

## EASTER SUNDAY HOMILY – COURAGE IN “DO NOT FEAR”

Jeremiah 31:1-6 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 Acts 10:34-43 Matthew 28:1-10

We, the faithful followers of Christ, this morning we gather together as family units, perhaps for the first time, without extended family members and friends but we nevertheless, join with other Christians around the world to proclaim: **Christ is risen!** Even as we are scattered, isolated and perhaps alone – we can still proclaim these powerful words and we will continue for the next fifty days.

Today, more than any other time we proclaim this joyful phrase without the usual fanfare of beautiful flowers, wonderful music and the company of fellow parishioners around us. Perhaps we proclaim this truth without these festive props with a fresh realisation that these things, by themselves, don't tell the whole story.

Perhaps one of the most realistic thing about celebrating Easter is that we (mainline churches) don't just wake up on Easter Sunday morning and start preaching about the risen Christ and singing Alleluias'. For, that would be only part of the story if we simply began preaching about the resurrection without talking about what Jesus went through to get there. For those who avoid this, it is perhaps because for the most part, we don't like to have to deal with the darkness and agony of Jesus' crucifixion, suffering, death and burial.

But, church tradition has perhaps helped us in understanding this. Each year during this season, we start by journeying with Jesus as he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, then we would have waited with him during Holy Week, then on Maundy Thursday, we would have celebrated the Lord's Supper, breaking the bread and sharing the cup. We would have listened to readings from the Passion story. As the service concluded with the stripping of the altar, we would sit in silent darkness, keeping watch, remembering that first experience of Jesus in the Garden of Getshemane – when the disciples were fearful and Jesus was left alone. The agony of Good Friday, finally reaching the pinnacle of the Easter experience with the the Service of Light on Easter morning.

On Easter Day we celebrate what God has done throughout history to bring salvation to all the nations. It is the most important feast of the Christian calendar, because it is the resurrection of Jesus that

gives meaning to everything else that we believe. And yet, this year, in the world-wide church, even as Christ is risen, there's still a lot of unresolved pain, suffering and loss out there. We live in the age of COVID19 when many have lost loved ones and many are sickly. So how do we live in the light of the resurrection at this time in our history?

We could so easily fall into the euphoric triumphalism of Christianity: behaving, believing and proclaiming as though we don't have to acknowledge and come to terms with the brokenness and the darkness in our world and the brokenness and struggle of human life: we could simply tell ourselves that Christ is risen and therefore nothing matters. because Jesus has risen and that these things no longer have any power over us. But that way of thinking only plays into our inclination as human beings, to avoid the difficult, mysterious and sometimes frightening aspects of our existence. Easter began with fear!

Matthew's Gospel reminds us of this in this account:

*28:5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.*

*28:6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

*28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."*

This phrase - "do not be afraid"- is often found in so many of our scripture passages expressed by angels and messengers, often at key moments of tension and uncertainty. Then of course, the next words we hear are: "Come, see the place where he lay."

And Matthew describes the two women's response as a mixture of "fear and joy."

I wonder, if that isn't also our reality? **I mean, don't we and our people also live lives tinged with both fear and joy?**

Fear of what may happen to our children in this time;

Fear of whether we will have a job in the year to come;

Fear about the fate of a loved one struggling with illness;

Fear about the future amid problems both national and global (the recession felt here and abroad);

Or to come a bit closer to home, fear about the future of our congregation and church;

The resurrection will not take away our fear away. Rather, it enables us to keep faith amid our fears, to do our duty and share our good news in spite of our anxiety. **This is the very definition of courage.** And, courage is precisely what Easter is about. For we are called to flourish even when life is difficult and uncertain.

For there is, indeed, much to fear in the midst of a pandemic virus. And yet the resurrection of Christ creates the possibility for joy and hope and courage and so much more. Why? **Because it changes everything.** In the resurrection, we have God's promise that life is stronger than death,  
that love is greater than hate,  
that mercy overcomes judgment,  
and that all the sufferings and difficulties of this life are transient -- real and perceivable and sometimes painful, for sure, but they do not have the last word and do not represent the final reality.

It's a powerful message and perhaps just right for **us**, confined to our homes – reminding us that Christ is risen, not simply in church, but also in the world around us. May we proclaim it, not only with our lips, but also with our whole body mind and spirit.

**Alleluia: Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**