatest of all which stands at the centre of our Christian faith, Jesus' resurrection, it all comes down to faith.

But putting aside the physical evidence for whether or not the resurrection actually happened, we can see its truth in the effect it had on Jesus' followers in their lives. The news that Jesus is alive, and then actually seeing Him in person, begins a transformation in Jesus' followers which finishes with the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost, and sees them going from their own 'lockdown' of hiding away afraid, to boldly going out and spreading the message of God's love for everyone in Jesus. The new hope which they discover in this news which changes their lives cannot but be shared with others also. They had experienced a victory coming out of what seemed to be a final defeat, and it changed their lives. Their transformation from the new hope they now have is for us both a proof that these events must have really happened, no way would they have been changed so much by a rumour or a hoax, and the new hope they have and they then shared now is the basis for our faith and our lives also: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

And like them, through the account we have here from Matthew, the accounts of the witnesses who saw what happened, we are also now witnesses. Like them this is now news of a new hope which can change our lives. It gives us hope in the life we are now living; the assurance that God loves us so much; that God keeps His promises; that if God is powerful enough to overcome death and the devil He is stronger than anything; and the hope that just as Jesus forgave the disciples who abandoned Him at His death, forgiving them and calling them in effect 'brothers' as He called them

to follow Him, in the same way we are forgiven for whenever we turn away or abandon Him in any way. A new hope. A life changing hope. A world changing hope.

For this Easter, in the current pandemic situation we are in, this Easter news also gives us hope; hope for both where we are now, and hope for how we will come out of this. The hope that there is nothing that God has faced before that He and His Church cannot overcome. The Romans and the Jewish leaders thought they could crucify Jesus and that would be the end of Him and His annoying message. Well, here we are, 2,000 years later, even in this situation still holding that hope and worshipping Him together. The hope that with God's help and strength we will get through this, whatever that looks like, and that ultimately, we can just know that we will still have Him and His love whatever we go through. Now, as much as any time, we need the hope that this message of Easter brings to us. We need to know that God is surely with us in whatever we face, and that He who overcame death and the grave is with us helping us move through what we now face also.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! What great news. News which changed the lives of Jesus' followers from despair and defeat, to joy and gladly wanting to go and share this news. News which today is just as strong for us also. Know this news, live this news, share this news. News of a new hope which transforms us and our lives every day. A new hope which both comforts and gives us strength, and helps us to move forward and keep going, no matter what we go through. Amen.

Lets' pray: Lord God, as today we remember the events of Easter Sunday, and worship you for being alive for us today, remind us always of your love, your strength, your forgiveness, and your care, which we now have through our new hope in you. Amen.

FURTHER THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

You are now invited to go through the following thoughts, and to reflect on them alone or discuss them with those you are with.

1. Gathered Together and Sent Out

All of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection have Jesus gathering His disciples together to show them He really is alive, encourage and teach them, and then send them out to spread this news. For the followers of Jesus, the Easter story is about hearing and believing this good news, and then going out to share it.

- As followers of Jesus, we are now also called to hear and then share this new hope. Think about what this means, how we can do it? How is Jesus calling us to show that this new hope is the central basis of our lives?
- In our current situation of lockdown/social isolation, how can we still live out Jesus' call to take this news out? How can we still be disciples of Jesus who both know and share the love He gives to us?

2. See the Empty Tomb

The stone was rolled away from the tomb by the earthquake not so Jesus could get out, He proved that physical space could not contain Him, but so that others could get in to witness that He was no longer there.

- Are there any 'stones' which sometimes prevent you from witnessing the risen Jesus? Not that you don't believe or lose your faith, but that distractions, anxieties, fears or concerns block you trusting in God and remembering He is with you in everything?
- Consider how you can read the Bible, pray, talk with other Christians, actively live out your faith to help you witness the empty tomb. Think of ways right now you can do things to help you focus more on the new hope of Easter.

3. Jesus' Resurrection is the Centre and Key to the Christian Faith

If anyone could ultimately disprove the fact of the resurrection, our faith and our lives would be very different. They can't, of course, and that is why 2,000 years after it happened, all around the world, Christians are still celebrating it today.

- Where would our Christian faith be without the resurrection, that is, if Jesus was just a holy man or a prophet who lived and then died and then that was it? What would be missing from our faith?
- How then is our faith in the fact of the resurrection so life changing for us? How does it help us, every day, to live out and share what we believe?

4. God Gives Us New Hope Everyday

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This Easter Sunday, albeit in a very different way, Christians around the world are greeting one another with this message. Its truth and its joy still ring so true for us.

Perhaps you might like to use this day to of celebration to list off the blessings God has given you, particularly in our current situation. There will be the obvious ones you will think of, but try and think of the less obvious one also.

Then, make these things into a prayer of thanks and praise. Thank God for all He has done and does do for us, and praise Him that this is all a part of the new hope He brings into our lives.