

Easter Sunday 20th April 2025 - Jesus, The Resurrection & The Life

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

- [0 : 00] Now 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 have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned round 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 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. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned towards him, and cried out in Aramaic, Rabbuni, which means teacher.
- [1 : 13] Rabbuni. 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. So today is Easter Sunday.
- We may be better off calling it Resurrection Sunday, the day when we remember and celebrate Jesus rising from the dead. It's the most profound, most significant, most consequential day in history, I would suggest.
- The day when Jesus declares and demonstrates his ability, his overcoming, his victory over death itself. Jesus had previously given us glimpses, shown us a trailer, if you like, like, of what was possible through him, when he previously brought dead people like Lazarus, or Jairus' daughter, or the widow's son, back to life.
- Again, each in their own way, pretty spectacular events. But these were acts in which Jesus raised other people back from the dead. Whereas on this day, it's Jesus, the one who was dead, who raises himself back to life.
- [2 : 45] And yes, I guess in trying to get our heads around it, we sometimes talk of it in terms of God raising Jesus from the dead. But sometimes I wonder if that language risks implying that Jesus somehow stopped being God in the grave and needed the big God to revive him, you know, getting a defib out or something like that, that kind of picture.
- But instead, because Jesus was God, because Jesus is God, the power to defeat death and rise again was always in him.
- He said this at one point, I am the resurrection and the life. You know, the resurrection and the life is who I am. And nothing, not even death itself can take that identity, that truth, that reality away from me.
- And yet, in focusing on Jesus resurrected life, which is of course a good thing to do. I think we'd also do well not to overlook all of the other stuff that Jesus left dead and buried in the grave.

You see, part of the understanding of Jesus' crucifixion is that in his death, Jesus took upon himself everything that is wrong, everything that is bad, everything that is unhelpful in our world, in order that it could die with him.

[4 : 1 6] greed, greed, selfishness, lust, malice, you know, all these sins and more. Jesus took all the hurt and the pain that this wrongdoing causes, so that it could die and remain dead and buried once and for all.

Jesus comes back to life, yes, but he doesn't bring back with him all that he carried with him to the grave. Now that remains buried, freeing us from its power, its presence, its hold over us.

Trouble is though, I think we're still tempted sometimes to try and kind of dig up those things which Jesus has buried for us.

So when we see perhaps, for example, someone who seems to be having a better or more glamorous life than us, you know, it's like, it's almost like we take a spade and start digging up those feelings of maybe envy or jealousy that Jesus has previously buried.

When we hold a grudge against someone who's hurt us and long for them maybe to get a bit of a taste of their own medicine, it's like we're taking a spade and digging up those feelings of malice or revenge that Jesus came to bury.

[5 : 4 1] You know, when we objectify someone as a way of satisfying our cravings perhaps, when we resent someone for taking credit for something that we've done, or allow our wants, not our needs to dictate the way we spend our money, you know, all those things and more.

It's like we're taking a spade and digging up perhaps the lust or the pride or the greed that Jesus gave his life to bury for us. You know, it's interesting that reading that we saw, Mary Magdalene initially confused Jesus for a gardener.

And we think of that as a mistake in some ways, a bit of a confusion on her part, but actually in many ways, I guess Jesus is a gardener.

You see, a gardener knows that in order to help things grow, you need to bury compost and manure in the ground, because when the rotten waste products of life are left in the ground, the result is a much healthier, growing, much more fruitful garden.

In the same way, Jesus knows that by burying everything that is wrong, you know, everything that is bad, everything that needs to decompose, if you like, it actually gives us a better, stronger, more beautiful, more flourishing, more flowering life.

[7 : 0 8] When we, when we choose our own way, when we sin, it's like we try and dig up that old manure, that old compost, and try and almost take it back and sort of separate it out in order to keep hold of it for some reason.

And I sometimes imagine if I'm thinking of doing that myself, that Jesus is like the gardener sort of standing there sort of saying, what are you doing? Are you crazy? I've already dug this in to the ground.

You know, no wonder your hands might feel dirty sometimes. No wonder your garden isn't growing as perhaps you hoped it would. put the spade down, stop digging, leave that stuff buried where it should be.

And instead, trust me to grow my fruit of my spirit in you. You see, that I would suggest is part of the beauty of Jesus' resurrection. It's not only that Jesus is alive, which he is, but it's also what he's left buried as well.

Because it's those two elements together that make up what I would say is the good news, the gospel of Jesus' love for us and for our lives. All of which, I guess, on days like today, perhaps begs the questions for each of us.

[8 : 28] What might our lives, or what from our lives, might we need Jesus' help to leave dead and buried? And what might Jesus want to bring to life in our lives?

So for example, I wonder what from our past, what might be best left there? what might we need to be best left there? So for example, think about this.

I wonder what from our past, what might be best left there? Without digging or raking it up every so often.

As you think back over the years, could be certain past relationships for us, maybe people with whom we were once close, and who perhaps we'd still wish well, but actually, maybe it's time to move on from the influence or the hold that they once had over us.

What memories of ours might actually be best left alone in the past? What friendships might have faded that we might need to let go of?

[9 : 42] Equally, it could be a current unhelpful habit or pressure that we're struggling to let go of, but which Jesus knows really needs leaving in the ground.

If it's unhelpful for us, well, we can be assured that Jesus has already taken it and its effects into the grave. But if you're like me, what kind of help might we need from Jesus to persuade us to leave it there, to put the spade down, if you like?

So it could be a habit we've developed that we know isn't actually good for us. You know, whether that's increasingly relying on social media for our approval, could be a growing gambling habit, could be a weariness of comparing our worst to other people's best, could be a compulsion, a buy stuff, you know, I don't know, all manner of things that Jesus longs to help us leave in the ground where they belong.

And I wonder, on this day, just between you and Jesus, I wonder what you'd say to him is something that you might need a bit of help from Jesus for today, to help leave buried where Jesus has put it.

But then, if we flip it more positively, I wonder, what new life, what new approaches, what new relationships might the resurrected Jesus be wanting to nurture in your life today?

[11 : 15] So it could be new relationships, new friendships, for example, perhaps an awareness that in perhaps our occasional feelings of loneliness or isolation, actually, God's given us new people to be around.

You know, there are people in this church, as we look around, who might just be the friends who God longs to connect us with, maybe for the first time.

Equally, it could be new, positive habits that Jesus forms in us, that enable us to replace old, unhelpful ones.

So perhaps rather than that kind of doom scrolling on your phone, which I'm liable to do from time to time, it depresses me, perhaps I could choose instead, I don't know, say, think of something positive, could be, instead of doing that all the time, just learn to cook or something.

I know Gemma would appreciate that in our house, if I could do that. I could do that. You know, maybe invite a friend round to try a new meal with us. It hasn't got to be a great meal. Just say, I've tried it. Do you want to try it with me?

[12 : 19] If it's rubbish, we'll sling it and try again. It doesn't matter. Just try something new, rather than that doom scrolling. You know, rather than perhaps succumbing to shopping for that little dopamine hit when we're bored and feeling low.

Perhaps we instead go for a walk to a place without shops, you know, perhaps without phone signal. Knowing that both the exercise and the space it offers us might well help us to connect with God.

But again, we could invite someone to go on that walk with us, something new. Someone new, perhaps, to build something fresh with. Maybe we use some of our time to volunteer or serve in something new, you know, springtime.

What new thing could we get involved with? Whether a group here at church or in our community, down at Sankey's, wherever. We're expanding our horizons and increasing our self-worth all while doing something positive for someone else.

I don't know. It'll be different for each of us, I know. But I do know that for each of us, myself included, we do well to think about both of these things.

[13 : 26] To leave some things buried while giving God the opportunity to grow new things in our lives. What's more, I think the same is true of the way in which we might understand and experience our faith and the way we relate to God.

For example, I'm aware that in terms of our church life here at St. John's, or perhaps your own personal faith journey, you know, maybe walking through these doors this morning, maybe that's been quite a big thing for you. That's been quite a brave step.

Maybe your decision to come here this morning or to come back to church recently is a kind of physical statement of intent on your part. In a practical way of saying to God, look, I'm not sure about everything, but I want to be on this journey of life with you.

And maybe walking through that door from time to time is part of that commitment. If you being here today is your way of asking God to help you to leave some things from your past behind and embrace a new openness with God, to God, and see where that leads.

If that is you, if you have that to sum up a bit of oomph to come here today, then good on you, good on you today. I know it can be a tough thing, but we're glad you're here.

[14 : 55] And rest assured, we are all just working things out. So you're in good company, feeling your way through life. Equally though, I suspect there'll be some of us here who might feel like we're kind of hanging on a bit, maybe hanging on to our faith, sometimes by the tips of our fingers.

You know, that might come into focus on days like this, where it's a day of celebration, and we're just, if we're honest, not quite feeling it, perhaps. Maybe you've reached a stage of life, stage on your faith journey, where what you once felt, once you once enjoyed, what you once experienced, and it kind of no longer seems to be working, should we say.

Maybe you've become understandably, I think, sometimes disillusioned by the state in which institutions like the Church of England seem to find themselves in, that you're not sure you really ever want to be part of something called church anymore.

Maybe there's a tiredness or a lack of connection for you with God. Maybe as you look around, you're aware of friends or folks who have left things that have changed, and there's a sadness and a sense of loss that comes with that.

If that's you, then I think on this of all days, I want to reassure you that the living, resurrected Jesus, he knows, he sees that, he understands all that you're feeling.

[16 : 33] He sees your doubts, maybe your numbness at things, but with the same tenderness with which he said Mary's name to her in the garden.

I'd suggest Jesus is saying your name to you this morning. A way of saying, I know you, I see you, I love you.

Let's start again, shall we? Indeed, in that starting again, I wonder if the kind of thing Jesus might be saying as some of us might be something like this, might be like, look, let me help you to leave those hurts, those disappointments, those feelings of disconnection in the ground.

That's not to deny they're not or haven't been real, but they're not going to help you going forward. Instead, let me heal those hurts by showing you the new life that's on offer, the new ways of understanding, the new people I'm offering to you to journey with.

You know, that for me, that offer of Jesus is why I genuinely feel privileged to be vicar here, because the resurrected Jesus is constantly doing something new.

[18 : 01] He is the gardener. He's constantly growing something new. That's why I love it that we've had, what, maybe 50 new people, I think, join us over the last year or so, adults and children.

Because with them, with you, with that comes new friends, you know, new enthusiasm, new personalities, new gifts, new life for us as a church.

But equally, that's why I love it that there are a number of us for whom this has remained their church, our church for years, you know, for decades even.

Because like any good garden, you know, that mix of established and new, of fresh and familiar, that's what makes this garden, this church, such a joy to be a part of.

Yes, like any garden, it takes a while to settle down, takes a while to gel, to get to know each other, to find our place. Yes, we won't always get here, perhaps as often as we might hope. And yes, some have decided that this changing church is no longer for them.

[19 : 10] And that's okay. But if Jesus is the resurrection, which he is, and if Jesus is the life, which he is, then we can trust him to build his church here in this place, here among us, so that we might be able to share the good news of his love with all those who God has given us to live alongside.

And one final bit. You know, it's interesting that for all the imagery of a gardener, and spring and new life and so on that's associated with Easter and resurrection Sunday, Jesus is also in the habit of using imagery, not just of a garden and growth, but of building and construction to describe his ways and his work.

You know, that language he uses of, I will build my church. It's interesting, it's not I will grow my church, I will build my church. I guess that ties in with what Jesus did for a living, you know, his nine to five, we might say, when he was growing up.

The Bible describes Jesus, the Greek word it's used is tekton, tekton. Sometimes translated as carpenter, but more likely it means a craftsman or a stonemason.

Indeed, in Jesus' time, stone was much more available than wood for construction. So it's likely that Jesus was essentially a builder. He was a bricklayer. That's who Jesus was.

[20 : 42] We see this reflected in his parables and his stories that he told. People building towers or houses of laying good foundations of likening himself to a building, the temple.

You know, all images connected with the way in which Jesus was keen to help us build our lives on him. And yet what's also interesting is that in a time and a culture in which we find ourselves today, you know, when church has become perhaps more on the fringes of society, when faith in God can be a little bit sketchy, when some of the inherited ways of seeing God or doing church life no longer seem always relevant or even right.

The word that's often used to describe this sense of change is a building term. It's this word. It's deconstruction. It's like a wall or a house being taken apart brick by brick, where what we once felt sure about no longer seems as sturdy as it once did or as secure.

I guess in some ways this deconstruction in our society of what people often feel about, perhaps in our faith, it's a kind of death, really.

A dying to what was before, a leaving behind of what once was. Maybe, though, maybe it's a good thing that some of these previous things have been deconstructed.

[22 : 21] Deconstructed like a good thing, as in Good Friday, perhaps. Why is that? Well, because out of this death, this deconstruction, comes life.

What we might say is reconstruction. That's what the resurrected, living Jesus is all about. Not just leaving things deteriorated or demolished, but working to build a new, improved, resurrected life.

Brick by brick, stone by stone. And we can take this analogy in both a personal and a corporate way. So on a personal level, as we were saying before, I wonder for us what bricks Jesus the builder, you know, the resurrected Jesus, might be wanting to reconstruct our lives with.

Bricks of patience, of grace, of kindness, of generosity, of inclusion. Could be new bricks of friendship. That mean when someone comes to church and we don't know, we make a deliberate choice of introducing ourselves and saying, Ah, we've not spoken before.

How you doing? How you finding all this? Maybe bricks of humility that are open to the fact that everyone has something from which we might learn.

[23 : 45] Maybe bricks of honesty. When someone asks how we're doing, we're prepared to be open because that's really how church life is built. But in thinking more corporately, the reconstruction that the resurrected Jesus builds means that each of us, both you and I, are a brick.

We're a stone in the house, the church that Jesus is building. A bit like that body of Christ metaphor. Each of us is therefore crucial for how that house looks, how that house stands, how that house becomes a home, how that church becomes a people.

You know, just as Dave got us the other week of you were here to all write our names when we arrived on a big sheet of paper out in a foyer. So each of us, known by name to Jesus, are an equally essential, particularly precious part of the house that God, that Jesus is building.

And best of all, Jesus is with us in that house as head of the house. Because through his death and resurrection, as Jesus himself quoted, he said, the stone the builders rejected him has become the cornerstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. Jesus is the living stone. I'd say the cornerstone of our faith.

[25 : 21] The one who embraces death and deconstruction in order to bring his life and reconstruction. Whatever that looks like in our lives.

Because he is the one who is the resurrection and the life. And so this Easter, this resurrection Sunday, I think my prayer is that wherever we are on our journey with Jesus, that we would find assurance and know the deepest of hope because of Jesus' life-giving love for us.

Love which helps us to leave in the ground all that is unhelpful while helping us to grow and nurture and build a life worthy of his resurrection power.