

## **Easter Sunday Sermon: 12 April 2020**

**Matthew 28:1-10 (also reference to John 11:38-44)**

### **Christ's victory over that which entombs us**

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Alleluia! Christ is risen

#### **He is risen indeed. Alleluia**

The poet John Donne composed a famous poem called "Death be not proud" and the last words of the poem read "One short sleep past, we wake eternally

And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:55, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

While it seemed the cross and tomb sealed Jesus' fate, the truth is that God was working out God's perfect plan of redemption.

Through Christ the victory has already been won – through the resurrection of God's Son, Jesus.

If Christ had not defeated death there would be no hope for you or me. The fact that Christ did come back to life is the central message and the cornerstone of our faith.

Death had no power of the Son of God. Jesus is now longer entombed. He lives and because he lives you and I have new life in Christ.

We are liberated – set free – saved from all those things in this world that are not from God and that seek to entomb us. When it seems that we are crushed under the weight of heavy burdens and diseases like COVID19 that threaten to keep us in that valley of the shadow of death and when it seems that there is no hope of the stone being rolled away – let us remember that Christ won for us the victory – let us remember that the stone has indeed been rolled away, beloved let us remember resurrection day.

Resurrection – All the Gospels record this event and today we have heard Matthew's account of the Resurrection. But I want to for a moment briefly shift to another resurrection event and to recall the event of Jesus raising Lazarus from

the dead. Just two weeks ago, our Gospel passage focused on the raising of Lazarus.

In John 11:44, after Jesus called out “Lazarus come out!”, we are told that the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Then Jesus said “Unbind him and let him go.” Another translation reads “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Today, the risen Christ says to each of us “Take off your grave clothes and be free.” I have conquered death so that you may live. Therefore let us take off the old grave clothes. These might be attitudes, habits, thoughts and beliefs that enslave us. Let us shed away those things that entomb us. Let us leave behind the old things that brought us misery, anguish and death and let us walk free as resurrection people.

Let us clothe ourselves in Christ so that we may continue to live as resurrection people – people of hope and new life in Christ.

Allow me to use another illustration.

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells in order to grow. They need the shell to protect them from being torn apart, yet when they grow, the old shell must be abandoned. If they do not abandon it, the old shell would soon become their prison and finally their coffin – their tomb if you will.

This illustration teaches us something important. To change and grow as we must as Christians, we must sometimes shed our shells – this could be a structure of support, a framework, a habit, belief, attitude, a default response or behavior that we depended on – but may need to be shed as it may not serve or benefit us anymore as we seek to walk in the new life of Christ. Discipleship means being so committed to Christ that when he bids us to follow, we will change, risk, grow and have the courage to leave our old shell behind in order that we may be transformed into something new.

It has been said many times that COVID19 has caused us to change our lifestyle, our thoughts and our behaviours. Jesus said that I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Death did not have the last say but Jesus did and does have the last say.

And so with COVID19 beloved, it will not have the last say – Jesus our risen Savior has conquered death and, in him, we are more than conquerors.

In a short while we will be renewing our baptismal promises and we will symbolically wash our hands to remind us of our own baptism.

Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans that we who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death, but also in his resurrection. Then, as Christ was raised to glory by God, we too may rise with Christ to walk in newness of life.

Therefore, then, as his resurrection power goes to work in our lives we are able to die to a life of sin that threatens to entomb us and instead we are freed to live a life of service to God and to others. As we free ourselves of our old grave-clothes and our old shells, we clothe ourselves in Christ and we experience the life-giving resurrection power of God in our lives. We begin to see how resurrection permeates everything and then we live as resurrection people who bring new life and hope to others, showing to others the compassion of Christ and the love of God revealed in Christ living in us. We can do this through grace and in our thoughts, our words and our actions. We can do it as we serve those in need, seeking out the sick, the lonely, the marginalized, caring for our environment, working for justice and peace, seeking to understanding other cultures and people.

Resurrection then, is not just a moment that we remember in history, but it becomes a reality we as resurrection people live each day as we become bearers of hope and the light and love of Christ.

I wish to conclude with words from Ronald Rolheisser who says in his book *The Deepest Longing* “The resurrection tells us it is never too late. Every so often we will be surprised. We must believe that the stone will be rolled back, and we must be ready to poke out our timid heads, take off the linen bindings of death, and walk free for a time, breathing resurrection air.”

May you have a blessed Easter. AMEN.