

Easter Sunday readings 2021

Acts 10:34-43

New International Version

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

John 20:1-18

New International Version

The Empty Tomb

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflection / Sermon

This morning we are here to celebrate Easter. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. To give praise to a God who moved the stone that day and you know what, God still moves the stones, stones which get in our way and cause us to stumble and falter. Yes God can move those things that are the trials of our lives today.

What is it that gives Easter meaning? Well one thing we heard in the reading was that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found it empty

That Empty Tomb has provided and still today provides hope in a hopeless world.

I heard a story of a father and his teenage son were living in Mexico City. They had had an argument, and the son, Paco, shouted curses at his father and then stormed out of the house and didn't return. Days turned into weeks; weeks turned into months.

The father searched the city over and finally in desperation he went down to the newspaper and put in an add. It said, "Paco, if you read this, I want you to know that all is forgiven. I love you and I will be waiting for you at this Sunday at the entrance to the city park. I hope you show up, love dad."

He said that Sunday morning 200 Paco's showed up at the park, all looking for forgiveness.

Today in a world where the Pandemic is causing so much anxiety, there are so many people searching. Searching for forgiveness, searching for hope, for meaning.

And the good news of Easter is that the empty tomb provides that hope in a hopeless world.

Jesus came into the world to give hope to the hopeless. The stories we read about like the woman standing before an angry crowd wanting to punish her for her sins. A leper, who was an outcast and shunned by society. A Blind man on the side of the road. A paralytic lying on a stretcher, a woman with a long-term illness. The list goes on. They were People, God's people who had lost hope until they met Jesus.

And the great message of Easter is that if Jesus Christ was powerful enough to move the stone and overcome the grave, then he is powerful enough to move the stones that are blocking our lives.

The resurrection gives us hope in the face of the unfairness of the world. It gives us strength and courage in every situation that we face. And we all need that. You need it, I need it.

If we imagine what it must have been like to go to the grave and find an empty tomb, undisturbed grave cloths, a 2 ton stone that's been rolled away.

I don't know if you know but it wasn't just the disciples who saw the resurrected Jesus. History records over 515 eye witnesses to seeing the resurrected Jesus.

All the evidence shows that he, Jesus rose again. And the tomb was empty.

Everyone involved was surprised at how it turned out. The Soldiers didn't have an answer, the Pharisee's were caught trying to come up with a backup plan. The Religious Leaders who thought they buried the one who challenged their way of life, were shocked when Sunday morning rolled

around and the stone rolled away and Jesus Christ rose victorious over sin and death. And that is the greatest surprise this world has ever known.

So, what does this mean for us today? In our reading After the angel asked Mary what is the matter she turned and met Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus spoke with her, gave her instructions which she told to the disciples: And she told them that she had seen the Lord and he had said they were to tell everyone the Good News. Jesus is Alive and has conquered death.

The command was given, and yet this is the one that so many choose to ignore. Those of us that have searched and found the truth and received him as saviour and Lord, must now go and tell others. And yet we often sit quietly as opportunity after opportunity to share the Good News passes us by.

Do you know how most people come to know Jesus Christ? Do you know what the most effective mode of evangelism is? It's the same as it has been for a long time. The most effective mode of evangelism is one person inviting another person to come to church with them.

Now you probably thought I was going to say that most effective method of evangelism is one person telling another person about Jesus Christ. And let me say that that is the ideal way. And that should be and could be the best way.

But reality is that 90 to 95% of all commitments to Christ come after a person has accepted an invitation to attend church. A person invites another person to come to church where they will hear the gospel and in time invite Jesus into their heart.

As I've already mentioned we live in a time when the world is in turmoil and everyone's lives have been affected by the pandemic. Right now and in the coming weeks and months we have a wonderful opportunity to reach out as we fully reopen our churches.

But and there is always a BUT, the church needs to be that body of people who live out the New Commandment Jesus gave us of loving others. Then those we invite will feel safe and valued and among friends.

Now if you're anything like me, it helps to have something or someone gently reminding me what I need to do. So, on that basis I have carefully selected the stones you collected as you came in.

They are to remind you of the open, empty tomb, of the stone rolled away. Each stone, like us, is unique, please keep it safe and not hidden away at the back of a drawer. Maybe in a coat pocket so each time to go out you will feel I there.

This Easter, right now, the responsibility for sharing Christ falls on each one of us. This is a time when people will much more open to receive that invitation and once they have come to church and opened up their lives to the influence of Godly loving people. Their heart is prepared and then someone shares the gospel with them and they come to know the Lord. But it starts with someone inviting a friend to church.

In the coming weeks as the restrictions lessen how are we, how are you, how am I going to respond to this Easter call to share the Good News.

Who are you going to invite to come with you to church in the coming weeks and months?

Amen