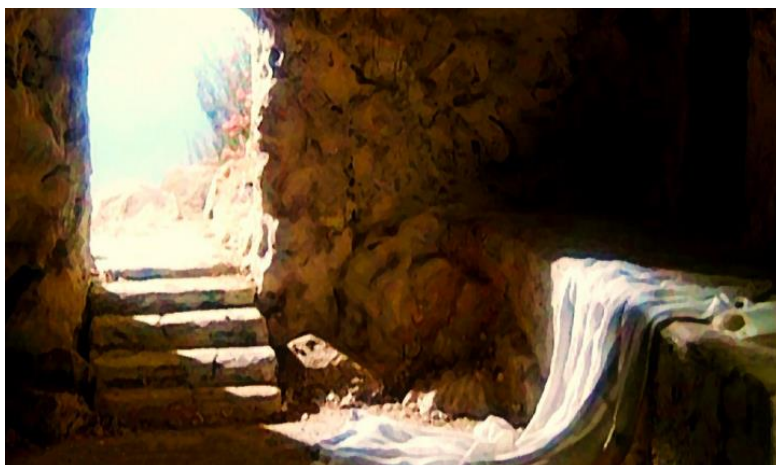


# EASTER DAY



This is the Good News – the grave is empty,  
Christ is risen.  
***Hallelujah!***

This is the Good News – the light shines in the darkness  
and the darkness can never put it out.  
***Hallelujah!***

This is the Good News – through Christ, we are God’s people.  
***Hallelujah!***

Christ is our peace,  
the indestructible peace  
we now share with each other.

The peace of the risen Christ be with you all.

**Hymn** *Christ the Lord is risen today*

Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!  
Let the whole creation say: Hallelujah!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high: Hallelujah!  
Sing now, heave, and earth reply: Hallelujah!

Love’s redeeming work is done: Hallelujah!  
Fought the fight, the battle won: Hallelujah!  
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Hallelujah!  
Christ has burst the gates of hell: Hallelujah!

Lives again our glorious king: Hallelujah!  
Where, O death, is now your sting? Hallelujah!  
Once he died our souls to save: Hallelujah!  
Where’s your victory, O grave: Hallelujah!

Soar we now where Christ has led: Hallelujah!  
Following our exalted head: Hallelujah!  
Made like him, like him we rise: Hallelujah!  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Hallelujah!

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### **Prayer of Confession**

O God, like the first witnesses of the resurrection,  
we too, come to the empty tomb with a variety of responses.  
We hear the good news that Jesus has risen,  
but so often the evidence for this is difficult to detect in our lives.

*Forgive us,  
when we fail to make the risen Christ evident  
through our words, our actions, our lives.*

As we come to the empty tomb  
seeking forgiveness for all our faults and shortcomings,  
help us to re-order our priorities so that we put the risen  
Christ first in our lives at all times.

*Forgive us  
when we forget that the tomb is forever empty because  
Jesus is here and is wherever Christians live and worship.*

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Help us always to remember the costly act of Jesus Christ  
which led to victory over sin and death,  
an act which gives us the gift of a new beginning –  
guilt free and graced by love.  
The tomb is empty because Christ is risen.

*Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

**Song**            *Halle, halle, halle!*

Halle, halle, halle- lu-jah! Halle, halle, halle-lu-jah!  
Halle, halle, halle-lu-jah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

### **A Poem for Easter**

Like a blade of grass pushing up stubbornly through the sidewalk.  
Like the butterfly emerging from the tomb-like chrysalis.  
But much more.  
Like the seed after years of dormant death sending up sprout.  
Like the brown bulb breaking forth from brown earth into brilliant color.  
But much more.  
Like brilliant daybreak after a stormy, darkened night.  
Like a rainbow mystically appearing amidst the rain.  
But much more.

Like a patient making an unexpected, unpredicted turn for health.  
Like the pinecone opening to spread seed only after touched by fiery death.  
But much more.

Like a beautiful vase emerging from a lump of clay in the potter's hands.  
Like a hidden spring bubbling forth in the middle of a barren desert.  
But much more...

So, it comes.  
Nothing else like it.  
No image adequate.

No simile.  
No metaphor.

Unable to talk about it but inadequately  
We celebrate this great, real mystery that  
Neither language nor imagination can encompass.

R B Preston

**Song** *Christ is alive! Let Christians sing*

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing. The cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring; Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound to distant years in Palestine,  
but saving, healing, here and now, and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war, where colour, scorn or wealth divide,  
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more, and lives, where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth can feel the Spirit, hear the call,  
and find the way, the life, the truth, revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive, and comes to bring good news to this and every age,  
till earth and sky and ocean ring with joy, with justice, love and praise.

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**The Gospel** *Matthew 28:1-10*

After the sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week,  
Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre.  
And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of God,  
descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it.  
The angel's face was like lightning, and the angel's robe white as snow.

The guards were so shaken, so frightened that they were as if dead.  
But the angel spoke, and said to the women, 'There is no need for you to be afraid.  
I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

He is not here, for he has been raised, as he foretold.

Come and see the place where he lay, then go quickly and tell the disciples:  
Jesus has been raised from the dead, and now is going before you to Galilee;  
it is there you will see him. Now I have told you.'

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the  
disciples. And there coming to meet them, was Jesus.

'Greetings!' Jesus said.  
And the women came up and, falling down before Jesus, clasped his feet.  
Then Jesus said to them,  
'Do not be afraid; go and tell the disciples that they must leave for Galilee;  
they will see me there.'

### Message

Where the gospel according to Matthew ends, the Christian faith begins - in the resurrection of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I certainly can't explain the resurrection fully – probably not even partially. For me it's mystery, and all attempts at rational explanations fail. It's something that arose out of an experience rather than a well-thought out theory, and experiences are sometimes hard to explain. We can describe them, but a lot of experiences are difficult to reason out. John Wesley couldn't rationalise the 'warmth that invaded his heart when he felt God's Spirit working within it.' And I guess that most of us can't rationalise what has been our experience of knowing that God is with us.

Rather than trying to explain the resurrection, I think we're better off looking at it as explaining us.

The resurrection establishes who we are and why we are a follower of Jesus. Because Easter happened, because the resurrection happened, the church happened. We wouldn't be part of the Church today if the experiences of those early disciples hadn't been told and retold down through the ages. We wouldn't be a follower if the experience of Christ's living presence is not one which rings just as true for us today, as for those early disciples.

As we think about the Easter story today, I want us to think about three of the details found in Matthew's story.

Firstly - the stone was rolled away: not to let Jesus out - but to let us in. The idea that God rolled the stone away from the tomb to let Jesus escape is inconsistent with the resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded elsewhere in the scriptures - appearances in which he suddenly appeared in the midst of the disciples, even when they were behind closed doors. Closed doors never kept Jesus in or out and Matthew makes this clear in today's reading. In his account of the resurrection it was after Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had come to the tomb that "There was a great earthquake, and an angel of the Lord rolled away the stone and sat upon it."

The angel tells the two women on that first Easter morning to look inside the tomb, saying to them: "do not be afraid, I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has been raised -- as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."

Easter rolls the stone door of the tomb away for us so that we might penetrate the mystery of death.

Someone has said that 'it makes of the tomb a tunnel - a tunnel into the heart of the eternal and shows us that the heart of God is love and life.' God rolled the door of the tomb away not to let Jesus out - but to let us in - to allow us to see that Christ's promises are true.

Secondly - the tomb is not completely empty. The woman would have seen the swathes of cloth that Jesus' body had been wrapped in – but nothing else except the words of the angel reverberating around the place: "Look, he is not here, come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples - he has been raised from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee, and there you will see him."

If the women on that first Easter morning had looked into an empty and silent tomb, then our resurrection faith would be a belief based on human speculation, an assumption of the moment, an argument based on negative evidence. Those same words that echoed and re-echoed in that Easter tomb still echo in our world today - "He is risen!" The tomb proclaims the victory of life over death, and the continuation of Christ's presence and mission in this world - first in Galilee, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.

And thirdly, - because of Easter we can turn our backs on the grave. Matthew tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, having heard the angel's assurance, "He is risen", turned their backs on the grave and ran "with fear and great joy" to tell the disciples.

Joy is the key word here. Christ was buried, but he wouldn't stay dead. The tomb could not hold him - and because of him, the tomb - death and darkness, can't hold us either. This indeed is what Jesus promised his disciples before he died, a promise that seemed times totally incredible, a matter, at best, of metaphor, but which - because of the first Easter morning, we know to be a matter of fact and substance.

The stone was rolled away from the tomb, not to let Jesus out, but to let us in, to show us that death is not the end - but rather a new beginning. A beginning that proclaims the victory of life over death, and which allows us to turn our backs on the grave and face our future with faith and hope, confident that all of God's promises will indeed bear fruit

But today we are in a world filled with the fear of a virus that has swept - and continues to sweep, across the globe. For many, there is the fear of death; for others there is the fear of not having a job; for others there is the fear of isolation and loneliness and for most of us there is the fear of not knowing whether we'll get through the next few months. These fears are real, and the question is 'How does the resurrection speak to people who have these fears and the darkness that at times threatens to overwhelm?'

Across the globe - as well as living with Covid-19 people also live with other forms of darkness.

What does the Easter story have to say in the midst of the misery of Syrian refugee camps, or the amongst the ruins of peoples' lives in towns almost bombed to oblivion? What does this story say in the migrant detention centres around Australia, or to those on Manus Island and PNG who have been left living in 'nowhere land'? What does it say in the hearts of the lonely, and the despairing?

I was cleaning out some files the other day and came across a collection of cartoons that I have.

There was one there by Michael Leunig. It is of a largish man and a smaller person - presumably father and son, and they are standing looking at an image of Jesus hanging on the cross. The larger man says: 'And here's what happens when you can't keep your big mouth shut.'

Jesus died because he wasn't afraid of speaking out for truth, justice, acceptance and tolerance. Jesus died because of his love for people which meant he helped people in the midst of their darkness and in doing so upset those who thought he was living beyond the laws of the day. Jesus couldn't keep his mouth shut when he saw injustice, lack of love, apathy and hatred of the 'other'.

The women who ran from the tomb with the news of the resurrection found it hard to keep their mouths shut. Many of the first Christians couldn't keep their mouths shut and were killed because of the seeming threat they posed.

Christians down through the centuries have not been afraid to speak up for what they believed was right and so have been tortured, killed and ridiculed.

I believe that the world today needs people who are not afraid to speak out against the forces that threaten at times to overwhelm us.

The world needs people who are willing to speak the messages of justice and tolerance and peace and hope, of compassion and love and care.

For this is what Christ's resurrection is all about: life, in the midst of seeming death and destruction.

The first women ran to tell the incredible news that Jesus was alive.

Today, in a world that is fearful of a virus, people - like us - are called to speak messages of love, of compassion and care. We are called to proclaim that Christ is alive and hope and transformation will occur.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

I believe that God is  
the creator and sustainer of the world.

God made us to live in relationship with him, with each other  
and with the world in which we are placed.

I believe that Jesus Christ is God's son - risen and set free,  
bringing us hope, new life and transformation.

I believe in God's Spirit,  
set free in the world to empower me and others.  
Set free in the world to blow where and in whom it will.

I believe in God's church – of which I am part.  
We are a fragile, often wandering lot of people:  
connected by our faith in God.  
Yet, we are people called to live the way of Jesus.  
A people called to see our risen Lord in the presence of  
each other and in the presence of friend and stranger.

**The Prayers of the People** *(Contributed by Elaine Fairall)*

Loving and Gracious God, as we come to you this Easter Sunday we thank you for Jesus. Thank you that you love us so much you sent your Son to die for our sins— to take the punishment we deserved— so that we could come to you forgiven. Your love for us is so great we find it hard to comprehend. Thank you that Jesus rose again and reigns with you in Glory that we might be with you in Eternity. We pray that people everywhere will reflect on these truths this Easter.

Lord we think of people across the world who are struggling because of the Corona virus. Those who have lost loved ones, those who are sick, those who have lost jobs and those who are afraid. Lord may they be able to hold fast to you knowing you are in control and. Though we don't understand, to trust you to guide us through.

Be with Government leaders both here and across the world that they may have wisdom, strength and courage as they seek to lead their people through this difficult time.

Be with all church leaders as they seek to encourage and support their congregations. Thank you for modern technology making it easier to stay connected. Be with Betty as she leads and supports us and as she learns to cope with the technology.

Life-giving Spirit you weave us together as the body of Christ. Strengthen our life together, even though we are physically separated. Nurture us in faith and discipleship that we may bear witness through our living, to your abundant Grace and liberating hope for all people and the whole creation.  
Through Christ our Hope we pray Amen.

**Song** *Thine be the glory*

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory over death you've won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave-clothes, where your body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory over death you've won.*

See, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
For the Lord is living, death has lost its sting.

No more we doubt you, glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without you: aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors through your deathless love;  
bring us safe through Jordan to your home above.

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### **Blessing**

The risen Christ says to us:

‘Peace be with you.

As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.

Through your fear,

through your doubt,

through your confusion,

as you travel many roads,

may you be liberated

to be Christ’s living voice, hands, feet and heart

and may you know the presence of God -

Creator, Saviour and Comforter at all times.

Amen.