

Jesus LIVES and Jesus LOVES

Easter Sunday 2018

Mark 16:1-8

Let us pray. Living Jesus, may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well done! This morning, by mere fact that we have all arrived to church on time means we successfully put our clocks back an hour last night. We have awoken this morning ready to begin the day on 'New Zealand *Daylight* time' which is one hour ahead of 'New Zealand Standard time'. And it is just as well, because today is Easter Sunday - and there is absolutely nothing *standard* about it.

Today we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Alleluia! Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. Alleluia! Jesus is ALIVE, and he is on the move, as he picks up again the baton of his mission to restore all things to God.

That today happens to mark the heralding-in of New Zealand's 'days of light' is most appropriate, for today we celebrate the arrival of the Eternal Light. Jesus, Son of God, Light of the World, who sheds light on every dark corner of life, driving away darkness with the warmth, truth, beauty, and tantalizing fragrance of his Spirit. The very same Spirit which hovered over the waters in that first act of divine creation now hovers over the world in the second act of divine creation – as the Service of Light liturgy reads: "A day truly blessed, when heaven is wedded to earth and all creation reconciled to the one who fashions it!"

The Spirit of the risen Christ causes open-cracks to appear in our narrow and assumed way and reason for living. Through the fissures he enters in, breaking through the barriers that separate the human from the divine. Breaking too through the barriers that separate human beings from one another, and human beings from the rest of God's created order.

The Spirit of the risen Christ for 2000 years has hovered over history, breaking through barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. They have all been pierced, cracked, and are crumbling. The barriers that suggest that God's love was limited only to certain Christians, are crumbling. The barriers that define Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and other world religions today are also tottering before our eyes. As are those that separate body and spirit, where the church seeks to encourage and enable people to discover anew that they are more than flesh and blood, that they are also spirit. The Spirit of the risen Christ too has broken through the barriers separating care of ourselves from care-of-the-earth, where we are applying greater effort to looking after our planet. This is the work of the Spirit of the risen Christ. This is the cosmic transformation of the resurrection evidenced in our reality – this is the work of restoring, redeeming, and making all things new.

This is the power of the Spirit of the risen Christ, who at the same time calls us to journey through him into the mystery and wonder of God that he has revealed. He is the way, the truth, the life. He is the door through which we walk to touch the meaning of God, the meaning of our own lives. He is the Source of Living Water. He is the Bread of Life, for he satisfies the deepest hunger, the God hunger that rumbles in the heart of every human being.

The Spirit of the risen Christ is here, and beyond these church walls, knitting creation back together piece by piece, and has been doing so for a very long time wither we believe it and understand it, or not. The risen Christ is making a difference in the world and he will not be stopped.

What difference does the risen Christ make in *your* life?

In St. John's account of the Resurrection, Mary had the experience of hearing with her own ears the risen Jesus call her name, and in response her spirit leapt in recognition of his voice. The risen Christ made a difference in her life, for sure. St. Mark's account however offers us no post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. Here there's one man in a white robe who says "he's risen" and the women flee. The very end of his Gospel reads: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Did Mark leave out some essential details here? Where is the morsel of evidence, that we find in John's Gospel, that we so need to hear and thus believe that the risen Christ could make a difference in *our* lives too! Why would he write such a compelling account of the life and ministry of Jesus and end in such a way that leaves us wanting?

On this, the most triumphant day of our faith, the day in which we embrace what we believe to be a divine conquest over death, it might be worth considering that perhaps Mark intended to end there.

Perhaps an open end, with what we know was true—that Jesus' followers were so desperately afraid for their lives and so confused that they ran away—is the most appropriate way to end the story.

Why?

Because that wasn't the end.

If that early morning 2000 years ago was the end, what we would have here is a very nice story about a great man who challenged a political system, loved and healed people and rose from the dead. What we would have would be a nice fairy-tale to tell our children. What we would have would be a section of Scripture pulled out once a year, dusted off, and read once more, then carefully tucked away until next time.

Mark knew that this was not the end of the story.

The only way those fearful followers believed . . . the only way they came to finally understand that their friend Jesus was, in actual fact, who he said he was, the only way the unbelievable became real to them was . . . *by allowing the story to reach its way into their lives until it transformed them . . .* until they were absolutely and positively compelled to finish the story for themselves, with their very lives.

And today, so far away from the events of the Gospel of Mark, the only way we're going to be able to believe the unbelievable is just the same. We're going to have to finish the story ourselves. Mark leaves us not to want... but to *participate*.

What difference does the risen Christ make in your life?

For Mark, the essence of Easter is far beyond rituals, angels, and tombs. Far beyond good church clothes, candles, eggs, flowers, banners, eloquent liturgy, beautiful music, or even a half-decent sermon. It is about the fact that life is hard, that death and pain, uncertainty and fear, injustice and war are daily realities here. We're here because we're human and we hurt; because we want hope for our lives; because we believe, we know, that to finish this story means to allow the resurrected

Christ to enter our lives, transform our pain and our fear, and give us new life. To satisfy the God hunger that rumbles in the belly-of-our-hearts, and of every human being.

We're here because, like the women in Mark's Gospel, in our humanity we have turned from the tomb seized by terror and amazement and, despite that, know that we have the end of this story to tell.

But we do not tell the story alone. Not only do we have each other. We have Jesus. He is risen! He has gone ahead of us. Jesus LIVES and Jesus loves. Jesus loves you. Jesus is with us.

This Easter, may it be a life-changing time for you, and me, for the Church, for St. Peters. The opportunity today, as we turn and leave the empty tomb, is that we invite the power of the risen Christ to take up residence in our hearts, to shape, to transform, and to renew us again.

What an unbelievable story, may it be ours to live.

Amen.