

## DANCE, EAT and be MERRY ...

Matthew 28:1-10 [MW17-10]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 16 April 2017

As you were coming to church this morning

- did you think you were coming to a party?  
we have parties for lots of reasons – going away parties, birthday parties  
anniversary parties, graduation parties ...
- so why a party today, on a Sunday, in the morning, in church???

Today is a party, a special celebration, because a very special friend has returned

- Jesus has come back  
come back from the dead  
that seems to me an excellent reason for having a party!
- today also marks the end of a kind of journey we've been on together  
from Ash Wednesday, through Lent, Palm Sunday  
and Good Friday and beyond ... to today
- we have reached the 'end' and it is appropriate to celebrate with a party

The message of Easter is simple

- so simple it is easily overlooked or forgotten or taken for granted  
so I have brought three things to share with you  
three simple things which tell me what Easter is all about

Now, when you go on a journey, especially a long journey

- you usually take things with you, don't you?  
so I've carried some things with me in my bag, especially for today ...
- three things that are good to have on a journey  
three things that are necessary for a party

The first thing I have is music

- not just music but a song  
and not just a song but a dance!
- this song, this dance helps me keep moving when the going gets tough  
and anyway, what would a party be without music and singing and dancing!
- this music, this song, this dance  
celebrates that Jesus Christ is risen!
- celebrates that because of today there is joy  
real, lasting joy in our world

Remember the disciples who fled when Jesus was arrested?

- remember Peter who denied even knowing Jesus?  
remember Jesus' friends huddled bewildered and frightened  
in an upstairs room?
- remember the women weeping at the foot of the cross?  
and the two Marys afraid and confused  
when they went to the tomb on Sunday morning?
- people with nothing to sing about and no music to dance to ...

But Jesus is risen!

- in the midst of darkness and despair there is hope  
when we think all our happiness is gone, one song remains
- sometimes we hear it but faintly  
sometimes it overpowers and surrounds us, but always it is there

God sustains our hope and says we can DANCE

- because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ  
we are to live through our own Good Fridays knowing that Easter Day will dawn  
sing the song, dance the dance and others will follow
- Jesus is Risen! Hallelujah! ... that's why I carry this music in my bag

We sing and dance because Jesus' resurrection means we have new life

- there are lots of things that remind us of new life  
and in my bag I carry this [popcorn]
- can anyone tell me what it is?  
yes it is a seed, a very unusual type of seed
- it looks dead, hard, useless [bite seed] not much good to eat  
plant it and it grows
- yes, seeds growing, blooming are a sign of new life  
but this is a special seed

On a journey you need food – and this, believe it or not, is food

- at a party you have “nibbles”  
and this, believe it or not, is party food too ...

This is ... POPCORN!

- it goes through a very trying ordeal – intense heat – and pops out  
it takes on new life and we can eat it  
from this [seed] to this [popcorn]
- food for the journey, food for the celebration

Jesus burst from the tomb in a way as surprising and exciting

- as this hard seed bursting into something good to eat  
it reminds us of the power and love of God  
who brings new life where life seems impossible
- the resurrection of Jesus is new life and new beginnings  
we are free, no longer bound by the past  
no longer bound by our mistakes, no longer bound by our sins

We are able to burst out of our old shell

- we have new life in a relationship with Jesus which begins now  
sustains us in the ups and downs of life  
and continues beyond existence in this world

As Peter preached in our reading from Acts:

*God raised him to life on the third day ... and he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all - the living and the dead ... everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.*

New life – food for the journey

- I have some popcorn in my bag which we can share later!

Sometimes when you go on a journey you take something special with you

- perhaps it doesn't have an immediately obvious practical purpose but it is very important
  - a memento, a keepsake, a personal treasure
- and sometimes when you go to a party you take a gift

I have been saving the best for last

- in my bag I have a very precious gift
  - it's in a special box worthy of such a treasure
  - [bring out, unwrap, show to a few people]
- it is very expensive, the work of a person's whole life
  - [show to everyone]
- where is it? Lost it? Empty?

Let me remind you of our gospel reading ...

- the tomb was empty
  - the two Marys were told:
    - He isn't here! God has raised him to life, just as Jesus said he would.*
    - Come, see the place where his body was lying.*
    - Now hurry! Tell his disciples that he has been raised to life ...*
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were frightened yet happy as they ran to tell the others that Jesus lives!

Empty?

- oh no! This box is full!
  - full of love, full of acceptance
  - full of promise, full of hope
- because in this box I have the empty tomb
  - the sign of Jesus' resurrection
  - the precious gift of Jesus' offering of himself and its fulfilment
- you see in this box
  - is the invitation to life

## **An Invitation to the Easter Party - by Anne Weems**

*I think on Easter morning we should throw confetti in church!*

*No?*

*What about a little fanfare?*

*A deafening drum roll?*

*A three minute standing ovation?*

*What? Have we had the drums beaten out of us  
that we in the celebrative community*

*can't really get excited about God's aliveness?*

*About God's love given to us unconditionally?*

*Have we given Easter to the flowers*

*the bunny rabbits and commercial interest?*

*Let's face it - sometimes we live as if we don't*

*believe in Easter.*

*We're believers who resist the resurrection*

*We're Christmas Christians who are very good at celebrating Christ's birth*

*We can cling to the Babe.*

*We're even crucifixion Christians*

*Agonising, sympathising*

*Relating to the hero of the cross*

*We can rock a baby*

*We can weep for a dead man*

*But what do you do with a thirty-three year old  
who won't let the story end?*

*Easter scares us because we're the people*

*who can't believe God gives us abundant life.*

*Sometimes we want to pay our own way*

*But Easter says it's already been paid.*

*Easter says no matter how prodigal*

*we can go home again!*

*So come to the Easter Party!*

*Let's celebrate that amazing grace*

*that in Christ's resurrection*

*we are still loved, even at our most outrageous.*

*The Lord has given us the music*

*All we need to do is dance it.*

*Come to the Easter Party!*

*(Anne Weems in Reaching for Rainbows)*

The message of Easter is simple

- Jesus is not here [show empty box]

because he is risen

- Jesus is here with you and me

Dance, Eat and be Merry!

- for today you live!