

HE IS RISEN

He is risen! He is risen indeed. Our sin is carried, our debt is canceled, our shame is removed, the powers are defeated, our suffering is shared, it is finished. And all of that because he is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Whatever life changing, world transforming, cosmos renewing, implications come from this Resurrection Sunday, the heart of the Easter story is an empty tomb.

The core of Christianity is the fact that a man who was dead is now alive and is alive forever. He is risen, Jesus is risen. That is the centre of the Easter story.

The story of Jesus is recorded in four biographies called the Gospels, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And each Gospel has nuances of different emphasis because of the different audiences and the different purposes of the authors.

And so as you read the Gospels, it's interesting to note the differences. But more importantly is the similarity that all four Gospels record the resurrection of Jesus as the climax of the entire story, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

We could have chosen any of the four Gospels to be our guide on this resurrection Sunday. But we've chosen the Gospel of John. If you have your Bible, open it to John chapter 20 and we're going to work our way from there.

Cedric has read for us the Gospel of John's account of the resurrection of Jesus. Interestingly, I think the Gospel of John's account is the most subdued of the four Gospels.

There's no angels, no earthquake, no fainted soldiers, not even Jesus himself yet. Only an empty tomb and folded grave clothes. The Gospel of John is subdued in his telling of the resurrection.

Why is that?

I wonder if it's because while the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell the resurrection story in their final chapter, that is Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John allows the story of the resurrection to unfold over two chapters.

He's not in a rush to tease out the implications of the event of the resurrection of Jesus.

In that moment that Cedric has read for us, when Peter and John arrived at the tomb and they found it empty and they found the grave clothes lying on the stone, I wonder what they were thinking.

Did they know that they were standing on ground zero of the in breaking kingdom of God? Did they know at that time that they were standing on the soil that bore the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead?

Did they know the implications of the moment that they were witnessing? I don't think so. Not yet.

All they knew was that the one they loved, Jesus, the one they had followed, the one they had learned from, the one they had been with for three years, all they knew was that he was dead and now he is not here.

They saw the grave clothes and they saw the empty tomb. It says in verse 8 that John saw and believed. The heart of the Easter story is that holy moment.

Jesus, risen from the dead and the disciples, seeing and believing. This is the resurrection as John tells the story, but it continues to unfold. So we're going to continue working our way through John chapter 20 and 21.

HE IS PRESENT

On Good Friday, if you were here, we looked at Jesus' final words on the cross as recorded by John. He said, it is finished. And on Friday, we asked the question, what is it for you?

What is your it? Maybe it started for you with a click or with a sip or with a phone call. Maybe you remember exactly where you were when it happened.

Maybe you don't remember life without it. Your it and my it, whatever they are, are very, very present, like a storm hanging over us, like a shadow in the back of our mind. It is present.

Friday reminds us of that. But Easter Sunday assures us that he is present too. He is risen and he is present.

This is the unfolding story of John's account of the resurrection. The Easter story is full of people with its. People in the midst of it and to every one of them, Jesus appears.

Firstly, Jesus appears to Mary, John 20, verse 11. Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, woman, why are you crying? They've taken my Lord away, she said. And I don't know where they have put him.

Mary's it is grief, the suffering that comes from loss. Mary was one of the few disciples who did not abandon Jesus. She stood by him and beheld him on the cross.

The reason she's at the tomb on this Easter morning is to embalm his body because she thinks he will be dead forever and she wants to treat his body.

Verse 14, at this, Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, woman, why are you crying? Who is it you were looking for?

Thinking he was the gardener, Mary said, sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him and I will get him. Jesus said to her, Mary, she turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, rabboni, which means teacher. He is present.

Jesus appears to Mary in the midst of her grief. So I wonder, is your it grief? Do you relate to Mary?

Are you suffering the loss of something or someone? Be encouraged as John tells this story that Jesus appears to Mary. He appears to us in the midst of our grief.

Next Jesus appears to the disciples, verse 19.

On the evening of that first day of the week, that's Easter Sunday, 2000 years ago, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, the disciples, it is fear, expectation of future harm.

The city of Jerusalem on the Passion Week 2000 years ago was in an absolute stir. 200,000 people have swollen the population of the city and stirred it to a frenzy as the chief priests have turned the crowds against Jesus.

It's a very dangerous time to be associated with the person of Jesus. And so the disciples, it is fear. They have the doors locked because they're scared of what might happen.

Verse 19, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands inside. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

He is present in the midst of fear. So is your it fear? Do you relate to the disciples expecting future harm, scared of the future?

Jesus is present and gives peace to those who fear. Next, Jesus appears to Thomas in his doubt, verse 24. Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came the first time.

So the other disciples told him, we've seen the Lord. But Thomas said to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. The it for Thomas is doubt.

Thomas is wrestling with faith, with maybe a heart that compels him, but a mind that questions him. He's wrestling with doubt. Verse 26, a week later, Jesus' disciples were in the house again, and this time Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God, he is present to Thomas in his doubt. So I wonder, is your it doubt?

Do you have a heart that compels you towards faith, but a mind that questions you when it comes to the existence of God and the historicity of the resurrection? Jesus is present for those who doubt. Finally, Jesus appears to Peter in his regret.

Chapter 21, verse two, Simon Peter, Thomas, also known as Didymus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were together. I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them.

And they said, we'll go with you, we've got nothing better to do. So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Earlier in the story of this week, Peter had denied emphatically, even knowing Jesus three times.

And now in this scene, Jesus appears on the shore and he calls to the boys in the boat and they catch a bunch of fish. They arrive, Jesus makes up a mean breakfast.

And after they had finished eating, verse 15, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, he said, you know I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs.

Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take care of my sheep.

The third time, he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep. Three times, Peter denied knowing Jesus, and three times, Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to reaffirm his love.

Jesus is present for those who have regret. He gives Peter a second chance, and he gives you and I a second chance. Is your it regret?

Jesus is present. This is the unfolding story of the resurrection. As John tells it in his Gospel, Mary, the disciples, Thomas, Peter, they each represent it.

Grief, fear, doubt and regret. It is present in their life. But what these first followers discovered on that Easter Sunday is that he is present too.

And if Jesus is present in the midst of our it, that changes everything. Not just thoughts and prayers from afar, but a person, more than that, God himself, present in the midst of our it.

And so the beatitudes of the resurrection, we might say, are blessed are those who grieve, for he is risen and he is present. Blessed are those who fear, for he is risen and he is present.

Blessed are those who doubt, for he is risen and he is present. Blessed are those who regret, for he is risen and he is present. He is present with us in the midst of it.

Not in body, not the body of Jesus, but something that the Gospel of John says is even better than his body, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus that he breathed onto his disciples to live within them. He is present. It is finished.

He is risen. He is present. This is the unfolding story of the resurrection.

HE IS RETURNING

John's Gospel has one more part to tell before he closes. Verse 20 of Chapter 21. Peter turned and saw that the disciples whom Jesus loved was following them.

This was the one who leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who's going to betray you? When Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?

You must follow me. He is risen. He is present.

And finally, he is returning. Jesus said, until I return. The Gospel of John, in his accounts of the resurrection, finishes with this small window into the coming return of Jesus, that he will come back.

The reality which Jesus inaugurated in his resurrection will be consummated in his return. That kingdom, which we often say is now and not yet, will one day be now and always. He will return.

And when he returns, he will make all things new. The Book of Revelation says that when he returns, there will be no more tears, no more mourning, no more death, and no more pain.

It will be well and truly finished when he returns, and Christ will be all in all. He is returning to make all things new. Richard Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist and a famous atheist.

Twenty years ago, in 2006, Dawkins wrote a book called *The God Delusion*. And as part of the events surrounding the release of that book, Richard Dawkins debated John Lennox, who is a famous Christian mathematician and apologist.

And the debate is one of the most famous atheist Christian debates of all time. And towards the end of that debate, in Richard Dawkins' final concluding statement of the entire debate, he said something interesting. Check it out.

Yes, well, that concluding bit rather gives the game away, doesn't it?

All that stuff about science and physics and the complications of physics and things, it all, what it really comes down to is the resurrection of Jesus.

And there's a fundamental incompatibility between the sort of sophisticated scientist, which we hear part of the time from John Lennox. And it's impressive, and we are interested in the argument about multiverses and things.

And then having produced some sort of a case for a kind of deistic god, perhaps some god, the great physicist who adjusted the laws and constants of the universe, that's all very grand and wonderful.

And then suddenly we come down to the resurrection of Jesus. It's so petty, it's so trivial, it's so local, it's so earthbound, it's so unworthy of the universe.

What do you think? In Bible College, I studied apologetics, and I had to do an essay critically analysing that debate. I had to watch the whole thing and evaluate Dawkins' arguments and Lennox arguments and to conclude who I thought won the debate.

And as was my style back in those days, I was working on this essay at 11pm at night. And I got to the very end of the debate, to Dawkins' final words when he said, it's suddenly we come down to the resurrection of Jesus.

It's so petty, so trivial, so local, so earthbound, so unworthy of the universe. And at 11pm, one night, I felt like crying or jumping up and down on my bed, or maybe I did both.

When he said those words, I felt like crying because if there is no resurrection, there is no end to our suffering and to our pain and to death itself. And there is no hope. If there is no resurrection, it is not finished and it never will be.

I felt the weight of what Richard Dawkins is saying. If there is no resurrection, there is no hope for this broken and suffering world. And so, maybe I cried for a bit.

And then I wanted to jump up and down to my bed and shout and wake up my homies who were living upstairs at the time. Because there is a resurrection. He is risen.

He is risen indeed. And when he rose again, Jesus kickstarted, inaugurated the renewal of all things so that we who trust in him do have a hope beyond the grave. The resurrection is worthy of the universe because of the one who was resurrected.

The one who was in very nature God, Jesus, but did not consider his equality with God something to be used, but he became nothing and he died our death on the cross. And in the resurrection, he ascended to fill the entire universe.

I felt like jumping up and down on my bed because he is risen. And that means that it is finished. And that means that there is an end to our suffering and our pain and our death.

When he returns, he will make all things new. Richard Dawkins doesn't know that. With respect to him, Richard Dawkins, his it may not be grief or fear or doubt or regret, but surely it for him is hopelessness.

Because if there is no resurrection, how could there be any hope? How could there be an end to death and suffering and pain? And yet the good news of Christianity is that he is risen, he is present and he is returning to make all things new.

When he rose again, he guaranteed the outcome for this whole cosmos, that he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death will be no more. It will be well and truly finished.

As we finished this morning, there's one part of the unfolding story of John's resurrection account that we skipped, and that is verse 30 of chapter 20.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the reason why John is writing. This is the reason why I'm speaking right now. This is the reason why we gather.

That you may believe that Jesus rose again, that he is present, and that one day he will return again to make all things new.

All of this is that we might trust in the finished work of Jesus and in his resurrection and in doing so that we might have life, the eternal life that is knowing Jesus as Lord and God.

Believe that he is risen, know that he is present, and anticipate that he is returning. So may you this Easter Sunday have a new chapter in your story. May the resurrection of Jesus unfold something new.

The implications open up for you. May you know that your sin has been carried, your debt has been cancelled, your shame has been removed, the powers are defeated, your suffering has been shared, and it is finished because he is risen. Amen.

Let's pray, and then we'll worship him. Thank you, Lord, that we don't grieve like the rest of the world. We live in the same world that they do, a world full of brokenness and pain and mourning and death.

But we have a hope that is firm in life and death. We thank you. We declare that your resurrection was the guarantee of our hope.

I pray for my brothers and sisters, for everyone in this room or listening to my voice. Would you make yourself present to us in a real way? Help us to believe, Lord.

Help our unbelief. May we have life as we look to your resurrection and believe. And may this be the start of a new chapter of our story for your glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen.