

Sunday 1st April 2018 Cathedral, Grahamstown 9.30 a.m.		Easter Day – Year B Renewal of Baptismal Vows	
Isaiah 25:6-9	Ps 118:1-2, 14-24	Acts 10:34-43	
		Mark 16:1-8	
The Resurrection of Christ			

“But they went out and ran away from the tomb, trembling with amazement. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (Mk 16:8)

“Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

Easter Day

If you go into Pick n Pay or Checkers this morning, you will find it full of chocolate Easter eggs, chocolate bunnies, hot cross buns – and some will dismiss the Christian celebration of Easter as simply a pagan fertility festival. The word Easter probably comes from *Eastre*, the German goddess of spring, or fertility. And eggs and rabbits – breeding like rabbits – all represent the new life of spring. AJ Bethke points out that “Christians simply absorbed these symbols into the faith, giving them new and deeper meaning related to Christ’s resurrection.”¹

Something BIG happened on that first Easter Day – an empty tomb, guards terrified, angels, and encounters with the Risen Christ.

We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his victory over sin and evil and death. A new day has dawned. Our world is turned upside down.

All the powers of darkness, all the forces of evil, all the weight of sin, death itself, could not keep him in the grave. Through our baptism, we

¹ AJ Bethke, *Celebrating the Seasons*, 57

share in his risen life and in the power of his victory. We leave behind the old ways of sin; we embrace the way of Christ. We move from darkness to light. Our Easter liturgy summarises it: “By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising again he has restored to us eternal life.”²

The empty tomb

All four Gospels tell the story of the resurrection – with different details. Mark’s Gospel is the earliest of the gospel; it has the least detail; it is also unique in that it doesn’t have a resurrection encounter – we do not meet the risen Christ. But we do find the empty tomb.

The reading takes us with the two Marys, and Salome, early in the morning, to the tomb. They are intending to anoint the body of Jesus with spices and oils. They had watched him die on the cross; they had been present at his burial. Now they are intending to do the final washing of his body.

They are concerned with the obvious – there is a heavy stone rolled across the mouth of the tomb – and how are they going to move it? But when they arrive, to their astonishment and dismay, the stone is rolled away. Matthew’s Gospel speaks of an earthquake and an angel. The women in Mark’s Gospel find simply that “the stone, huge as it was, had been rolled back already.” (Mk 16:4)

They enter. Inside, they find not the wrapped up body of Jesus, but a young man seated on the ledge where the body had been laid. Who was it? An angel, as in Matthew and Luke’s gospels? The young man with the linen cloth who had followed Jesus and was present at his arrest (Mk 14:51)?

He says 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,

² *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, 136, # 12

there is the place where they laid him. But go and say to his disciples and to Peter: ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’ ” (Mk 16:6-7)

Significant words. The disciples had fled the scene when Jesus was arrested; they had failed miserably in their faithfulness to him; and when we last encountered Peter, he had denied - three times! - even knowing Jesus. So these were healing words – especially for Peter.

But the women “went out and ran away from the tomb, trembling with amazement. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (Mk 16:8)

Mark’s Gospel, according to some of the most ancient witnesses, ends with those words at v 8 – “for they were afraid.” It is a strange way to end. Was Mark the writer taken ill? Arrested? Was a piece of the manuscript lost? Or is this a deliberate ending, leaving us to fill in the gaps?

Perhaps those women – and the absent disciples, they who had run away - represent you and me in our failure, in our fear, in our trembling, in our uncertainty. And the words of the angel or the young man are gentle words of forgiveness and assurance: he has been raised. He is not here.

You and I have been raised into new life. We are not locked into our failures, our sin, our denials of Jesus. Those are the places of death. But we have been forgiven. We are allowed to walk away! – walk away from the empty tomb, the place of death and sadness and failure. Even Peter has another chance, a new sign of God’s love. The fear of the women, our fear, is not the end of the story. The risen Christ goes ahead of us, into Galilee – into our lives, into tomorrow and the next day, into next week, into our everyday – and there we shall see him.

Resurrection today – new life

To tell the Easter story is to tell the story of our faith - the story of Good Friday and the cross of Christ – the story of great suffering, the sin of the world that rested on the shoulders of Jesus on the cross; his death for our salvation. He died so that we might have new life. He took upon himself the brokenness of the world. Our world *is* deeply broken, distorted, damaged beyond repair – and in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. He reached out on the cross to bring us salvation. To save us. Our deeply broken world is the world into which God enters; he has not given up on you and me, on us; he comes to suffer and to die, to share in our sufferings, to transform and to heal. Death does not have the last word. We come with the women to the tomb, and we find it empty. Life beyond the grave; hope beyond our failures; forgiveness. On Good Friday we faced death in all its horrible reality. Today, at Easter, we are given new life.

These are not easy words. Nor is it a quick fix. We look around at the potholes of our town, symptoms of a much greater problem, with no easy solution. The huge inequalities in our country; struggling schools and hospitals; vulnerable children at the mercy of drunken parents; recent allegations of sexual abuse within the church; accusations of racism, savage attacks on social media; and even Australia's cricketers tampering with the ball – all these are signs of sin, brokenness, suffering. A long drawn out Good Friday. All will take hard work, love, commitment, faith, to put things right. Can we be signs and instruments of God's grace?

The risen Christ invites us to trust, to follow him, to walk away from the empty tomb of our lives, and to receive new life, new hope, life in Christ.

CONCLUSION

So let us be people of the resurrection, with hearts and lives transformed and healed. Made whole. Forgiven. Born again. With the cross of Christ and the empty tomb, the Risen Lord, at the centre of our lives, let us be... people who love; who reconcile, who forgive; who care. Trust. Believe. Have faith. Reach out in love across barriers. Don't stay in the empty tomb. Go to Galilee. There you and I will find him.

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