

Matthew 28:1-10

Christ is Risen!

Those are wonderfully uplifting and encouraging words, aren't they? We need them, and all they encompass, so much right now.

2020 has begun very painfully. There have been disasters beyond our imagining. Fires, floods, hail and hurricanes and now a global pandemic that has turned our lives upside down. We are now all living with restrictions and economic uncertainty not experienced since the world wars of last century. We live in constant wariness and tension, careful not to contract the virus ourselves.

If I were not a Christian I might begin to despair. But I am a Christian. And because of that, I believe in the power of the resurrection - not just when Jesus rose from the grave - but here and now, in the midst of a pandemic. God has got this, and that he has written a future that transcends the suffering of a broken world.

If we can embrace that, it can transform the way we experience the challenges and tragedies of this life.

Our reading this morning, Matthew 28: 1-10, takes us to the resurrection morning, where we see two women wrapped in pain.

1 *“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”*

Of course we don't get a detailed description of how the two Marys were feeling - but we can guess. Jesus had been taken from them - Jesus who loved them and had transformed their lives; Jesus whom they loved deeply in return; Jesus, who they believed to be the Messiah, the one to deliver Israel. They were grieving and they were disillusioned.

In fact, in John's account of the resurrection morning, we see Mary Magdalene so engrossed in her own grief, that she actually didn't recognise Jesus when he appeared to her. It wasn't until he spoke her name that recognition dawned.

Grief is so often part of our own lives. We can't avoid it. It's comes with being human. Today, people across Australia and the world, are grieving the loss of much

that is dear to them. People have lost jobs, businesses, and freedom and basic physical human contact. So many, tragically, have lost loved ones.

God's people have lost contact with their physical communities of faith - their churches. We're grieving the loss worshipping and celebrating together at this most sacred time of our Christian year. Watching a service online helps, but it is a far cry from being present together in a place of worship, and being able to share together around the Lord's table. We are all feeling this loss deeply. And yet, the resurrection has the power to transcend grief.

Note what happened for these two grieving women

5 "...the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said." The angel then invited them to check out the empty tomb. "come and have a look!" he said.

Here we see God directing the thoughts of the two Marys away from the pain of the present, to the power of the resurrection. The angel then went on to tell the women take this message back to the disciples.

This encounter with divine beings was sure to have blown their minds. The news filled them with joy, but we read in v8 that they were still afraid.

Then this happened:

9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

Now, all fear had gone, and they were filled with worship.

Jesus always travels with us and meets us in our place of need. He doesn't always take away the difficulty but he does always give of himself. As Jesus appeared to his followers after the resurrection, time and again we see this happening.

Remember the disciples going fishing after the resurrection? They didn't recognise Jesus so he filled their nets and ate breakfast with them on the beach. (John 20:1-14)

Remember Thomas, who missed it when Jesus appeared to his gathered disciples? Thomas was deeply cynical, and though he said he didn't believe, no doubt he felt

excluded - so Jesus came to him personally and helped him believe: *“Thomas, put your finger here. Put your hand in my side - stop doubting and believe!” (Jn 20:27)*

Remember Peter who had denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion? He was overcome with shame. Jesus met him where he was, and drew from Peter three declarations of love - one for each denial, and then commissioned Peter to care for Jesus' followers. (John 21:15-19)

Jesus will meet us also, wherever we may be in our journey with him. Whether we are in a good place, or whether we are afraid, or lonely, or anxious, or despairing, or depressed or grieving, - Jesus is there for us. He offers us himself. And he offers us love with skin on, if you like, through his church. As we take our earth-bound eyes away from our circumstances, and look to Jesus, the power of the resurrection, ours from our baptism, through the Holy Spirit, can renew and restore us, bringing peace to troubled minds.

However, the power of resurrection is far wider reaching than just for us as individuals. The resurrection is the king pin of God's eternal plan to renew and restore a broken world.

Christ's death and resurrection was the fulfilment of 2000 years of covenant promises. It embraced both Jew and Gentile into God's plan of salvation. The new heart of flesh that God had promised, replaced the heart of stone, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to be poured out upon all people.

Jesus taught that following his resurrection, there would be an intervening period of indeterminate length, during which time, we, his followers, have the opportunity to bring God's love to bear on this world; to tell others this most wonderful news; which is that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, God will welcome us back as his children. He taught that he would return, and take his followers to be where he was. We read in Revelation 21:4-5 that a new world awaits:

‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ 5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

So we are not consigned to the vagaries of Covid-19, nor flood, fires, famines, hurricanes or earthquakes and the like. Yes they will happen, and yes we may have to live through them, but God is with us.

When the time is right, in God's plan, Jesus will return and make *everything* new. This is the new future that God has written for us - though it starts here and now as we serve him.

The Christian's call during this time, despite all that may be going on around us, is to pray that the world will recognise Jesus and turn to him. More than that, we need to make ourselves available to God to be agents of his peace and power in the melee.

But we don't do this alone. The power of the resurrection is within every Christian. That power can change hearts, renew minds, heal spirits and even bodies. The power of the resurrection can bring peace and reconciliation. The power of the resurrection can change us personally, and change the world.

I read about a cemetery in Hanover, Germany, where there's a grave on which were placed huge slabs of granite and marble cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. It belongs to a woman who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet strangely, she directed in her will that her grave be made so secure that if there were a resurrection, it could not reach her. On the headstone these words were inscribed: "This burial place must never be opened." In time, a seed, covered over by the stones, began to grow. Slowly it pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath them. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted so that the steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. A tiny seed had become a great tree that had pushed aside the stones.

The dynamic life force contained in that little seed is a faint reflection of the tremendous power of God's Spirit that lives within his people. Power to overcome evil. Power to bring his love and mercy to bear on this broken and hurting world. Power that will someday call to life the bodies of all who are in their graves.

The great Easter truth is that not only can we have life after death – we can be made new here and now by the power of the Resurrection; not only can we live forever through Christ, but through him we can live fully and powerfully in that risen life in the here and now.

Lord, may we not be so overcome by the troubles and trials of this life, that we forget about the power of the resurrection, which lives in us, your people, by your spirit. Help us in times of difficulty, to look to you, trusting in your goodness, and to offer ourselves to you to be agents of your peace and power in a broken world.

Amen.