

Christ's Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, and it's very nice to be with you this evening to join in your worship, and I appreciate the invitation to come and share the cool bit, Mr McHeever. Thank you.

As was mentioned, my name's Douglas Craig, and Scottish coordinator of WEC. Just before I share from the word, just a bit of personal background, my wife and I have been with WEC since 1980, and we worked in the Congo for 11 years, and then in the Netherlands, where WEC has a missionary training college, and I have the privilege to be coming to these islands as Scottish coordinator, and also representing Congo and the Netherlands in the past, and this is my 10th visit to the island in these capacities.

I've also another link with you, because my son David was a roommate to Andy, and they both survived to tell the tale, and I think they're still friends, is that right, Andy? Yes, so that's another link with you here, but it's good to be with you and to share in this evening's service, especially as this is Easter Sunday, and I gather you had a message this morning on the resurrection, so I make no apology for saying that we're going to speak about the resurrection again this evening, and the difference it makes to us as individuals, and as a body of believers, of the community of God, the church of God, and also the difference it makes in the world, as we think about, meditate on the fact of the resurrection.

When Mary Magdalene, whom we read about in John chapter 20, went to the tomb that Easter Sunday morning, it was with grief in her heart and despair.

She had no expectation that she would find anything but a dead body when she got there. She had indeed, in the other Gospels tell us that, along with the other women, she had actually prepared spices to anoint the body for burial, as was the custom of the day.

[2 : 17] Jesus had told them that he was going to rise from the dead. Several times he told them that he was going to die, but after three days he would rise again.

But they hadn't grasped this reality, this truth. They were so traumatised by the events of the past two or three days, where they had witnessed the betrayal of Jesus from one of their number, Judas. They would know Judas well. He would be well known to them over the years, and they hadn't expected this betrayal. Followed, of course, by the arrest, and the humiliation of Jesus at the hands of the Sanhedrin, and then the trial before Pilate, and the suffering and cruel scourging that followed that, and then, of course, the suffering and unspeakable horror of the crucifixion, and the lingering death that that entailed.

They had been part of that, and especially the women had stayed around, and been witnesses to these traumatic events.

So it's no wonder that they hadn't really grasped what Jesus had said to them before that. But arriving at the tomb, Mary, and as we know from the other Gospels, the other women came, and discovered that the stone had rolled away from the entrance to the tomb where Jesus was buried.

[3 : 54] And this was even more upsetting for them, because the conclusion that Mary, as we read, took from that, that someone had stolen the body, had taken the body away, the final indignation, or even not allowing Jesus to rest in peace in the grave.

So she assumed that someone had come and stolen the body. But we read that this was, that in Mark's Gospel, that they entered the tomb, they met their ladies, the women that were with Mary anyway, entered the tomb, and they saw a young man, dressed in white robe, and of course this was even more alarming to them.

But this angel spoke to them these words, Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are looking for, is not here. He is risen. See the place where he laid them.

He is not here. He is risen. Now go and tell his disciples and Peter, and Jesus will meet with them. So slowly but surely, Mary and then the other women, and then Peter came along, and John began to grasp this incredible reality, that Christ indeed was risen from the dead.

He was alive. And then later we read that Mary, he actually met with Mary herself. She stayed behind when the brothers had gone away, having seen the empty tomb, and Jesus graciously came to her, and spoke her name, Mary.

[5 : 31] And in that instance, she knew it was the Lord. She knew the reality that he had risen from the dead. So the resurrection made all the difference in the world to these early friends and followers of Jesus.

To Mary Magdalene, the resurrection brought a renewed hope for her future. Here we read that Mary had been the one, Mary Magdalene was the one from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons.

She had been in terrible bondage, and her life had been a total disorder, and then Jesus had set her free, and now he was alive forevermore, giving her that eternal hope, that this release that she had received in her life wasn't just temporary, it was for all time.

We don't read about, in this account, or in the Gospels, about Mary Jesus' mother meeting the risen Christ, but we're sure that this would have happened too, as we read in 1 Corinthians this morning, that he appeared to Mary, and his mother too, and his mother's heart was broken by the death of her son, but the fact of the resurrection made all the difference to her too.

You can imagine the joy that that would have brought to Mary, Jesus' mother. And then Peter, who had denied Jesus three times before the death, before he was put to death, we know that the resurrection made all the difference to him, because on a later occasion, Jesus asked him three times, do you love me Peter?

[7 : 15] And in that way, restored his assurance that Jesus loved him and had a plan for his life, even though he had let him down. And then of course, Thomas, whom we read about here too, the doubter, his doubts were dispelled completely when he encountered the risen Christ.

So Jesus made all the difference to these early disciples on an individual basis. Later on, he made a difference, a radical difference too, to Saul of Tarsus.

We know that Saul was a legalistic, persecutor, self-righteous persecutor of the church, the early church, and yet when he met the resurrected Christ on the Damascus road, his life was changed and turned upside down.

And he became the foremost missionary of all time. Christ makes all the difference to individuals. And Paul later on wrote these words in Romans, Romans chapter 8, verse 11.

It says this, The resurrection of Jesus gives us new life to our mortal bodies.

[8 : 43] We are dead in our trespasses and sins by nature. By nature, we are under God's wrath because of our sinful condition. But, the resurrection assures us that if we put our trust in the death of Christ for our sins, we'd receive this new life and we're raised with him into the heavenly places.

It's all because of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, that wouldn't be a reality. And so, from the days of the first early church till today, individuals have been encountering this reality.

We know from history the story of Augustine who had led a profligate life as a young man searching for truth, looking for reality in his life, looking into different philosophies, but only finding Christ when he encountered the living Christ for himself.

The resurrection of Christ changed his life and he became St. Augustine and a foremost one of the great theologians of the church. Martin Luther, again, a sincere young man looking for truth in this time as a religious man, joined religious order and subjected himself to all the disciplines of that order in order to find this peace with God that he was looking for.

But it was only when he met the risen Christ he realised that it was you were only saved through faith alone in Christ alone based on the resurrection of Jesus.

[10 : 21] The Wesley brothers, John and Charles Wesley, had in fact been missionaries in America to the American Indians but coming back from their missionary journey they encountered a severe sea storm and they were terrified of drowning.

There was a group of Christian people, Moravians, on that boat coming back from the States too and they were singing and they were comforting themselves as they were facing the same danger as the Wesley's but they had that assurance that the Wesley's lacked.

and again by the grace of God John and Charles met the risen Christ when they got back to England and encountered for themselves the reality of the resurrection life and it led on to a great revival in Britain.

So we see this happening time and again. C.P. Studd, the founder of WEC 100 years ago went to Congo to an area of the world which at that time few if any people knew about Jesus and the resurrection but within a few years many in that part of the world had encountered Christ for themselves and had experienced that Jesus does make all the difference in the world to them. As I mentioned we had the privilege of working in Congo 1981-92 and we met a young man there called Mazaburo who was a school teacher in the school that I was working in and his testimony was that he as a young man had been led had rejected the faith of his parents and had gone his own way and had become a bit of a drinker and a bit of a lad in the area but one day he'd been drinking and he was making his way back home and trying to cross a narrow tree trunk bridge over the river and inevitably he fell into the water he didn't drown but he came to his senses and he went back to the village and asked a catechist in the village how to get peace with God and again he met with the risen Christ and now he's a faithful servant of God for many years another young man called

[12:49] Raul from Madrid he was a drug addict he was a heroine and he was stealing to feed his habit and then one day he met a missionary who shared Christ with him shared about the risen Christ that Christ had died and had risen again to give new life even to drug addicts and through time that young man came to faith and released from his habit went on to be a leader in the drug rehabilitation work of that part of the world so the resurrection makes all the difference to individuals and many of you here tonight I know have experienced that for yourself that Christ has come into your life and his spirit lives in you the spirit of Jesus is alive and is among us and is living in our hearts perhaps you're here and you think well he doesn't live in my heart how do you know how can you experience this resurrection life in your heart for yourself well Paul again gives us the answer in Romans 10 and 9 he says if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved that's quite simple isn't it confessing with our lips being willing to stand up and be counted and say yes I believe that Jesus died and I believe that he rose again by making that confession before men and women and really believing in the resurrection we receive this new life the spirit of God comes into our life and we are new creations in Christ and that's all because of the resurrection it's all based on the reality that Jesus rose from the dead and if you haven't already done that this Easter

Sunday evening is as good a time as any as you just simply in your own heart pray and ask God to come and make the resurrection real to you in your life so it makes the resurrection makes all the difference to us as individuals but also for the church as we see we read this in the gospels before the resurrection before Jesus rose from the dead the disciples were totally discouraged and devastated by the death of their friend and saviour they didn't know where to go in fact they were all going to be scattered they were scattered back when Jesus was arrested and they were in disarray but we see that the resurrection transformed this band that was dissolving into a cohesive unit that was expecting that Jesus was going to come back to them because they were encouraged when Jesus met with them over a period of 40 days we read in the gospels and the acts speaking to them about the kingdom of God breathing on them the breath of God imparting his peace to them as we read in that

Easter Sunday evening he ministered to them over that period of 40 days convincing them in many different ways of the reality of his resurrection and in fact that this death and resurrection had been foretold in scripture he taught them that even in their own scriptures the reality was already there and they could understand it they would have appreciated that Jesus had to die the suffering servant had to suffer and yet rise again from the dead and then he told them during this 40 days towards the end that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age and then he promised that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth these and many other things Jesus spoke to them over that period of 40 days that he was with them and transforming them into the church that was going to transform the world that was going to turn the world upside down by this message of the

resurrection and sure enough as they waited and as they prayed here in Jerusalem as they were instructed the Holy Spirit came upon them in the day of Pentecost and they began to take this message of the resurrection to the world for truly the message of the apostles was that Jesus had risen from the dead we read this in Acts 2:32 this Jesus said Peter on the day of Pentecost God has raised up and of that we are all witnesses he bore witness to that and then later on he was in the temple when the

Jewish authorities were challenging by what authority they were speaking and Peter said to them boldly you killed the author of life whom God raised from the dead to this we are witnesses this was the message of the apostolic preaching then again after the lame man had been healed and the apostles had been arrested because of this disorder Peter said again let it be known to all of you and all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified whom God raised from the dead by him this man is standing among you well it was because of the resurrection of Jesus that the healing of the lame man took place so they bore witness time and again to the reality of the resurrection and then later on the apostle Paul when he was in Athens preaching to the philosophers and the stoics and the epicureans of that city they couldn't understand what he was saying because they said these words he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities because he was preaching

[19:29] Jesus and the resurrection that again was the theme of Paul's message there in Athens and everywhere he went so this message of the resurrection spread throughout the whole of the Roman world at that time and it made all the difference to the church it galvanized these early church communities with this message that burned in their hearts and was taken to the world and today because of that reality of the resurrection all over this world today in practically every geographical country of the world there will be groups of believers small and large celebrating this resurrection and the reality of that because Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive forevermore and that makes all the difference to us and again as we gather here this evening and you've gathered earlier on today Jesus has promised his special blessing and presence in our midst some people today increasingly are saying well I can be a Christian of my own

I don't need to gather in church I don't need to come together with the saints and that's true we can be on our own in fact we should read our scriptures on our own and with our families pray at home but there's something special takes place when two or three are gathering in Jesus name because he's with us he's here and that's to bless we come often with our doubts and our fears and our confusion and he says to us my peace I leave with you my peace I give to you even as we're in the presence of the Lord here tonight and then he also says as the father has sent me so I am sending you just as he spoke to the disciples on that first Easter Sunday evening he gives us the mandate to go and make this resurrection known in the world beginning in our communities and then going eventually to the ends of the earth so the resurrection makes all the difference to the church the church only exists because of the resurrection it's because

Jesus has risen from the dead that we can be here tonight to praise him and to worship him and last but not least the resurrection makes all the difference to the world you know everyone every human being born into this world has a problem and that problem is death the death that came into the world through sin and the judgment that we all have to face and of course other people have different solutions to that but Hebrews 2:15 says he came to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery that's the human condition we are born into this world and from the time we begin to realise that we're alive we are conscious that one day we're going to die and no religion or other philosophy has an answer to this the ancient

Egyptians they buried their pharaohs in elaborate tombs and they put gold and possessions and even buried some slaves along with them to help them through the afterlife that was their solution put all the possessions into the tombs so that the pharaoh will have provision for the next life others believe in reincarnation that's a common philosophy or a common world view among other religions that when you die if you've been good you'll come back as a rich person if you've been bad you'll come back as a poor person or even worse an insect or an animal but that's their idea that you're given time and time and time again to live the perfect life and then once you've done that you've made it well in some cases you're eliminated for good so others other religions believe that there are others who do believe some religions do believe in a judgment after death but have no assurance that they will measure up to that judgment and they don't know that they do their best they fulfill their religious obligations all through their life but hoping against hope at the end of the

day that they'll be acceptable they'll reach the acceptable standard but none of us can measure up to that no matter how hard we try no matter how religious we are no matter how good we are in other people's eyes all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and we never can meet that standard others in our own culture even today believe that death is the end of everything so they just say well let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die there's no point in worrying about death because it will happen to us all and then it's finished it's nothing after death your heart stops beating and that's it they say well we don't know because no one's ever come back to tell us well that shows their ignorance of the gospel doesn't it because Jesus has come back to tell us he has died and was buried and has risen again and has shown us the way to the father shown us the way to god shown us the way to heaven by through faith in him and that makes all the difference no other religion offers this salvation and that's why mission exists that's why we have to be willing to take this message to the world some people say well the Asians have their religion and the Africans have theirs and the South Americans have theirs and we have ours but that denies the reality of the resurrection if the resurrection has truly happened then all people on this earth need to hear that message and we as Christians who know this have to take that message to them the resurrection makes all the difference in the world so does it make a difference in your life and in mine twice as today now you've already heard a message about the resurrection so we now are beginning to get the message but does it make a difference will tomorrow morning the resurrection be a reality in your life and in mine because Jesus is here with us and he'll be here he's promised to be with us always to the close of the age so does it make a difference in your life and in mine and does it make a difference to us as a church does the reality of the resurrection inform our meetings and make us want to come together and have that presence of God with us presence of Jesus with us as we meet together in his name and if that is true then we have a message for this world we need to take this message of the resurrection to those who are still in bondage to a fear of death and have no answer to that final mystery of life so let's be those who live the reality of the resurrection today and to be a blessing to others through that let's pray he is not here he is risen hallelujah father we give you thanks for the fact of Jesus having risen from the dead and is alive forevermore and we who are gathering together in your name this evening we thank you that you have promised to be in our midst by your spirit because you are alive may each of us here standing before you now know for certainty in our hearts that you are alive and that you are in heaven in the place of authority and you will come back one day to take those who love you to be with yourself may each of us have that reality today and for the rest of our lives and may we as a church a fellowship may we reflect that truth in our community and in our world that is in so desperate need of this message of resurrection lord bless us as we conclude our worship together may you have the honor and praise for we pray in jesus name amen