

Easter Sunday – 20th April 2014 – Wesley 10.30 & St Aidan's

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10 'The Resurrection'

Introduction

'Jesus lives' is the major theme of Resurrection/Easter Sunday and this should show in our lives.

There is the true account of Martin Luther King Jnr. being called upon by local church leaders to ease up in his agitation for civil rights. King responded in a sermon in Montgomery that is often called 'Our God is Marching On'. In that sermon King mocked the desire of white moderates for a return to a more comfortable, placid world of the 'old order'. He vowed defiantly, "No, we will not allow Alabama to return to normalcy." 'A world in which racial segregation made sense has ended', he proclaimed. He asserted that from his Christian faith that after God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, forget 'normalcy'. The power to and for change had occurred. The 'catch cry' of 'Jesus lives' changes everything!

The Text

There is little normalcy in the reading for today from Matthew 28:1-10.

We have the two Mary's who go to the tomb.

There is the violent earthquake.

The angel of the Lord comes, rolls back the stone and sits on it.

The angel has the appearance of lightning with bright white clothing.

Meanwhile the guards are in a dead faint.

The angel tells the women not to be afraid (most unlikely to happen in this scenario) and shows them the empty tomb.

(There is no account of Jesus leaving the tomb or how he left the tomb.)

The angel then tells the women to go and tell the other disciples what has happened.

The women go with joy to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen, and are confronted by the risen Jesus. They obviously bow down in worship of him grasping his feet.

Not many of us would call any of this 'normal' but here is one account of the resurrection.

What do we make of this?

Firstly, there is an 'in-breaking' of the power of God in a way that is incredibly difficult to explain.

Secondly, the tomb is empty and the women witness that fact.

Thirdly, the women experience the joy of the risen Lord in a very real sense. The change in the women is tangible, real and life changing. This is the amazing truth of Easter – 'Jesus lives'.

Marcus Borg and John Crossan in their book, 'The Last Week – What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem' (page 205) write:

“...the truth of the affirmation “Jesus lives” is grounded in the experience of Christians throughout the centuries. Not all Christians have had such an experience. It is not essential. To quote from one of John’s Easter accounts, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ However, some Christians to the present day have experienced Jesus as a living reality for themselves.’ Certainly this is what Martin Luther King Jnr was proclaiming as he spoke out about breaking down racial segregation. He asserts that we are all one in Christ from his personal Christian experiences.

Earlier Borg and Crossan state:

“.. the appearance stories in the gospels make explicit what is promised in Mark: ‘You will see him’ (referring to Jesus). They underline the parabolic meaning of Mark’s story of the empty tomb: Jesus is not among the dead, but among the living. ...Jesus is a figure of the present, not simply of the past. The presence his followers had known in Jesus before his crucifixion continued to be experienced and to operate after it.”

This is the living, risen Christ still present with us in so many ways even today. This is what we affirm as we say “Jesus lives”.

Jesus lives today!

We have journeyed through Lent and Holy Week to this Resurrection Sunday. There is much we do not know or comprehend in the resurrection but for all of us we have seen or experienced the changed life or lives brought forth through knowing Jesus as our Risen Lord. We have seen the massive positive impact where truly Christ-like lives have changed the world for the betterment of humanity. In a moment we are going to have a time where we re-affirm our Baptismal vows which gives us a chance to re-dedicate ourselves in following Jesus and living out our faith. Also we will share in Holy Communion. Use these times to come afresh to the empty tomb and meet our risen Lord. Use this time to look at yourself and look to what Christ is calling you to do.

On this Easter Sunday we celebrate the fact that “Jesus lives”. May our lives reflect that high calling. Amen.