

Sermon 20 April 2014 Easter Day
Acts 10:34-43 John 20:1-18 "Celebrate Easter"

Prayer: God of light, you come to us while it is deepest night; God of life, you overcome the power of death. Alleluia! We come from the shadows to stand in your presence, unafraid. Alleluia! Fill our hearts with joy that we may celebrate this day of resurrection. Alleluia! Amen!

Let the celebrations begin! Today is 'Easter Sunday' – the day we celebrate above all others because today the truth of God's love for us **was made real** in the resurrection of Jesus. In a moment, I have a video clip for us to watch called 'Celebrate Easter'. It was this video that pointed out for me that of all the things / events / activities We know about Jesus and from his life the only one he commanded us to remember is his death.

On Maundy Thursday evening for those who gathered we reminded ourselves of that last Passover meal Jesus had with his friends and disciples around him. And as he shared the bread and later the wine he told them – "do this to remember me". And so every time we share Communion - / the Lord's Supper / the Eucharist / Whatever name we know it by - we remember **him and this** weekend from his life's story.

His story as highlighted in the video is that Jesus' birth was the incarnation: that is God with us in human flesh; His life was revelation: showing us how to live God's way; His death was our Salvation: bringing healing to our lives of relationship God-us, us-world, us-self; and His resurrection is our restoration: to being full members in God's family, of God's kingdom. This is why **we celebrate**.

Show video

Jesus birth was the incarnation; His life was revelation; His death was our Salvation; His resurrection is our restoration and so we celebrate. Celebrate because it is a gift, it is one we can refuse – *and we all know* people who have or are refusing to accept for a wide variety of reasons:: refused or ignored **it is still** a gift waiting! It is a gift we will never be able to **repay or earn**, but we can accept, in the Spirit it is offered – with fully open hearts, minds, souls, and with all our strength. Cv

Another way of talking about the gift of restoration is to equate it with being given the front door key for God's home. We have been restored in the relationship that we are now trusted members of the family and entitled not only to come home, but to come in the front door. This is why we celebrate and claim the Good News of Jesus as our Good News story too. We can come home to where we belong.

This is the Good News of Jesus his disciples and friends and family and... discovered because of Easter; from the Friday of his death to the Sunday of his resurrection God loves us so much he came in person to tell us, die for us and what we humans rejected, God vindicated, because Jesus did all the work. The one **we lifted to a cross** on Friday of Passover over 2000 years ago, God lifted to **his presence**. (Loader)

Because Jesus did all that was asked by God, God could do all that was needed to open the doors of the kingdom, open his heart to all of us. Each one of us, no matter what gender, race, culture, language, ... We can come home, all of us because God has no favourites, we're all; each **one of us God's favourite**. **God knows us by name**, and each one of us here knows the *hunger of heart* to hear just as Mary did that day so long ago, our name being called. We are known by name, by the Lord of all, **that's** good news! cv

Jesus' birth began the most significant change the world had known since creation. Some would see Mary thinking she saw a 'gardener' as no accident. The Gospel writer John would certainly have been thinking about how much in Jesus, God was beginning the 'new' creation, with the original garden relationship renewed, restored on earth: in real terms, real time. This is why we celebrate and even call Friday, good!

The Lord of all, since the beginning of creation and time came to us, died for us **and restored** our status as children of God. In Peter's speech, Jesus is Lord of all because of what he did: what he did was to go about doing good, **because** God was with him! And so in Peter's summary of Jesus 'good' is that Jesus set people free, he liberated them.

For doing good, Jesus was executed on a cross, **but** *Peter* says, God raised him and let him be seen alive. The effect was to reverse what actually happened: They rejected Jesus; God accepted and vindicated him. In God's vindication Jesus was recognised as Lord of all, and this now extended to the call of judgement for the world and the promise of forgiveness. Loader says: "The underlying message is one of God's generosity expressed through Jesus, which includes forgiveness and liberation. The resurrection only serves to confirm that this is so." This is good news worth sharing, not keeping to one's self and holding on to – right? cV

John 20:17 To Mary "17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them,..." Mary becomes in this moment the apostle to the apostles! She tells the apostles, (did you note the change of title from disciple to apostle, from student to 'sent one' of Jesus), tell them that **he is alive**. Mary saw Jesus, talked to him but was not allowed to hold him in this place. The Son who came, returns to his Father, and leaves us the Spirit to continue. Mary was told to go and tell Jesus 'brothers'!

In this meeting the risen Christ transformed Mary and offers hope to and for the world. It is in this meeting we see how the risen Christ both transforms and offers hope in one of the most difficult situations of human pain and grief we know. With this meeting, scholar Lesslie Newbigin maintains 'we are lead from the empty tomb to that which is *the real meaning* of the resurrection – the creation of a new relationship between Jesus and those who believe in him.' Transformation and hope!

This new relationship with Jesus is one of the great celebrations of Easter. The old way has gone – in Jesus, with Jesus, God opened the door for a good, new way of life. One of the post-Easter discoveries we all make is that Jesus is alive and can transcend our time and physical limitations. **But** this discovery can be really hard to accept. Brennan Manning said: 'For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say 'yes' to the present risenness of Jesus Christ.'

Saying 'yes' to the **present** risenness – the presence of the risen Christ in our world, within our midst, in our lives is a challenge, –but when we do – it's time to celebrate.

I want to show the video again – because we remember more, the more times we see something and I believe the message of this video is worth remembering: "Why we celebrate Easter".

Show Video.

Jesus birth was the incarnation; His life was revelation; His death was our Salvation; His resurrection is our restoration, thanks be to God. Amen.

I invite you to stand and sing; "In Christ alone"