

Easter Sermon

A Way To New Life

Emma King

Mark 16:1-8

So, Easter morning begins in quietness and uncertainty, doesn't it? In our reading, we're told that very early in the morning, just after sunrise, three women are walking towards a tomb. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. But these women are not going to celebrate. It's not like as we were walking to church this morning, full of joy and celebration. These women are carrying spices, and they are going to anoint the body of Jesus Christ. Just a few days earlier, they had watched him die on a cross, the one that they had followed. the one that they had listened to, the one that they had hoped in had been executed. The movement that they believed in must have felt finished at this time. So they walk in grief and on the way, they ask a very practical question. We hear them say:

Mark 16:3

³ “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

It's such a human moment in amongst all that is going on. Even in their grief they are thinking about the problem that is in front of them the stone ceiling the tomb would have been large much bigger than what they would have been able to do themselves it's huge so you can actually imagine that this is a question that most of us would say.

But when they arrive, something unexpected has happened. The stone has already been moved away. Inside the tomb sits a young man dressed in white who tells them:

Mark 16:6

6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.”

And these three words change everything: “He is risen.” Three simple words that changed the course of a lifetime. Easter is the moment when joy breaks into a grieving world.

Up until that moment, the cross looked like defeat. The Roman Empire had crushed yet another rebel teacher. Death had done what it always does. But the resurrection declares something different. God has raised Jesus from the dead. **The resurrection is God's declaration that death does not have the final word.** The world said ‘no’ to Jesus. Human violence crucified him and a stone sealed the tomb. But God said ‘yes’ to Jesus, and he raised him to life. And that is why Easter day is not a day of sadness where we remember Jesus on the cross. Easter Day is a day of joy! It's a joy and celebration, because it tells us that the deepest powers of darkness, of sin, of suffering and death are not victorious.

One thing I love about Mark's account is that no one is expecting this. The women arrive with their burial spices and Mark even tells us that they leave the tomb trembling and bewildered. They absolutely were not expecting to find Jesus there, because resurrection is not normal. Dead people stay dead. Yet something happened that changed everything. The tomb was empty and the disciples became convinced that Jesus was alive. Within weeks, they were publicly proclaiming that Jesus was Lord even though it cost them persecution. The resurrection turned fear into courage and despair into joy.

And I also love the detail about the stone. The women are worrying as they walk towards the tomb. And you can kind of almost imagine it. You can almost see them walking towards the tomb saying, 'well, actually, do you know, Mary, how am I going to turn this stone? How am I going to move it? How are we going to get in there to even do this? Is there somebody around maybe that might be able to help us?' You can imagine all these questions going on. But when they arrive, the stone has already been moved. And sometimes that is how God works in our lives. We carry these worries, we carry these problems that we don't seem to be able to solve and situations that seem impossible for us. Yet God is already at work before we arrive.

Easter reminds us that God is in the business of moving stones that we cannot move ourselves. These could be stones of guilt; the stone of fear; maybe the stone of death itself. And this is where Easter becomes more than just a beautiful story that we celebrate once a year. Because the death and resurrection of Jesus both speak directly into the world that we live in today. We live in a world that still knows way too much suffering; way too much violence; way too much injustice; way too much grief. All we have to do is turn on the news and it doesn't take long to see things that are not as they should be. There is war; there is division; there is anxiety; there is loneliness; there is environmental crisis. And the world can sometimes feel really heavy.

But the cross shows us something powerful about God. **The cross tells us that God does not stand far away from human suffering. In Jesus, God enters into it.** Jesus experienced injustice. Jesus experienced betrayal. Jesus experienced violence and Jesus experienced death. So, God knows what it is to suffer. And **the resurrection tells us something equally powerful, that suffering and death will not have the final word upon our lives.**

Easter is the beginning of God's renewal of the world. It is the first sign that God is making all things new. Because if Jesus has been raised from the dead, then the story of the world is not heading towards despair, as we may fear. But the world is headed towards restoration.

So, we must be bold and believe that the resurrection is the beginning of God's new creation. And that means **hope is not just naive optimism. It is grounded in what God has already done.** And it changes how we live today. Because if Christ is risen, as we believe that he is, then surely it must mean that love matters; it must mean that justice matters; it must mean that compassion matters. Because every act of kindness, every stand against injustice, every effort to bring healing into the world becomes part of the story that God is writing for us.

And this is why baptism is such an important, powerful sign at Easter. When someone is baptised, they are symbolically joining Jesus in his death and resurrection. The old life that they have led has been left behind. And today, a new life begins. And that is why adult baptism can be such a joyful moment in the life of the church. When an adult chooses to be baptised, they are saying, 'I believe that Jesus is alive and that I want to belong to him.' It is a public declaration that the resurrection is not just something that we believe happened long ago. It is something that changes our lives today. Baptism becomes a personal Easter moment. A step from old life into new life.

In today's reading, the angel tells the women:

Mark 16:7

7 "But go, tell his disciples and Peter..."

Now that small detail matters. The small details in the Bible always matter, so never brush over them. Peter had denied Jesus three times. He must have felt ashamed and broken - we read that he wept. Yet the resurrection message specifically includes him. "Tell the disciples *and Peter*. And I'm going to be talking about Peter in a few weeks' time. But the reason that it includes him in this message is because it's a reminder that the grace of Easter is personal to each one of us. Because, my friends, **Jesus comes for the ones who think that they've failed; Jesus comes for the ones who feel that they're far away; Jesus comes for the people who think that they've messed up way too much to be worthy of Jesus' love.** Jesus comes because Easter says that grace gets the last word for each one of us.

The empty tomb on that very early morning, just after sunrise, asks us a few questions. What will we do with the risen Jesus? Will he remain a figure in history just for us to celebrate once a year? Or will we respond to the invitation of a new life? Because the message of Easter is not just that Jesus rose from the dead. And it's not just, 'Oh, how lovely! We've had a lovely time at church, and we've had a lovely time of worship, and the band were amazing. Now let's get home because I need to put the roast potatoes on and the lamb in the oven. And I need to have that glass of wine that I've not had for the whole of Lent.'" It's not that. **The message of Easter is that because he lives, a new life is possible for us and hope is possible for the world.** And forgiveness is possible through Jesus; transformation is possible through Jesus. And the healing of the world has begun because of Jesus.

So today we celebrate with joy. Hallelujah, Jesus is risen! Hallelujah! The stone has been rolled away. We didn't need to worry about how we were going to do it. The tomb is empty and Christ is risen. And because he lives, there's hope for our lives and for the world.



@allsaintswestonchurch



All Saints Weston Church



01225 447663

All Saints Church, Church Street, Weston, Bath, BA1 4BT
office@allsaintswestn.org.uk allsaintsweston.org.uk