

“Easter changes everything”

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31 March 2013 Isaiah 65:17-25 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 Luke 24:1-12

Easter changes everything. The resurrection of Christ changes everything. God's purpose and joy in creating human beings is restored. The power of evil, the blight of human weakness and failing, the scourge of suffering, the persistent experience of human competitiveness and hostility, and the oblivion of death no longer hold sway. Christ's coming to life again puts all these in their place, transcends them, reinstates God's gifts of love and life and peace offered to all.

Most sermons they say, should have three good points – today I'm giving you five! But be assured it won't be too long. I want to share with you five ways in which Easter, the resurrection of Christ, changes things.

First, suffering. Suffering has been part and parcel of the human experience ever since life began. We know pain, physical and emotional; we frequently struggle for happiness; we work hard for our living and can experience deep weariness; we are hurt by others; disease afflicts us; life is not always good. But the resurrection of Christ changes our suffering in at least two ways – one is that we now know suffering is not all there is, we now know that suffering is not God's plan for human life, we now know there is always reason for hope, for even death can be overcome; the other is that there's no doubt now God fully understands what human suffering is like, for Jesus suffered dreadfully in his arrest and trial and execution, and the risen and eternally alive Jesus, God's Son, knows what we go through, listens and understands, and offers comfort, hope and ultimately healing to us all.

A second way Easter changes things is that evil and human sinfulness no longer triumph. Jesus is arrested and executed because the religious authorities refuse to be open to God and reject Jesus as a danger to their power and influence, and because the Roman political authorities want no whiff of public uprising, don't care about what's right or just only what is in the empire's interests. And mob rule plays a part too, the crowd incited to shout “crucify him, crucify him”. Jesus is killed, he's dead and buried – evil smiles. But the resurrection tells us that evil does not and will not win out in the end. And resurrection inspires us to challenge the powers of evil and sinfulness, certain that God is on the side of good and that God's power will prevail.

Third, life beyond death. Christ's resurrection carries the promise that all who trust in him, even where our trust is partial and weak, will receive the gift of eternal life too. While I think Paul overstates it when he argues for God's gift of life beyond death and he writes “if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” – for the resurrection and faith in Christ carry more benefits than “just” eternal life – nevertheless it's a magnificent change in our understanding of life. Death is not the end. Hark back to the story of Adam and Eve where God's intention, until with the gift of freewill human disobedience and sin emerged, was for people to live forever. The symbolic “tree of life” stood in the garden of Eden, to nourish human life forever, and it reappears at the very end of our Scriptures too, in the book of Revelation. While we know very little about the nature of life beyond death, while it is mystery to us, it has always been part of God's promise for human beings made in his image, mirroring the eternal life of God. Christ's resurrection restores God's gift of life eternal.

Fourth, Easter provides fresh purpose for our living. Think of how the disciples, women and men, were transformed by the resurrection. Their first reaction on finding the tomb empty was of course confusion, bewilderment, then amazement, fear – then when they meet the

risen Jesus and discover he's defeated even death, they're in awe, they worship, and they take on new responsibility, new roles, new leadership, empowered by the resurrection of Christ. So with us, we too are called by God and empowered by God to be witnesses to this good news of God's love and victory in Christ, to live the abundant life of generosity, humility, unselfishness, peace-making, service, seeking justice, love – fresh purpose and power and joy for our living.

And fifth, Easter means God is always with us, the God who has lived a human life in Jesus and knows what it's like to suffer and struggle, to rejoice and celebrate, is with us. In Matthew's gospel the very final sentence is the promise of the risen Jesus that he is with us, his followers, to the end of the age, while ever the world exists. In the prophecy of Isaiah we heard this morning about God's new heavens and new earth, God says he will answer our prayers before we even give voice to them, "while they are yet speaking I will hear" he says. For me this is perhaps the most important of the ways Easter changes things – God is always with us, always available, knowing us, caring for us, wanting to embrace us with gifts of love and peace and purpose and joy. Other benefits, like eternal life, are extra bonuses!

So friends, this morning rejoice. Christ is alive, our risen Lord is with us. Evil and sin do not succeed. Suffering does end, living with God does not. Life is empowered. Easter changes everything.

To the glory of God. Amen.