

Easter Hope!

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen.

What a privilege to be here on Easter Sunday morning. And what a privilege to see a full room, even though we're sitting a long way from each other.

Is that echoing too much? Let's read from Mark chapter 16. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices so that they might go and anoint him.

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went out to the tomb. They'd been saying to one another, who will roll the stone away for us from the entrance to the tomb?

When they looked up, they saw the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side.

[1 : 30] And they were alarmed. But he said to them, do not be alarmed. You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised.

He is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee.

There you will see him, just as he told you. So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them.

So here we are on Easter Sunday morning 2021. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. I read a book once about preaching. You wouldn't be able to tell, but I did read it. And one of the things it said is that one should never preach a sermon without there being a message of hope in it.

[2 : 39] And I want to just talk about hope this morning. We gather in really strange circumstances to celebrate one of the most wonderful events in the Christian calendar.

We meet socially distanced, with masks on, not singing, sanitizing our hands as we come in and as we go out, and not having bacon sandwiches either.

It's really weird. Really odd. And this week, as we've thought about the Easter story again, we've walked through the joy and celebration, the exuberance, the excitement, the hoorays and hosannas of Palm Sunday.

And then, through the week, into the agony, the bloody agony of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, his blood shed, his body broken.

It's not possible to overstate that pain. We read of Jesus crying out in physical, emotional and spiritual pain to his Father in Heaven.

[4 : 15] And then, of his death. And we've read of the sadness and despair of those who were closest to him.

Men and women who called him their master and their friend. And now we come to this glorious Easter Sunday morning.

The sun's shining. The daffodils are out. The sky and the countryside look beautiful. And we celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death and his gift of life through his resurrection.

One of the most, one of the real privileges of preaching on Easter Sunday morning is the vast array of passages to choose from. The huge number of messages and lessons we can learn from these momentous few days in the life of Christ.

And so we must celebrate. We should celebrate. It's right to celebrate and we will. And we do. And we give great thanks to God our Father.

[5 : 33] To Jesus our risen Saviour. To the Holy Spirit our comforter and our guide. And yet at the same time we must remember it's been a funny old year hasn't it?

A year like none other unless you're old enough to remember the Spanish flu of 1918 and of course many of us remember the bubonic plague of 1347.

but it has been a year like none other. Lockdown social isolation test and trace and the new currency of who's had the vaccine and who hasn't.

All things that we had no knowledge of just a few months ago. and this day last year saw the restrictions not allowing us to meet in person to celebrate our risen Christ.

The first time in my nearly 57 years I've not worshipped in public on Easter Sunday morning and it hurt. And of course some of us have suffered loss as family and friends have died become really very poorly.

[7 : 03] Some of us have suffered loss of jobs of security of peace. And so as we reflect on Easter Sunday morning it's right and proper that while we rejoice and celebrate we also reflect on the sombre sense of the cost of this last year.

And this is the mystery of our faith. The mystery that Paul talks about. And I've been reminded this week as I've been preparing of the line from the great hymn of praise and celebration.

Great is thy faithfulness. And the line that says strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. God is the love of God.

God give me the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed. Courage to change the things which should be changed and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

[8 : 37] Living one day at a time. Enjoying one moment at a time. Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.

Taking as Jesus did this sinful world as it is. not how I would have it. Trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will.

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next. You see our walk as Christians is a walk filled with challenge.

Sometimes self-inflicted challenge. Sometimes challenge that we find ourselves facing through other people. All sorts of reasons.

And as we come through this year and as we see the beginnings of hope as we see the beginnings of lifting the lockdown. As we think about potentially when we can meet together and take our masks off.

[9 : 58] When we can sing together. When we can break bread together. We need to remember that all of this is part of our journey with Christ.

All of this is part of who we are as Christians. As people who follow the Lord Jesus. He himself who faced so many challenges.

But of course for him yet without sin. And so at Easter time we must reflect. We must reflect on the joy but we must too reflect on the challenge.

How have I dealt with this year? How have I dealt with the massive change? What's God trying to teach me this year?

And as we think of hope we think of the hope of the life changing truth of Jesus. but the life changing truth is life changing.

[11 : 14] And that's part of the point. We need to become people who are changed. People who are changed from glory to glory till in heaven we take our place.

I'm quoting lots of hymns this morning, aren't I? And I suppose that this is one of the things that I've been reflecting on and one of the things that I've wanted to talk about this morning.

This idea of journey. Very much appropriate on Easter Sunday morning but very much appropriate in Whitby. The notion of pilgrimage.

The notion of journeying. The notion of taking each step with Christ. going where he leads us.

Doing what he asks us to do. And coming back to him for the strength, the comfort and the next set of instructions.

[12 : 19] Christians. And so let's have a look at what happened in this passage in Mark 16 that I read. Three women getting up early, going to anoint the body of their friend and master.

Doing so in the knowledge that they saw him killed. Doing so in the knowledge that they saw him taken from a cross, dead. And buried in a tomb, in a cave, behind an enormous stone.

And they went because they loved him and because they were committed to him. They went to anoint his body with oil and aromatics and they went to do that because it was part of the tradition.

They went to do that because it was part of their love even though they knew he was dead or they thought they knew he was dead. And they went because they wanted to stop the body smelling. And as they wandered along the road they said, well how on earth are we going to get into the tomb? Did you see the size of that stone? They put across the entrance to the cave. And when they got there the stone was rolled away.

[14:00] The stone had been moved. So that was a relief for them and they went in and they found not Jesus' body lying there but they found a young man dressed in white.

It's a rather nice narrative isn't it? He was just sitting there waiting for them. Sitting on the right there waiting for him. And as angels do he said don't be afraid.

Angels always say that and I always think well you know easy for you to say. And then he said I know why you're here.

You're looking for Jesus aren't you? Well yeah sort of. Well he's not here. He's alive. Just imagine for a moment what was going through those women's brains.

They were coming with sadness with despair with pain to anoint their friend's body. And instead of finding their friend's body lying prone and lifeless.

[15:15] They were met with an angel who said don't be afraid he's not here he's alive. Now it's worth remembering of course that Jesus told his disciples that this would happen.

But they either didn't understand or they didn't believe it. We don't know whether the disciples who were men went home and told their women folk.

We don't know that. But Jesus told his friends that he would come back alive resurrected and it had to happen like this.

and he said you best just go across to Galilee.

Go on a journey to Galilee and he'll meet you there. This is an astounding thing for the women to process.

[16:29] they were met with something completely different. And that's what it needs to be like for us on Easter Sunday morning.

We need to have that sense of profound wonder, of astonishment. We know the story. We've read to the end of the book. We know how it ends.

But if we lose the mystery and the wonder of Easter Sunday morning, the celebration and the delight of those women who are saying, our friend is not dead, he's alive.

Don't understand how. Seems a bit odd to us. We're going to run away a bit fearful. But the truth is that Jesus Christ is alive.

And in the mix of this extraordinary year, we mustn't ever lose sight of the astonishing mystery and the astonishing miracle and the astonishing joy and the astonishing celebration of our risen Lord Jesus.

[17:56] Of course we have trouble. Of course we have challenge. Of course we have sadness. Of course we have more to come. But we celebrate a God of hope.

hope. And we therefore can be hopeful people. The mystery of our faith as Paul talks about in Colossians 1 but also the hope of glory.

And as we stand or sit here today many of us will have conflicting feelings. Looking back to a really tough and for some a sad year. Looking forward the real hope of things slowly getting better.

It's a bit like we've climbed a hill and we're standing on a summit looking back at where we've come. Remembering the tough bits.

Remembering perhaps the scary bits. Remembering the rather more enjoyable bits. But we got to the top. And as we look forward we might have more climbing to do.

[19:15] We might have more work to do. But we can look to promise of rest and being home at the end of that journey.

As we follow the way of Jesus there will be times of wondrous joy. And we need to be deliberate and celebrate that. Equally there will be times which are hard, sad and confusing.

And as a fellowship together we must be honest about that too. But this Easter Sunday morning we can be sure of these things.

Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. He is alive forevermore. Wherever we are today on our journey with Christ, wherever we are on our journey today in our life, we have hope in him.

True hope and a true future. The Holy Spirit, the gift from God, strengthens us in our time of need.

[20 : 34] He is with us. He will comfort us and guide us. And we can look forward with hope to a time of being supremely happy in future eternity with Jesus.

this Easter Sunday morning. Be hopeful. Be a hopeful people because that is what God promises. That's the point of Easter Sunday morning. Salvation and hope. May God give us each strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

A very happy Easter to you all. Amen.