**New Life in a Fractured World. Easter Sunday - Luke 24:1-12**

We come to this Easter season starkly aware of the fragility of life. Living in the midst of a pandemic and most recently witnessing diabolical violence in the Ukraine, and on a much smaller scale in acts of violence within households and communities. We come aware that evil continues to impact the life of this world. Greed, pride, arrogance and the lust for power and domination have not been obliterated. The message of Jeremiah has a pertinent relevance in our times, *“Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” [[1]](#footnote-1)*

Yet the message of this day is one of hope and joy. You may have heard a song by Robin Mann the lyrics seem particularly relevant to this Easter

*Let’s remind each other How the world was won Not with mighty army, Nor with soldier’s gun;*

*Cluster bombs and rifles He had none of these. They were never needed For his victory.*

*Flesh and bone so fragile His strategic way: With a broken body Jesus won the day.*

*Feeble flesh, so human, Just like mine and yours, Brought the world to safety, Opened heaven’s door.*

*Though this child was helpless, Satan’s kingdom fell. Weakness was the weapon that defeated hell.*

*Feeble flesh, so human, just like mine and yours, brought the world to safety, opened heaven’s door*

*May I sit beside you In this quiet room? Though the darkness hides you, Dawn is coming soon.*

*When the night is gone, Your legs will walk again, Death will be destroyed And life will never end.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

The paradox of Easter is that such a radical transformation could happen within our world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Clearly we continue to live in a world which has not been miraculously transformed, evil, violence, self-centredness are all still active in our world and in individuals. So the transformation instigated by Jesus death and resurrection continues to be a work in progress.

In preparing his followers for the days ahead, when he would be arrested, mocked and beaten, condemned to death and crucified, Jesus gives them these words of encouragement, *“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

“The defining conviction of the Christian hope is that because Jesus was raised from the dead [death] is not the final reality of human life.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The message of Easter Sunday, the message of the resurrection, is a message of life and hope, a message of new life and of a *“sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life”* as we state commonly in the church’s funeral liturgy.

“The resurrection of Jesus is God’s response to Jesus death, God’s vindication of Jesus, and God’s validation of Jesus”[[5]](#footnote-5) and his message of good news for the poor, the oppressed, the ignored, the maligned.

*The apostle Paul stated, “If Christ had not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain….we are of all people most to be pitied.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

“The New Testament never suggests that the death of Jesus would have been adequate for salvation apart from Jesus resurrection. The two are fused so that neither can be considered apart from the other.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The Israelite community had an understanding and expectation regarding the resurrection, but it was vastly different to what the followers of Jesus experienced on this first Easter Day. The Israelites believed that all who were righteous, from the beginning of time till that actual moment, would be resurrected at the same time when God restored God’s kingdom. This would be a one-off large scale world changing event. They had no expectation that one person would be resurrected whilst everyone else continued to live as usual.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It strains our comprehension, to process the magnitude of what these early followers of Jesus encountered on that first Easter day. Interestingly all the gospels highlight the fact that it was a group of women, in an age when women were not given significant esteem, a group of women were the initial witnesses to the news that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

The women provide a wonderful model of faithfulness in a time of crisis. It was the women who were there with Jesus all along the way. They were there as his followers, some of those mentioned were known for their care of Jesus and his followers during his itinerant ministry[[9]](#footnote-9). Some were clearly part of his inner circle of followers, they had personally heard his predictions of his sufferings, death and resurrection.[[10]](#footnote-10) They were there at the cross, they were there at the time of his death, they witnessed his burial and they were the first to become aware of his resurrection. The women were going about the normal tasks after a death, having prepared spices they arrived to anoint his body, and in the midst of that were met by this life transforming news.

These were credible women, they went on to share the news with the eleven disciples and all the others. They were relating a firsthand experience, there were several of them. The women had seen the empty tomb, heard the message of the angelic visitors and recalled how this really did fulfil what Jesus had said to them before his sufferings and death. They remembered what Jesus had said. Taking time to remember what Jesus said and did is always valuable. However the women’s report initially did not convince the disciples, they thought it was ‘*laros’* a medical term for delirium[[11]](#footnote-11) *“nonsense” “an idle tale.”[[12]](#footnote-12)* Yet Peter explored for himself and was amazed. It was an astonishing experience.

After Jesus was raised he didn’t lead a normal human life, he “appeared and disappeared at will, moving in and out of human perception of his presence. Through the resurrection Jesus moved into the existence of eternity, the life of the future, from which he would bring the kingdom to fulfilment and come again.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

C. S. Lewis observed that “The resurrection narratives are not a picture of survival after death; they record how a totally new mode of being has arisen in the Universe. Something new had appeared in the Universe: as new as the first coming of organic life… A new mode of being has arisen.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Martin Niemoeller described it in this way, “Easter is not part of the old accustomed divine order, of the ordered world in which we live, but it is an absolutely new, unexpected act of the living God, which interrupts and runs counter to the uniform rise and fall of the world’s rhythms. Here we have the beginning of something new.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

This is the good news, the gospel. Clearly this was not something that we could have dreamt up for ourselves. In the message of Easter God surprises and stretches us. The good news of the resurrection strains our finite comprehension. What it means to be sharing in God’s kingdom here and now is a challenge to our thinking, actions and attitudes.

Yet when we encounter the risen Jesus for ourselves, we also experience newness of life, a new mode of being, we have a taste in life here and now, of eternal life. The resurrection of Jesus is most strongly affirmed by the continued experience of his presence in the lives of those who hope for his kingdom.

The reality of the new life which we share in, is seen as we continue to discover new aspects of what Jesus expects of us, as his followers in this age, as we embrace this astonishing event and live out of God’s new life.

1. Jeremiah 17:5, NRSV 17:9,NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Robin Mann 2001, 54 Currawong Crescent, Modbury Heights SA 5092 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 16:33 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Ed) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 473 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 472 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 1 Cor 15: 14, 19 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 472 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 290 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 470; Luke 8:2-3; 23:49 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Luke 24:6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997) 839 footnote 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Luke 24:11 (NIV) then (NRSV) respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 473 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. C. S. Lewis, God in the dock, “What are we to make of Jesus Christ” cited in C. S. Lewis, *Preparing for Easter: Fifty Devotional Readings,* (London: William Collins Publishing, 2017) 200-201 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Martin Niemoeller, in Tony Castles (Ed), *Complete Quotes and Anecdotes,* (Stowmarket, Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Publishing, 2007) 584 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)