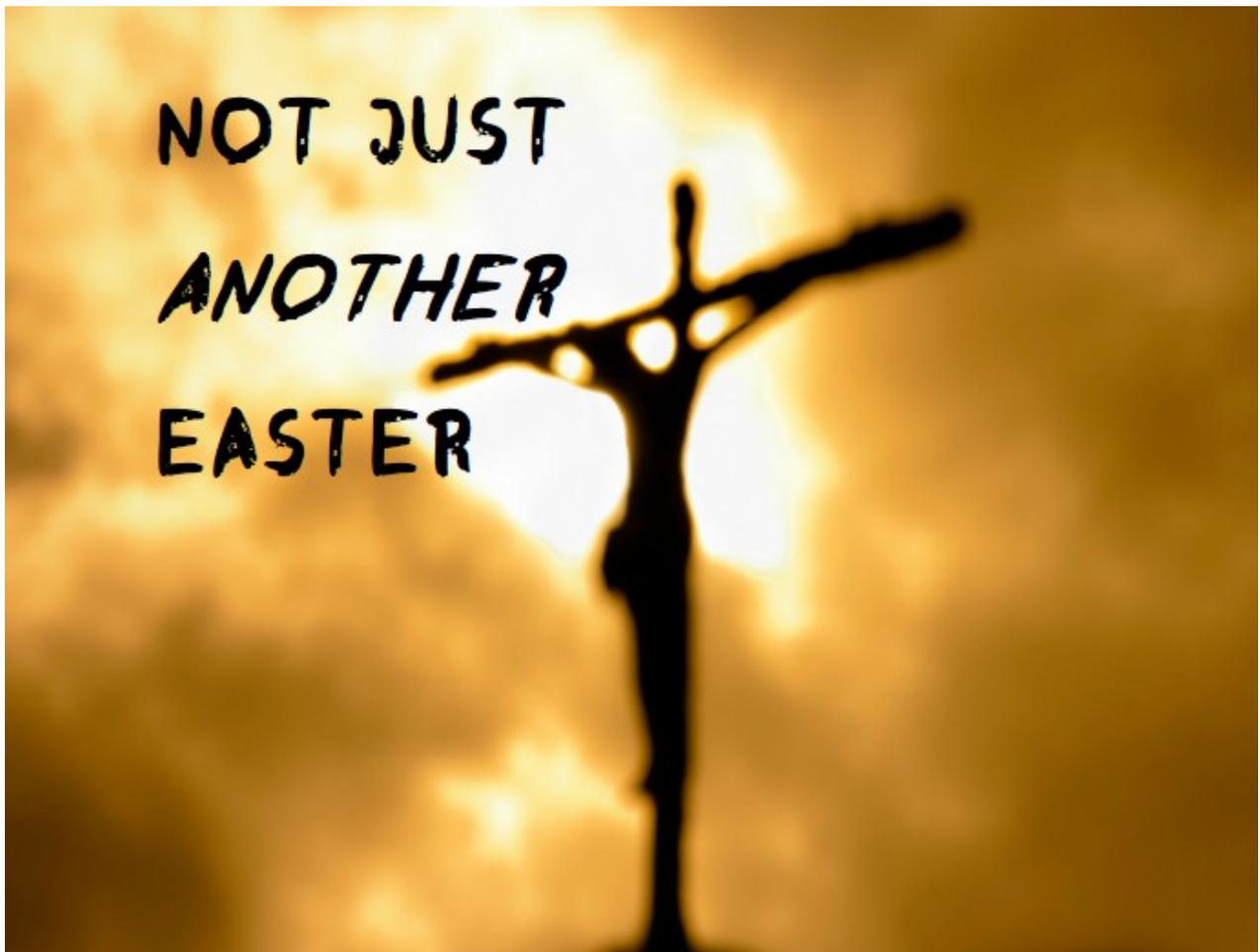


MRBC Easter Services 2012



Not Just another Easter



Matthew 21:1-17

EASTER

So here we are around the Lord's Table. It's the first Sunday of the month and this finds us in a familiar place doing a familiar thing. There's something comfortable about familiarity. Familiarity makes us feel secure.

FAMILIAR THINGS

People vary in how they like the unfamiliar or change. For some, they like security. So therefore things around us make us feel familiar. If something breaks that routine, it's often unwelcome, even traumatic as it challenges all they are familiar with. Everything was new to us once upon a time. Can you remember your first phone, your first TV, your first car? I'm an early adopter of new things - but know of many who resist change, because of fear of unfamiliarity. I remember when microwaves came in. My family just couldn't understand why we would want one or need one. It soon becomes a kitchen essential and so familiar that we couldn't imagine life without one. It's the same with all the devices up on the screen. They are now familiar; comfortable.

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT

On the other hand, there's a saying: familiarity breeds contempt - usually used when something or someone is so familiar that we cease to give it or them its proper value. I remember saving up for our first microwave. It was an amazing piece of kit. A few years ago we inherited a microwave from my parents (who finally succumbed to buying one). It was a quality model. A few months ago it broke down. I didn't bother to fix it, I just threw it out and got our previous microwave out of mothballs and used that. What started life as a marvel of technology had now become so routine that we didn't even give it the honour of bothering to fix it!

FAMILIARITY CAN DEVALUE THINGS AND PEOPLE

We all do it to people don't we - Mother's Day. We do it to our lifestyle. Rather than celebrate how blessed we are we complain about our lifestyle: the prices of everything and how bad things are and forget that there are still a significant number in the world going without. There was a report this week on how the various countries of the world compared with one another in terms of wealth. We are still a vastly wealthy country and on the BBC you could put in how much you earned and see how you compare to others in the UK, and even more alarmingly - the world. Let's never take for granted the blessings God has given us, because when we do so, we devalue what we have and others. So the danger of familiarity to my mind isn't that it breeds contempt, but it can lead us to devalue things or people .

MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER EASTER

Nowhere is that more true than in our faith. I'm one who loves Easter, although I would prefer that we drop the name Easter as it's pagan and adopt the more continental Passiontide as it's a Christian term. It truly is the most important Christian festival. It should pale Christmas.

I was challenged by some of my own words a few weeks ago when I described what we were doing this Easter as "just the usual stuff". Should we ever describe the faith we celebrate as "just the usual stuff"?

Just another Easter? We've done Easter in this church since it started - since people started worshipping on this site in 1802. It's part of the Christian calendar - why wouldn't we do it? What happened nearly 2000 years ago when Jesus died and rose again is at the very root, the very cornerstone, the very origin of our faith. It should be a period of the year that should bring us most joy as we re-affirm the roots of our faith.

Nowhere this is more true than as this morning we celebrate a very familiar element of our monthly calendar: the Lord's Table. As we come to the start of another Holy Week, let's affirm again why we are

able to call ourselves the people of God, the children of God, the body of Christ; as we again remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus.

As we do this, let's pray as Jesus taught us to.

COMMUNION

Prayer of Confession

The bread and wine

Post Communion Prayer

The Reading

NOT JUST ANOTHER FESTIVAL

So Easter is a time of challenge as we have remembered again the reason Jesus had to die - because of our sin and rebellion - as a human race and as individuals.

But as I've said, there's the danger that it may be just another festival; and that in itself is comfortable for us. Yet what I believe God is reminding and challenging us about this year is that this festival shouldn't make us feel comfortable, but should remind us of some uncomfortable and inconvenient truths as well as filling us with awe, amazement and joy as we are also reminded of the profoundness of what this is all about.

So each of my sermons this Easter is going to be prefaced with the phrase: not just another.... And today I've entitled it Not just another festival.

It was another year, one in millennia for Jews as they remembered again the Passover and as the population of Jerusalem was swelled with pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire and beyond. For the locals in Judea and Galilee, it was another Passover as they had been top plenty before.

Everything went on just so - the visits to the temple, the passover meal and the general enjoyment of the festival. Something I discovered when I was teaching is the Jewish people have lots of festivals in the year. Depending on what group they belonged to, there could be up to 13 festivals a year - and of course, they had all the regular bank holidays off!

WAILING WALL

Passover was therefore an exciting festival and people were used to all the regular things that used to go on in Jerusalem at that time.

AND ON TO THE SCENE CAME JESUS

Then something happened that you just don't see every day. A man riding as though He was a king - but riding on a donkey and all his followers celebrating. That was the surprise. People got up and looked. Listened? Asked questions? More than that - well let's read the words.

VERSE

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. Who is he? the people asked. This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee, the crowds answered.

There was uproar. Jesus had grabbed their attention. All this was unfamiliar, uncomfortable. The longer I have been a Christian, the more I've been surprised by Jesus. Never believe you know everything you could about Jesus and there's nothing anyone can teach you that's new. It's a mark of immaturity. I say it because there are Christians that are like that. They are comfortable with the familiar and as a result miss, even reject the surprises that Jesus frequently pops up with. I regularly learn something new - praise God!

Never lose the capacity to be surprised and to embrace what is unfamiliar to you. I believe we have learned or re-learned some things this year. We've been surprised by some of the teaching we have engaged with. Don't be worried, or in uproar. Consider it, pray over it, discuss it, search God's word. But most of all let Jesus surprise you. Sharing Service.

JESUS CHALLENGED THEM

My second point this morning is that Jesus challenged them. He didn't just cause an uproar, but he challenged the very heart of their faith. He walked into the temple and turned over the tables of the money changers. Why the challenge? Because what they were doing were lawful by their laws but an abomination to God. He then started to do two things - heal people and accept the worship; even from children. It had become a place where the power of God was being exercised again and where people - children - were shouting praise!

16 So they asked Jesus, "Do you hear what they are saying?" "Indeed I do," answered Jesus. "Haven't you ever read this scripture? "You have trained children and babies to offer perfect praise."

It was what the temple was for and even the smallest child could see that one. But the religious folk were so puffed up with the familiar that they missed the truth of God!

I believe this Easter Jesus wants to surprise and challenge us. Not to confront us with the wild and wacky, but to confront us with what it's all about again and to make a reality in our lives what He came to do - that we may know His power and presence in our lives and we may lift our hearts and voices in praise in a way that we have not done before.

NOT JUST ANOTHER EASTER?

So as I conclude and as we start another Holy Week, lets come in prayer before God, asking, expecting, demanding that Jesus shakes us out of the familiar and give us a new, a refreshed image of who Jesus is; a deeper understanding of the meaning of His death and resurrection; and from it changed lives that will be a living act of worship that will draw others to Jesus.

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
1st April 2012 MRBC Felixstowe
(c) Mark Reid 2012*



Luke 22:55-62

TITLE

So here we are with the second sermon in my Easter Series. On Sunday we looked at how the Passover Festival turned out to start with an unexpected event – the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. He was hailed by His disciples and king but the city was left in uproar as the local Jews and the religious establishment looked on concerned as this Galilean rabbi came into town, talked about God as His Father and accepted worship – even from children!

Of course for Jesus' disciples, Passover was a familiar event. They had done it many times in their lives and this last evening they were celebrating it with Jesus for their third time. But this one was different as Jesus institutes the Lord's supper. He also talks about the end. How He will be taken. And how they were all going to run away when the heat was on.

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES

I'm sure you've seen this slogan before – some of you may remember when it first came out. The wartime government were concerned that any information may be useful to the enemy: where factories were, where secret installations were sited, where raids were going to be carried out. All of it small talk by servicemen in pubs or by ordinary people who had children in the services and who talked about where their sons or daughters were posted.

We can all see the implications. There were German spies in Britain and they did listen to conversations and gauge morale. Thankfully, they were also not very good – probably because people heeded the warnings!

In some occupations careful words are necessary as it can literally cost lives.

A BIG MOUTH CAN GET YOU INTO TROUBLE

Politicians for example measure their words carefully and often some of the stupidest interviews on TV are where the interviewer is trying to put words into the politician's mouth and the politician is trying to use his or her words. This is a picture of the US Vice President Joe Biden – someone accused him of speaking unwisely and hence this parody.

LEMMINGS – and then there's this enough said.

Of course, you can guess from the reading tonight that for one disciple this Passover was even more traumatic because of his words. Here they are

LUKE 22: 31-34

31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

We often talk about impetuous Peter – the man who talked first and then engaged his brain. I don't think he was that bad or even stupid; he was someone who just spoke out when others remained silent. I have no doubt that all the disciples had the intention to follow Jesus to death, but only Peter spoke out.

The problem is that intentions are one thing, but what actually happened when the chips were down. Jesus knew that and gave Peter the prophetic word we just read.

DOES OUR TALK MATCH OUR EXPECTATION AND ACTIONS?

Before we feel all judgemental on Peter, let me ask this question. The truth is, that just like Peter, words are easy, but so often, how our heart is and how our actions are don't match. So what can we learn about matching words and actions from Peter's experience?

THINK AND PRAY BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Obvious I think. Stupid things said invariably reflect the fact that we haven't thought through the implications of what we are going to say. Thoughtlessness can be trivial, but can be hurtful because we engaged our mouths before engaging our brains!

Even more significant is that so often we act without engaging God. We do things, even the service of God without talking to the Boss about it. However routine something is, take it to the Lord in prayer. This after all, was just another Passover, wasn't it?

Lord, save us from the error of not thinking, and most of all, not praying about what we say and what we do!

CARELESS TALK COSTS

As the old WWII poster says "careless talk costs lives". But as you can see I've taken the word lives out. Careless talk costs. That night careless talk didn't change anything as regards what was going to happen to Jesus, but Peter's pride, his opinion that he could change things (he'd already had an abortive attempt at swordsmanship), his dignity, his integrity, were all dashed when he said "I don't know what you're on about chummy" "Nowt to do with me mate" "He's no mate of mine!". And of course he was a broken man when the cock crowed and Jesus just looked at him. Only the look was required.

Take care that our words do not condemn us. The enemy is on the prowl to exploit our weaknesses – our proneness to pass on juicy gossip, the tendency to exaggerate for effect, the desire to impress with fine words. It's so easy to destroy someone by just saying something without thinking that cuts them to the heart. I remember when Rhiannon and I were a childless couple seeking to have children. I can't tell you the number of people that said stupid things like "you don't want to have children anyway, they will break your heart. They are nothing but trouble. You're better off without them." They never understood how offensive that kind of talk was because they never stopped to think how childlessness affects people.

And how many Christians have uttered the phrase "I'll follow you Jesus to the end. I'm prepared to lay down my life for you" but never thought it through. It's an easy thing to say when the prospect of martyrdom is remote, but think again. What is our reaction going to be when Jesus wants us to give up that which is most dear to us to follow Him. When Jesus talks about those that lose their lives will save it, is not referring to martyrdom, it's all about losing what's most precious to us about life in order to follow him.

What's the most precious thing in life to us? What if Jesus called on us to give it up?

And Satan just loves it when Christians with big mouths and un-engaged minds destroy themselves and destroy others. That was his desire for Peter that night: *31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*

How many Christians have destroyed their integrity and reputation on words – theirs or others – and walked away from the faith. We know plenty of them. Satan desired that Peter will be sifted like wheat. Sifting of wheat means that all the parts are separated. We often use it when we want to finely examine something – sift through information. Satan wanted to take Peter apart rather like he wanted to take Job apart. Unlike Job, Peter was flawed by his impetuosity and Satan wanted to sift him through. But Jesus had prayed for him – not that he wouldn't fail, but that he would strengthen the others afterwards.

The lesson? Take care with our words, that they don't destroy our integrity and reputation, and much more importantly don't damage others.

Lord rescue us from our mouths that our words, minds and prayers all be under your Lordship!

WE CAN'T FOOL JESUS

The truth is that it doesn't matter what we say, we can't escape from the fact that the Lord knows. A phrase that has disappeared over the years is one that Christians used when they made excuses for not being somewhere or doing something. The phrase will be "the Lord knows what happened .." I always felt like saying "I know, He knows only too well!"

But that is how it is. He knows our every part. Peter, the bold warrior when he was with the other disciples and Jesus, was just a flustered person in front of hostile Jerusalem-ites baying for blood. As he was protesting no connection with Jesus, that look reminded him of what Jesus had said. There was no escaping that eye. He knew that Jesus knew only too well. He'd let down his Lord and wept bitterly.

Lord help us to realise that we can't escape your gaze. Remind us that when we are tempted to say things that are unwise or destructive, that we're saying them in Your presence!

Words can crush us. We've all experienced it and we've all seen it happen to others. Peter had a lot of guilt to carry with him after this event – and it wasn't really cleared until Jesus met the disciples on the shores of Galilee – more about that on Sunday.

PETER FOUND FORGIVENESS & RESTORATION

Are we carrying guilt this evening? Guilt that we let Jesus down at some point – maybe it involved words and deeds not matching. Peter, this silly man, found forgiveness and restoration from his Saviour. Sometimes it's not the sin itself that finished Christian people off – it's the guilt afterwards that means that they never serve God in the same way again.

What a shame, because the blood of Christ has dealt with all our sins. May we understand that more fully this Easter.

Peter let Jesus down big-time. But in Jesus he found love, forgiveness and restoration. Well, it was more than restoration, he became the leading figure in the early days of the church. As a result of his failure, his big mouth was harnessed in the work of God. That didn't mean he never failed again – as Paul recounts to us in Galatians 2. But he learned.

Are we burdened with sin and guilt this evening? The blood of Christ was always sufficient for it. So find forgiveness afresh.

Are you paralysed by guilt, thinking that god can never use you effectively again as before. Then find release from that guilt this evening and let the Holy Spirit energise you with anew enthusiasm as to how you can serve Jesus – the risen and glorified King!

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 5/3/12
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Not just another crucifixion

Matthew 27:27-54

It was just another job. *“C’mon lads. We’re the execution party today. The 1-15re’s three Jews to crucify and one of them’s that Jesus guy – he thinks he’s a king or whatever. We like that sort, so we’ll give him a good going over first. It’s a quick job anyway – he has to be dead by sunset – we need to keep then Jews happy, Sabbath day and all that. Mind you they seem pretty happy about getting rid of this Jesus bloke.”*

I’m not sure that the Roman execution party quite saw things like that, but they were witnesses to the account we had read to us. They’d done plenty of these before – crucifixions. The Jews kept them plenty busy. The Roman soldiers hated a posting to Jerusalem. They always found the Jews revolting if you’ll pardon the pun. So it gave them pleasure to finish them off with the horrible death awaiting them on crosses.

In the Jerusalem of that day, crucifixions were common, so the crucifixion of Jesus was just another in a series – they were routine. Horrible isn’t it. A horrific death becomes a routine. How could men of good conscience carried out these killings as a routine?

Studies of people who commit atrocities like this show that often reduce the act in some way or other which seems to salve their conscience. *“I was following orders”, “They are just scum” “They got what was coming to them”, “The world’s a safer or better place without them”, “We have to protect ourselves”, “They got their comeuppance” “They’re just animals”.*

People who support their actions use the same logic down the years. There’s something about the sinfulness of human beings that we are able to suspend truth in the face of something patently wrong. In reference to people who teach false truths they know to be wrong, Paul describes their consciences as being seared with a hot iron (1 Tim 4:12) Things happen that cause our conscience to be suspended. It wasn’t much different for the crowds coming out for executions. Crowds of Jerusalem people came out for the execution of Jesus. Usually in this kind of environment; people somehow leave their morality behind and come for the spectacle.

One chilling phrase that we had read to us was in verse 36 of our reading. The soldiers had done their worst and Jesus was on the cross and Matthew records: *And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.* Their job was to make sure that the execution was completed without interference. They weren’t expecting any so they just sat down and watched. It was a horrendous scene – but it was just another crucifixion. What can we learn from these men?

– ***Never leave our morality behind for our convenience or to support our prejudices***

Despite our libertarian values, our society is no better than any other at condoning the suspending of conscience to suit ourselves. We live in a world characterised by injustice, but what do we do about it – if anything? Look at most major news items today, and you’ll find injustice at the heart of them. And often our Government and people are not on the side of the victims of inequality, injustice and oppression. On a personal scale we condone unforgiveness, back biting, destructive criticism and just plain selfishness using any excuse that we can find to forget the command of Jesus so love one another and to love our neighbours, and of course to ask His forgiveness for our sins when we haven’t forgiven those that have sinned against us.

Jesus was a victim of injustice pure and simple. His death was the result of a conspiracy, He got a sham trial, there was mob rule, and He was given this horrific death. On a purely human level, there are some things that are just wrong. What the people who conspired to kill Jesus that day was awful just purely on a human level. They didn’t understand who He actually was. But nothing made this right.

In our modern society we are often asked or expected to suspend our morality for convenience. Name a subject and you’ll find an example. Jesus said “follow me”. We are called to tread His path and stand for what’s right. Truth be told, it’s not the most popular path. But if we want to see our nation changed and our church fellowships vibrant again then we’ve got to stop allowing our

consciences being seared with a hot iron and allow Jesus to bring healing where that's happened.

– ***Don't rob the cross of its horror***

For the Roman soldiers it was another execution, pure and simple. Their suspension of conscience trivialised it. By any standard, crucifixion was a disgusting thing to do to another human being. Jesus was additionally beaten substantially.

Down the years as God's people we've been as bad at trivialising it as anyone else. Look at most Christian cross art and crucifixes and you'll find a sanitised Jesus – He's even turned into jewellery. But the scene we had read to us this morning was one of horror.

One film which broke new ground in recent years was the *Passion of the Christ* which was directed by Mel Gibson. Gibson is a devout Catholic and he was determined to produce a film to show as best as he felt he could the sufferings of Jesus. Because Jesus was a high profile prisoner – accused of being the King of the Jews – He got far worse treatment than other condemned men. So the scourging scene seems to go on forever, the beatings are shown, the evil smiles on the faces of the soldiers, the nailing to the cross and then the suffering on the cross. By this time Jesus is a complete mess and it rather reminds me of Isaiah 53 where it says: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.* (vv2-3) The film got an 18 rating because of scenes of graphic violence.

Many people who went to see the film were deeply upset by it, not liking to watch the violence; turning their faces away. The actor who played Jesus, Jim Caviezel, also a Christian when asked what he thought about this said *“what they are seeing is their own sin, and it's not wanting to deal at times with their own sin; it is that hard to look at but this film forces you to see yourself, not the way you want to see yourself, but the way God sees you. ...We are all culpable for the death of Christ, my sin, your sin were laid on Him on the cross”*

Why did the Holy one of God have to endure this suffering. Because of us. It was my sin that nailed Him there, it was my sin that inflicted pain, because it was for me He died. Never minimise the horror because in understanding it, we see the depth of love our Saviour had for us, for me, for you. And that fact alone will drive us to always seek to honour Him in our lives day by day.

– ***cry out “this was the Son of God!”***

And what of these hardened men who crucified Jesus and then just sat down to watch Him die and witness his last hours of life? *When the army officer and the soldiers with him who were watching Jesus saw the earthquake and everything else that happened, they were terrified and said, “He really was the Son of God!”*

They were the only people who uttered such words on that day. The religious folk wanted him dead and were satisfied with their actions. The disciples thought it was the end. They might well have heard Jesus say that he was going to die and be raised to life on several occasions, but they had no expectation of a resurrection. But these guys having watched Jesus die understood at the end who they had put to death.

I believe that there is no-one who can truly look at the death of Jesus with an open mind and not come to that conclusion too. And if He is the Son of God, then if you've never trusted and followed Jesus up until now, an important question mark stands over your life. And like in Deal or No Deal? then following Jesus is a simple matter of deciding that if Jesus really did die for you, are you going to follow Him and keep on rejecting Him. This is the big question for you this Easter. The death of Jesus wasn't just another crucifixion, but it was that means by which human beings, people, could return to God again and find Him that Heavenly Father waiting for them with open arms

Let's pray.



Not just another sunrise

Ephesians 1:16-23

It's nice to be here on this Easter morning. Most of us don't get to see a sunrise at this time of year unless we are early risers or on morning shifts – unless of course it's overcast! We wake up and there's daylight. And we know that every morning we wake up that the daylight is there. It's dependable – we just take it for granted because it's there.

So this morning we are here for just another sunrise. I wonder how many times the sun risen has risen on this shoreline. That's an interesting scientific conundrum – answers on a postcard please!

I'm going to play safe and say the safest answer. Countless! Unless anybody here has counted them! Yes, I know that the Lord knows! Sunrise happens – it's so predictable that it's possible to consult a table that tells us exactly when the sun will rise and set at this point here in Felixstowe. The sun is dependable. It's there. God has given it to us and the cycles of days, nights and seasons to ensure life on Earth functions.

The sunrise on that resurrection day was the same sunrise that everyone expected, because it happened every day. But we've heard the story this morning. The women got there and found the tomb empty – Jesus had risen!

Now that's something that doesn't happen every day. In fact it only happened on just one day. The Son of God, Jesus rose from the dead! It was a unique day. It will never happen again. It doesn't need to happen again.

It was not just another day. It was THE day. On this day, everything changed. Let me give you the words of a song by Tim Hughes. Many of you probably sing it at your churches. It's a prayer so speak it out.

The greatest day in history, Death is beaten
You have rescued me
Shout it out Jesus is alive
The empty cross, The empty grave
Life eternal You have won the day
Shout it out Jesus is alive
He's alive.

Let me read you a few verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Eph 1:16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

What changed that day? The risen victorious Messiah had all things placed under His feet and to be head over everything for the church.

I haven't got time this morning to go through all the implications for what that might mean to those of us who are His people so I'm just going to confine myself to just a few of the things Paul says here. I believe that Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is the same prayer that may apply to any of this letter's readers. So what does Paul pray for?

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Because of this victory over death, Jesus has opened a way by which, through faith we may know God personally. Give yourself some time today and read the early verses of this chapter. It lists all the things God makes us in Christ, not because of what we have done but because He loves us and shown His grace – His unmerited favour to those of us who have believed and follow Him. So if we know God, then our prayer for this resurrection morning should be the same as Paul's – that we may have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may know Him better. In a moment I'm going to lead us in prayer and ask Him just that. But more specifically Paul prays in three ways for his readers. He prays: that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know

1. the hope to which he has called you.
2. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
3. his incomparably great power for us who believe.

If you remember nothing of the rest of this morning, I pray that you will remember these three things from God's word because they have the potential to change each of our lives.

1. The hope to which He has called you.

I don't wish to be morbid at this point, but what if a giant tidal wave was to come crashing down upon us and we were all swept away and drowned us. Do you know what would happen to you? What is your expectation of death and eternity. If you are in Christ you should have a hope and an expectation of God's presence. If you struggle with that, talk and pray with someone, your minister or another Christian. In 1 John 5:13 John recalls that *these things were written .. that you may be sure you have eternal life.*

I find Felixstowe is no more than a depressing mirror on the rest of our land. Without Christ, the long term prognosis for people is that they have no hope. For many people life is just full of pain and pointlessness – and then they die. Yet we have the life transforming words of hope that can change lives and transforming communities. The resurrection of Jesus gives us that hope. He's conquered death so we have a hope that no other can offer. Please share it.

2. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

What I want you to see is Paul holding out to the Ephesians the riches that have been bestowed upon them by God in Jesus Christ – whether it's the riches of being chosen as God's inheritance or whether it's the riches of being given an inheritance by God, we have been lavished with a mercy and a grace and riches from God beyond all comparison, and the Apostle Paul wants them to see that. He wants them to have eyes to understand that and desire those riches above worldly riches.

3. His incomparably great power for us who believe

If you get nothing else out of Easter this year, then I pray that you'll get this last point in abundance. The resurrection was an awesome display of the power of God. The way that creation works is that just as the sun sets and rises, the guarantee of life is that it's 100% fatal. Not exactly. We have a God who has power over death. It's a power that far transcends anything human beings can do. And Paul says I pray that you might know His incomparably great power. He prays: that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know

4. the hope to which he has called you.
5. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

his incomparably great power for us who believe. For those of us who believe. The Christian faith is a power faith. It's life-transforming, community-transforming, yet so often we see so little of it. Why? Well, it's not for want of God offering it. It comes down to expectation. Our land, our people, our community so

desperately need to experience the life changing power of God in their lives. They need to be made alive in Christ. What are we doing about it? What can we do? I believe that we need to covenant to pray for our land and particularly for our community that God will by His Spirit and transform this place and this people. I say covenant because that needs to start with His church here in Felixstowe. How about now.

If you want to do that, or are already doing that personally or at your church, then maybe you'd like to pray this prayer with me. I'll pray and if you are in agreement, then repeat each statement.

Prayer.

*Preached by Mark Reid
CTiF Sunrise Service 8/4/12
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John 20:19-29

NOT JUST ANOTHER STORY

Unless you've just slept through the service, you'll know that today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The man who was dead is now alive. If you're someone who is not too familiar with the Christian faith, then to believe that a man who had suffered a violent death could come back to life three days later is a big ask.

EGG IN THEIR FACE

But sometimes that which seems impossible happens. Sometimes even great men get egg on their face!

20TH CENTURY

Take this guy for example. *Television won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.*

Daryl F. Zanuck, Head of 20th Century-Fox, 1946. They didn't and his company is now owned by Rupert Murdoch!

LORD KELVIN

Lord Kelvin was one of Britain's leading scientists in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Here's one comment he probably preferred to forget when he heard of the Wright Brothers!

Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible.

Lord Kelvin (1824-1907)

LORD KELVIN 2

He wasn't much better with X Rays either. He lived long enough to see their usefulness!

IBM

Here's a wonderful quote from the 1940s. *I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.*

Thomas J. Watson Snr., IBM Chairman, 1943 Pity he hadn't read the sign above his head.!

ASTRONOMER

An a fine comment here by a leading US astronomer in 1932. *There is no hope for the fanciful idea of reaching the Moon because of insurmountable barriers to escaping the Earth's gravity.*

Dr. Forest Ray Moulton, University of Chicago astronomer, 1932

THOMAS

And Thomas – the doubter. What did he say? *“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.”*

I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT

“Unless I see it with my own eyes, I will not believe it”. Many people say that about the Christian faith. That was Thomases take on the resurrection of Jesus. The idea of Jesus rising from the dead was just too impossible - despite the fact that Jesus, the doer of miracles (witness by Thomas) had said that was what was going to happen. It's a stupid thing to say if you think about it. How does this computer work, how do the lights go on. By electricity. Can you see electricity? How do I stay alive on this planet – I breathe air. How do I know air exists, I can't see it? We may not be able to see electricity but we can see their effects. Try going out on a windy day.

Scientists tell us that all matter is made up of atoms? Where are they, I can't see them. I've never seen any. How do I know that they are there. I don't – I take the word of scientists who have built microscopes to see them.

So it's not what I see alone that determines something is true or not – sometimes it just goes down to believing someone you can trust. We ask you to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. We ask on the basis of men and women who were there, who witnessed these things and passed the information on for

others to read and believe.

MICHAEL GREEN

Here's what a British theologian called Michael Green said: *"The appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity... There can be no rational doubt that they occurred, and that the main reason why Christians become sure of the resurrection in the earliest days was just this. They could say with assurance 'We have seen the Lord.' They knew it was he."*

But can we really trust the word of a group of guys who lived 2000 years ago and really wanted to persuade people that Jesus had risen from the dead. After all, wouldn't they have gained from it? Well, no. Here's what an American called Craig Blomberg says:

CRAIG BLOMBERG

"Besides, these disciples had nothing to gain except criticism, ostracism, and martyrdom. They certainly had nothing to win financially." Most of the 11 disciples that were witnesses on that day and the next week paid with their lives for making that claim. If it was a lie, they just wouldn't have. In fact over 500 people at one time also met Jesus in the following 40 days – many too paid with their lives for claiming it and calling on others to believe it too.

VERSE

And the disciples, who had seen and believed asked others who had never seen and believed to examine who Jesus is, to hear His words – which have been recorded – and discover that, having believed that Jesus really does exist and can be known. This is what Jesus said:

"Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

So if that's the case then people should, on believing find Jesus to be real? Yes.

THE MOST COMPELLING EVIDENCE

In fact the most compelling evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today is that countless numbers of people the world over have got to know Jesus, have found that even though they do not see Him, they experience the Holy Spirit in their lives day by day and so often see His power displayed.

The Easter Story isn't just another story amongst many the world over. It was the day that something impossible happened – it stretched the belief of the disciples, but as they embraced it, they found Jesus was alive and that they were going to walk with Him day by day not with Him but by the Holy Spirit, within them.

And this morning we are asking any person who has not entered into this relationship with Jesus to take that step of faith and start to trust Him and follow Him. We talk a lot about eternal life. Eternal life starts today when we trust and follow Jesus. Do you want to do this today?

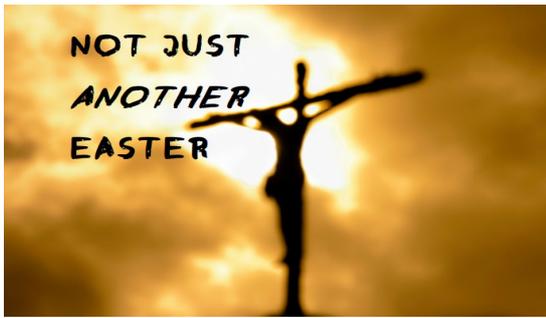
Prayer

HE LIVES

To finish I want to remind us that when we trust Jesus He lives in our lives. Here's an old chorus that sums it up.

TITLE SLIDE

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 8/4/12
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An Easter Reflection

John 20:18-23

In the last week I have explored the theme of “Not just another Easter”. The idea was to look at how the world was shaken out of its pattern of familiarity by the the life changing and history changing power of God. Because I've explored different aspects of the theme in different venues and to different congregations I want to finish the series tonight an overview of the journey.

The first Easter challenged people who were happily sitting in their comfort zones because God was bringing in a new order. It was to challenge their values and offer people to exchange what they had for hope, and life and peace. So last week we had the subject of JUST ANOTHER FESTIVAL.

Jesus broke into the Jews' comfy festival being hailed as a king! He scandalised Jerusalem society by turning over the tables of the money changers in the Temple and accepting worship – even from children.

I believe that by His very nature Jesus surprises and challenges. He doesn't confront us with the wild and wacky, but to confront us with what it's all about and to make a reality in our lives what He came to do – that we may know His power and presence in our lives and we may lift our hearts and voices in praise. If I've learned anything from this series, then it's to understand that we should never lose our capacity to be surprised by Jesus. As the eternal Son of God, there's a vastness to whom He is. There's always more to learn; more to be inspired by. If we ever think we know it all about Jesus and there's nothing new to learn, or worse, no need for our lifestyle or our way of thinking to be challenged, then there's something seriously wrong with us seriously and we need to come before Him in repentance, asking for His healing.

Which brings us nicely to
NOT JUST ANOTHER PASSOVER

The disciples expected just another r[passover. What they got was a whole new meal – a new way of being reminded of who Jesus was. Over that weekend, it probably didn't mean much but afterwards it took on huge significance when they understood what it all meant. Jesus had died to deal with the issue of their sin and to bring those that follow Jesus into a new relationship with God. Peter found that out in a very practical way as he denied Jesus. It was guilt he was to carry until after the resurrection when he found what forgiveness and restoration was in Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus was about dealing with our sin. Note the past tense. When we are forgiven of God, we don't carry guilt with us. Many Christians have their lives, their witness and their potential for serving God blighted by guilt for things they have done in the past that have been forgiven by God and dealt with. The risen Christ brings more than forgiveness: He brings freedom to truly life a new life.

On Friday morning I looked at
NOT JUST ANOTHER CRUCIFIXION

For the Roman soldiers who executed Jesus it was another crucifixion and just another “King of the Jews” or similar rebel leader. But the day ended by them saying “surely this was the Son of God”. They were men who left their common morality behind to commit atrocities to people – but found it when they realised in their horror what they had done.

We are proud that we live in a libertarian society but this is still a world where we consider it OK to dump morals for our convenience or prejudices. Name the subject and you'll find an example where morals are exchanged for convenience.

Why do we do that? Often like the soldiers it's because we've robbed the cross of its horror. The death of Jesus was an ugly, a horrific event and there is always the danger of trivialising it. But when we do that we forget just what Jesus suffered for us. Easter or for that fact communion is there to remind us of the huge price that was paid for us. May that cause us to raise our voices in devotion to Him and say “were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so diving, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

This morning I looked at
NOT JUST ANOTHER SUNRISE

The sun rises and sets each day. It's the cycle of life. God has given us that cycle and maintains it. One day is much the same as the next – the only thing that changes is the weather that comes with it! But there was the one day that was different. We sung about it this morning – it was the greatest day in history.

*The greatest day in history, Death is beaten
You have rescued me
Shout it out Jesus is alive
The empty cross, The empty grave
Life eternal You have won the day
Shout it out Jesus is alive
He's alive.*

It was the day that changed history when God demonstrated His power over death – Jesus was raised to life victorious. But more than that, that resurrection power went further: Ephesians 1:19 That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

That day means that we are people who should experience God and the world in a different way and I dealt with three points in Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. He prayed: that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know

the hope to which he has called you.
the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Ours is a power faith. Resurrection means that we should be seeing God's power in our lives and in our community. Having realised that, then let's seriously pray it.

Finally, this morning I looked at
NOT JUST ANOTHER STORY

The resurrection of Jesus is a reality – a life changing reality. It shatters our comfortable mediocrity, it deals with our guilt, prejudice. By understanding the horror of the cross and the victory of the resurrection we understand that we have a life changing and a community transforming faith. He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me, He talks with me, along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives. He lives within my heart. Does He? In which case, let's pray that this will show daily in our hearts because when people see us they will see Him. So how do I conclude the series? With the words of Jesus:

VERSE

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

John 20:21-23

HE'S ALIVE

Jesus is alive and as people who have been given the Spirit, He is sending us to others that they may know Jesus. That's the challenge of this Easter. He lives and He sends. But more than that:

HE SENDS US IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

We are a power people. If we aren't then it's not for want of us having the Holy Spirit – but we need to understand, ask for and expect that power to characterise us. It is the Spirit who brings change in people, but how does the Holy Spirit reach them. He could just zap them, but God has chosen us to be the vessels the Holy Spirit uses. Jesus sends us – that's how people get to hear the gospel.

HE SENDS US WITH AUTHORITY

Never be afraid to talk about sin and forgiveness. We have the authority of Jesus Christ. Why is the gospel ineffective. It's not for want of the Holy Spirit, but it's usually for the want of God's people being sent and

going with authority. What a shame that we have the authority to bring forgiveness to people and stay silent. We can really change people's lives – really! That's our challenge as a church as we go through 2012!

FINAL

But before you all rush out of the door, remember, we go in the power of the Holy Spirit and with authority. The disciples had to wait. If you have been challenged, then spend time with God, don't move before the Spirit moves you. But how will we know? We'll know. The disciples had 50 days to prepare for Pentecost. So we know God is calling us to reach out. Let's pray, let's prepare, let's plan. Let's be ready and expectant to catch the move of the Spirit

Let's pray for the power of the Spirit to shine out in each of us that people will see us and be drawn to faith in Him.

Prayer

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