

Easter Day: CHRIST IS RISEN!

Acts 10:34-43, John 20:1-9 [MW20-14]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton, Sunday 12 April 2020

So, here we are on Easter morning, in different places, yet together in faith and hope

- and let me assure you that you can 'do theology'
you can think about the meaning of Easter
... anywhere!

A couple of years ago I was in the supermarket shortly before Easter, with a friend who'd come to visit. We were remarking on the significance of the magnificent displays of "Easter goodies". My friend pointed out a particularly delectable variety of Easter egg describing the yummy taste of the creamy caramel filling ... I looked at the size of the egg and its price. "A dollar each," I said. "It's not worth it!" "Hmhmh," my friend mused, "last year they were only seventy cents." "Ah," I said. "It is reassuring to know that even in the commercial world they know the truth of Easter." My friend just looked at me blankly. I think the checkout person thought we were mad. "It is risen," I said to my friend. "Ah," said my friend. "It is risen indeed."

Easter eggs and price rises contain an important truth for those who think about it

- but you know it's even easier to do theology in the kitchen
who's eaten any hot cross buns?
who's ever made some, or watched someone make some?
- you mix the dough and put it in the hot water cupboard or warming drawer
or some warm place ... and something happens to the dough
- then you shape the buns and put them in the oven
when they're cooked you take out a bun and what do you see?
- it is risen!

But wait – there's more

- God's resurrection of Jesus means all he was
all he did, all his hard sayings, all his teachings
- were right and true

Jesus said:

- I am the resurrection and the life
Your sins are forgiven
I am the Good Shepherd
Love God. Love your neighbour. Love yourself
Take up your cross and follow me
I am the way, the truth and the life

By the resurrection of Jesus, God affirmed that Jesus was his own dear Son

- with whom he was pleased
Jesus' resurrection confirms God's great love and faithfulness
that having reached out to us through Jesus and the cross
God was not going to leave us alone
- Jesus' resurrection is also God saying
the way my Son showed you and walked with his own feet
is the way I want you to follow

Resurrection ...

You know some people wonder what all the fuss of Easter Day is about

- Christmas, the birth of Jesus is fine
everybody knows you have to make a fuss of a baby
- even Good Friday, the death of Jesus is understandable
it is proper to remember someone who died, with respect
- though sometimes the ideas of the cross, sacrifice, forgiveness and love
are hard to tie in

But resurrection is something quite removed from most people's everyday experience

- people look to us to see what it's all about

Put yourself in the place of the disciples on finding out the news

- as they hear what the women tell them
and they begin to grasp that what they thought had ended
had only just begun
- you can almost feel the excitement of Peter's words as he tells the Good News
in our reading from Acts, chapter 10

We are the witnesses of everything that Jesus did ... they put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But God raised him from death ... and commanded us to preach the gospel to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God has appointed judge of the living and the dead ... everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through the power of his name.

Peter who three times denied Jesus

- who was ashamed, in despair, is ready to set the world on fire
that's resurrection!

It's about freedom - not being bound by the past, not being bound by our mistakes

- it's about nothing being able to separate us from God's love
God's love which is freely and wonderfully given to all of us through his son, Jesus

It's about new life - it's about hope - it's about faith

- it's about a relationship with Jesus which breaks through despair and darkness
which helps us celebrate in the ups and downs of life
- a relationship which continues beyond existence in this world

Resurrection is coming through the Good Friday experience

- resurrection is people looking at us, the gathered body of Christ
and saying: "he has been raised - he is here!"
- our faith is a resurrection faith
not nice, neat, tidy, comfortable
a faith in which Good Friday is essential
- but also a faith which says that is not the end of the story

We must believe our story

- living through Good Friday knowing that Easter Day will dawn
we've got to tell our story too - as Peter and the other disciples did
- so that people will begin to understand
what all the fuss of Easter Day is all about

I said earlier it's possible to do theology anywhere

- and what's more anyone can "do" theology
- even eight year olds ... or may be especially eight year olds
- let me tell you this story I came across

Philip

Philip was born with Down's syndrome. He was a pleasant child - happy, it seemed - but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday school and was in a class with nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.

You know eight-year-olds ... Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted as a member of his Sunday school class. But the teacher was a creative and helped to facilitate a good group of eight-year-old children. They learned, and they laughed, and they played together. And they really cared about one another, even though, as you know, eight-year-olds don't often say out loud that they care about one another. But Philip was not really a part of that group of children. Philip, of course, did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.

On the Sunday after Easter the teacher had a great idea. You know those things that pantyhose used to come in - the containers that look like great big egg - the teacher collected thirty of these to use on that Sunday. The children loved it when he brought them into the room. Each child was to get a great big egg. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assigned task was for each child to go outside on the church grounds and to find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises together one by one.

Well, they did this, and it was glorious. And it was confusing. And it was wild. They ran all around, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom. They put all the big eggs on a table, and then the teacher opened them.

He opened one. There was a flower, and they oohed and aahed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. "Beautiful," the girls all said, since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say "beautiful." He opened another, and there was a rock. And some laughed, and some said, "That's crazy! How's a rock supposed to be like new life?" But the smart little boy whose egg they were speaking of spoke up. He said, "That's mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers, and buds, and leaves, and butterflies, and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life." They all laughed. The teacher said something to himself about the profundity of eight-year-olds and went on opening egg surprises.

He opened the next one, and there was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, "That's not fair! That's stupid! Somebody didn't do right."

The teacher felt a tug on his shirt and looked down. Philip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Philip said. "It's mine."

And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Philip said. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty!"

There was silence, a full silence. And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day. From that time on, it was different. Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Philip died the next summer. His family had known since the time that he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny little body. And so, with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died. The mystery simply enveloped him.

He was buried from that church. And on that day, at the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched right up to the altar, not with flowers to cover over the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg - an empty, old discarded pantyhose egg.

[“Philip” by Henry Pritchett, Jr. in *Programs for Lent and Easter, volume 2*]

The message of Easter is simple

- like Jesus said they would, the children understood
the tomb is empty ...
Jesus is risen
- all that he said is true
Hallelujah!

I invite you to listen, to reflect, to join in singing

- as we have Graham Kendrick leading “Led Like a Lamb/You're Alive”
during this time I will place these symbols on our altar
*turn on the song [place eggs, flower etc.]

This is indeed a very different Easter

- however the Good News of Easter remains the same
as it has been for nearly 2000 years
- God is still God
we are God's people
Jesus is our risen Saviour

So what does all this mean on April 12, 2020 and beyond ...

Here is what I think:

Our post lock down country and post Covid-19 world

- will be very different
we will not go back to the way things were before
there will be a new normal to get used to
- there will be a new beginning
there will be new life
- that is what we celebrate today

The Good News of death defeated, darkness overcome and new life shining

- is going to be very much needed
that is where we come in
- this is our calling:
to be bearers of hope
to live shining with the light and love of Christ
- we are to go out and live like Easter people!
*as a sign and affirmation of all this, we will light out Easter candles