Easter Sunday 31st March 2024 - The Resurrected Jesus

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Date: 31 March 2024

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0:00] We're going to begin thinking about the Easter story with a little video, a passage from John's Gospel, which covers one of the occasions in which the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples.

Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord.
But he 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.
A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and 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.
[1:13] See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.
All right. So this is Resurrection Sunday.
This day when we remember and celebrate the wonder of Jesus coming back to life. And it's a day that the Bible tells us, on which a number of Jesus' followers saw him.
And we have stories of Mary Magdalene, of Peter, the two companions on the road to Emmaus.
And then Jesus' disciples as a group, both male and female, as they gathered together later on, on that first Easter Sunday night.
[2:22] And yet, as we saw, one of Jesus' disciples, Thomas, he was absent. He got an AWOL.
Now we're not quite sure what he was doing. Instead, to miss out on all this.

Could have been shopping or sleeping or working or engrossed in a box set or something. We just don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. But for whatever reason, Thomas missed out on seeing the risen Jesus.
Now presumably he turned up at some stage because we're told that the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. So he was still included, still part of their gang.
But he's obviously not buying their story because he responds this way. He says, 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.
Now we don't know if Thomas saw the crucifixion in person, sort of watched it from afar. Most of the disciples seem to have done a runner, it seems.
[3:25] But he clearly knows that Jesus was killed because he talks about his body having nail marks on his hand and his side and so on. But Thomas says, unless he sees and touches these wounds himself, he won't believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.

And really, who can blame him? Who can blame him with that? It is a pretty far-fetched story, this rising back from the dead of Jesus stuff.
Yes, he'd seen Jesus raise other people from the dead. So he'd seen Lazarus being raised in Bethany. He had Jairus' daughter in Capernaum, had the widow's son in the town of Nain.
But it's surely a whole different level for Jesus, having been so brutally killed, to then raise himself effectively from the dead. And I've got a soft spot for Thomas.
I feel quite sorry for him, I think, really. Not just because he missed out on seeing the risen Jesus with the rest of the disciples. You know, that's a lot of FOMO to deal with, I tell you.

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[4:32] But what's more, because he missed out and therefore lacked the proof he needed. He's been lumbered ever since with this label of being doubting Thomas.

His life defined by one day. Which feels a bit harsh, really. Because Thomas has still got faith. He's still around.
I guess, though, his faith is maybe compromised a bit. Because it seems that he's decided to put his deepest faith, perhaps at this point, in his own understanding.
His own sort of rational view of the world. Rather than placing it in Jesus or in a testimony of his friends. And I guess we could say that every doubt is simply the decision to put our faith in something else.
So, for example, if I doubt that a rickety old chair would take my weight, it's because I've got more faith in gravity to do its thing than I have in the chair to support me.
[5:39] You know, my faith in gravity is greater than my faith in the chair. I've still got faith. I've just decided to put it in a different thing. Or when I doubt, for example, that West Ham will win.

It simply means that I've got more faith in the opposition than I have in West Ham. Even when you're 3-1 up with 20 minutes to go and then you end up losing 4-3. For example.
For example. And so when our faith in God feels lacking, I'd suggest it's really that our faith in something else is greater.
You know, faith perhaps in ourselves to be able to make the best sense of the world and this life without the need for God. Might say faith perhaps in what we can see and hear and touch and taste and smell more than our faith in the idea that there's something or even someone beyond our awareness or our understanding.
And yet for all the virtues of that confidence in human intelligence, you know, for all of Thomas' sort of understandable, I think, insistence in needing to be convinced, you know, his eyes soon see, his ears hear, and his hands, as he wanted, touch what he thought was just not possible.
[7:06] The living and the resurrected Jesus. It's worth noting, though, that before Jesus says to Thomas, you know, go on, put your finger here and so on.

What's the very first thing he hears coming out of Jesus' mouth? It's when Jesus says this. He says, peace be with you. Peace be with you. In other words, to Thomas and all of those gathered there, you know, be whole, be assured, be fully yourself, and most of all, be still and know that I am God. Allow my peace to rest on you, says Jesus. Peace which doesn't undermine understanding, rather peace which surpasses all understanding.
It's that kind of deep peace, that profound gut sense of knowing beyond doubt, that whatever difficulties we might face, whatever confusion we might be in, ultimately, because of Jesus, all will be well.
And in having declared peace over them, it's only then that Jesus says, go on then, Thomas, here you go. Reach out your hand. You know, in other words, allow your senses to catch up with what you know now, deep down, to be true.
[8:37] And no wonder we saw Thomas sort of fall to his knees in that clip there. Perhaps a sign of his humility. No wonder he declares to Jesus, my Lord and my God.

Why is it no wonder? Because I guess in this moment of encounter, all of his ideas about life, his ideas of what's possible, his ideas of just who Jesus is, have suddenly got bigger, if you like.
We might say his ideas, look at that smile, have come alive. You know, his faith is suddenly filled with new possibilities, new understanding, new wonder, new hope.
It's a proper mind-blown moment for him. You might call it an experience in the flesh of revelation, of realization, ultimately, of resurrection.
And I'd say for us, that's what Jesus and his resurrection is in the business of helping us to experience. That whatever limited or narrow or preconceived ideas you might have about who God is and what God's like, there will always be more to surprise us, more to discover, more to enjoy, about the ways that God is present and at work in the world.
[9:57] It's interesting, Jesus himself said that the spirit of God blows wherever it pleases. And so just as the wind can't be tamed, and just as the risen Jesus couldn't be contained in a tomb, so to, I think, our ideas of God, they can't be neatly packaged in a box, in a book, or even in a belief.

Now, the resurrection of Jesus tells us that there's always more to come with God, that a bigger, deeper, wider faith in God is always on offer for us to discover and embrace.

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And so what might that look like? What would that mean in practice? Well, if I think of my life, I think there's a number of times when I'd say God has enlivened or enlarged my understanding of who he is and in the different ways of how he is already relating to the world.
For example, one time that's stuck with me, that took place a good few years ago, about 15 years ago now, was when I had the privilege of going to Egypt with an organization called Open Doors, who work with persecuted Christians.
And one of the things we did was visit a big Christian youth conference held in a warehouse way out in the desert. You know, it was a remarkable setting.
[11:30] But at the time, I took a little video of the worship songs that were going on. And here's a little clip of one of them, which is being sung in Arabic.

And here's a little clip of one of them, which is being sung in Arabic. You're Allah, you're an army You're Allah, you're an army I'll bring you Allah There you go, there you go Now do you recognise that song?
Yeah, How Great Is Our God It's the English version of it Except because they were singing it in Arabic in Egypt It comes out as how great is Allah Allah Now, how does that make you feel?
How does that make you feel? Christians singing how great is Allah Maybe surprised Maybe makes you feel a bit intrigued As to quite what's going on I think for me as I listened to it In this Muslim country It provoked all sorts of questions Such as Well, who are Muslims therefore praising When they sing to Allah?
Same God As we do? If so, how does God respond To their worship? And then I was thinking Well, if Jesus is God And God's name is Allah In Arabic Then does that mean that Jesus is Allah?
[13:27] And does that mean that any worship of God Is by default worship of Jesus Even when people don't realise That they're worshipping Jesus? And then where's the Holy Spirit In all of this?

Just a few little questions for you to ponder over lunch Alright For me, they're all interesting Challenging questions And the good news is I'm not going to ask you to turn to your neighbour And talk about this one Alright I'm not looking for answers today But I simply pose those questions I simply share that experience As an example for me Of how the neat categories You know, the neat box I might even say the neat tomb In which I tried to place Jesus Suddenly couldn't contain him He just got bigger Shall we say Now Jesus was and is alive And that means he's challenging me I'd say challenging us In new ways New ways which mean that our idea of God Well, my idea of God certainly As I say, just got bigger And most importantly This was, I'll say This was a good few years ago now This experience humbled me I was quite sure perhaps
In a way Cocky Cockshaw Shall we say About some of the things That I believed perhaps at the time But this experience And others associated with it They humbled me In a good way Became less certain perhaps Of what I thought I knew But at the same time More open-minded To the possibilities Of how God Is at work In ways far beyond My limited understanding What else?
Well, how else has my faith Been enlarged or enlivened By the fact that Jesus Is alive and active?
Well, I've been struck of late I was listening to a book on Spotify Called Curveball Which is well worth having to listen to If you want By a guy called Pete Enns He was talking about How relatively recent It's been Since Jesus was on earth 2,000 years or so Now that may feel like A long time for us Especially when we grumble About an hour 2,000 years is a long time I know But humans Have been around Long before that So there's This, for example Which is The oldest piece Of representative Art That we've so far Found It's a cave painting Of a pig Found in Indonesia And this has been dated To around 43,000 Years ago
And you think That's old How about this figure Here From Morocco Where the shaping of it Has been dated To over 200,000 Years ago That's 100 times Further back Than Jesus is From our time Now With those kind of Figures and years In mind If we accept That Jesus Is eternal You know The word At the beginning As we sing And as it says In John's gospel That's at least 200,000 years Of humanity That Jesus Is aware of And has been Relating to 300,000 years If we agree With the science That says That's when Homo sapiens First emerged That's an awful Long time That is a long time For people to have Been relating to God And for God To be relating to them Hundreds of Thousands of years Of experience
[17:12] And wisdom Accrued All without The benefit Of the written Bible And without The advantage Of having The person of Jesus And a record Of his life To flesh out Their understanding Of what God Is really like Now it's interesting It's kind of Covered a little bit In the Bible It says this In the book of Romans It says this Since the creation Of the world God's Invisible qualities His eternal

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power And the divine nature Have been Clearly seen Being understood From what Has been made And so if our Ancient ancestors Could relate to God We could say Could relate to Jesus Primarily through Creation And the nature That surrounded them I think it tells me How much more Humble How much more Expectant Might we be That Jesus Will do As he's always Done And will be

Speaking to us Through Our Surroundings And so when God Says you know Count the stars Lift your eyes To the hills When Jesus says Consider the lilies Of the field Look at the birds Watch the skies Think about seeds And trees I think he means It I think he means It Because these Are the Timeless ways In which God Has always Been speaking To our species But most of all I'd say Well I suggest I think That means That the physical Resurrection Of Jesus Therefore takes on Even more meaning Because it's Jesus' way of saying That this whole history This whole creation This whole life Is worth it You know It matters History and creation And life Which therefore Need honouring And protecting
And enjoying Jesus' Physical resurrection Not just a spiritual Resurrection A physical resurrection Is an endorsement Of the wonder And the worth Of this world And of our Physical life You know This gift of life Which Jesus Is prepared To die for In order to be Raised again Into And that means That every hug Every handshake Every small act Of help Every humble act Of hope Every decision To care For the environment They all speak Of and celebrate The reality Of the physical Resurrection The resurrection Which reveals That ultimately God Hasn't given up On the world Now he's hopeful For the world Because he came back Into it And that means That we Can live With that same Hope As well But then what else
What else How else Does the resurrection Of Jesus Enlarge Or enliven Our understanding Of who God is And how God Relates to us Well lastly And most importantly I'd say The resurrection Of Jesus Means that he Is alive Today Today And that Is good news That's the best news News which is not Just worth celebrating But news Which if we allow it Can shape Our everyday Lives See I often Get a little bit Jealous I think Of the disciples You know These ordinary people Who had the privilege Of living alongside Jesus When he was on earth You know How Amazing Would it have been To have had Jesus On tap You know Just have a chat With him Over a glass of wine Or You know Lamb kebab Or whatever they used to have How amazing Would it have been To be encouraged
In person By Jesus To ask all your questions To him To see how he handled himself And in turn Learn from that You know Quite apart from having someone Who was pretty good at miracles And could turn water into wine I'd take him down a pub every night I'd tell you It would be good It would be good And yet the privilege Is Well the privilege that we have Is that this same Jesus Is the one who offers himself To each of us By his spirit Today You know To have our own Dynamic Ongoing Living Relationship With him What might the impact Of this living relationship Be On our faith And our understanding Well I was struck For example By something that Phil said The other week When he shared that In Jane He'd been watching The Chosen Series On TV About the life of Jesus And I think Phil said He'd been reminded Of just how
[22:17] Radical Jesus Was And he's absolutely right He's absolutely right Jesus was So radical So challenging That It got him killed People couldn't handle How radical He was But what's also true Is that having been Raised to life And now being alive Today I'd say the resurrected Jesus The Jesus we know And relate to He's still as radical And as challenging As ever Only now He's asking us To be radical In our time And in our culture In the same way That he was asking The disciples To be radical In theirs Now I fully understand That as soon As we think about Being radical Our first response Might be Oh do you know what I'm quite tired Really I'm quite tired I'm not quite sure I've got the energy To be radical Especially after losing An hour's sleep And so on

And I understand that I understand that And this tiredness Might especially be the case If we're parenting Young children Or caring for relatives Or living with Long term health conditions And so on But if that is our response Then how might we still be radical Within that tiredness Well perhaps the radical thing Might be To ask God to help us To see How we might become Less tired You know Sounds obvious But it's pretty profound For our life Seeing what we could start Saying no to Or decluttering In a Stacey Solomon Kind of way About downsizing perhaps Switching off from things Maybe eating more Or less of the things That are good for us Maybe Being radical Means addressing The reasons Why we need to feel Or why we often Find ourselves So Busy Maybe Radical Means Doing less Actually Not Doing more

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Easier said than done And I am Speaking to myself As much or if not more Than anyone But the good news is We have to live in Jesus And we have This community To help us work Things out For others of us I guess being radical Might mean not being Distracted By the pressure To compete You know To feel like We're missing out On living our best life Just because Other people Are posting Carefully curated photos On their social media field Comparison Is exhausting It's the thief Of joy So maybe the radical thing Might be to step back From all that And find joy In what we can be Not What we can't Equally perhaps Radical for us Might mean A greater sense of honesty Of not automatically Replying Yeah I'm fine How are you When someone asks
How we're doing Especially if we're not Or maybe making it Our mission To have the most Honest Messy Warts and all Photos On our social media field You know Posting pictures Of the piles Of washing up Rather than just The meal That we've got You know Photos of the Greyest of days Rather than The spectacular sunsets You know Simply but profoundly To say You know what Jesus is with me In the grey As much as in the sunshine As well Maybe radical Radical means I don't know Choosing to have Fewer holidays Or meals out And instead Giving that money To a family Who otherwise Couldn't afford them Maybe radical means Plucking up the courage To talk to someone new Each week Or to ask someone How you can pray for them Or to invite That neighbour To drop in One week I don't know I don't know You'll know For yourself What would put you Out of your comfort zone What would be radical For you
You know Whatever radical Means for us It's a word Which originally Comes from The word For being rooted Like radish To be rooted And this is key Because that's What being radical Is all about Being rooted In the same way That the resurrection Jesus Was rooted Once again In the physical World But we are rooted In a knowledge Of Jesus' Love for us Rooted In Jesus' Sustaining of us Rooted In Jesus' Peace Being spoken Over us And above all It's about being Rooted in The resurrection Jesus The one Who is Our living hope I guess In all of this You know For this Easter And beyond My prayer For me And for you Is that Through the wonder
[27:19] And through the reality Of Jesus' Resurrection We'd be able to Recognize You know In new ways That the breadth And the depth And the heights Of God's loving Presence in the world With us That we'd have New eyes to see And new ears to hear And new hands To experience The sheer range Of ways That the radical Yet resurrected Jesus Is alive And is active In all sorts Of ways In the world Today And perhaps Most importantly For us On this Easter Sunday That we too Would invite This same Living presence Of Jesus To be As Thomas himself Declared Our Lord And our God Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

So All the different In the first Verse

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