

# Easter Sunday 2020

Ps Dermot Cottuli



## **Luke 24:1-34**

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

### **The Walk to Emmaus**

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, 11 kilometres from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognising him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." "What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

“Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.”

Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?” Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, “Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.” So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognised him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.”

### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognised him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus

himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.

Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things.

## **Message**

This morning we're celebrating an event that has become the hinge upon which all of history turns. An event that catapulted a Jewish rabbi born in the first century AD in a nation struggling under Roman occupation, from relative obscurity into becoming the most influential person who has ever walked our planet.

The miracles attributed to Jesus were amazing and his teachings on love and forgiveness were profound. His claim to be God's son was a little out there but not a huge threat to the established religious order of his day. They considered him a curiosity at best and a pest at worst. As his notoriety started to grow their concern for their own future, began to change their thinking about him. Their solution to the following he was raising throughout the country was to have him crucified under false charges. They thought that that would be the end of their problem however it became the beginning of a movement that would go on to completely overshadow in size and human significance, the religion that birthed it and the Empire that was at that time, considered the greatest the world had ever seen.

You see 3 days after they crucified him, Jesus stepped out of his tomb alive and well, having settled once and for all, his claim to Divinity.

### **Jesus said he was God's very own son.**

Jesus' claim to be God's son rests on factual events and not the wishful thinking of his early disciples. In fact they were completely devastated by his crucifixion and were in fear of their lives, causing them to doubt the first accounts that they heard of Jesus' reappearance after they'd seen him die. It wasn't until Jesus appeared to them in the flesh that their courage returned.

The chain of events stepping us through their initial grief, fear of discovery, doubt and eventual joy were recorded in the writings of 4 separate people. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and as would be the case of any eyewitness account or recollection of a shared event, they're all slightly different. If it was a story made up years after Jesus' death, wouldn't it be told in the same way that stories about Zeus are relayed to us in Greek literature with a set

storyline that doesn't deviate from the standard norm? This happened and then this happened and then this happened etc. That's not how the gospels tell the story of Jesus' resurrection. They're all different and each tells of things that the others miss out.

The message of the resurrection didn't evolve over time, it was the churches singular message right out of the gate. It was the only reason they were able to face death and not flinch because they now had an unshakeable faith in what they'd seen with their own eyes. Why worry about your own death when the one you're trusting in has shown you that death doesn't mean it's all over, but rather it's a door into the next life, which up until then had been shrouded in mystery and myth. Jesus could only have proven that to be the case by dying and coming back from the other side and then appearing to his disciples in the flesh.

### **So what does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us today?**

When we look at the world around us often we find ourselves asking the question, what's it all about? Are we just bit players in a life and death struggle that has no meaning or purpose other than the eventual destruction of our planet through overpopulation and the consumption of all available resource? Or is there an underlying purpose that has been moving us toward a future place that is so far outside of what we currently know and experience that many have failed to even acknowledge it could possibly exist?

Jesus stands in the midst of humanistic, unthinking evolutionary thought and says that there is more to our world than what we can experience with our five senses and his resurrection from the dead is a huge blow to the edifice

erected by those who would say that there is no overarching purpose to our existence.

God's not finished with the human race. How could he be? We are the pinnacle of his creation, fashioned in his own image, loved so much by him that he left his home in heaven and came and lived amongst us. Willingly dying in our place so that justice could be served and our sin dealt with once and for all.

Easter in 2020 has lost none of the hope that it brings to an eternal story that began when God first spoke the universe into existence. You and I have not been forgotten by an uncaring God, left to our own devices on this revolving rock that we call home. Jesus stepped into history and the world has never been the same since. We are moving toward a future where the veil will be drawn back and everyone will see and know that Jesus is truly who he said he was, God's very own son. In the meantime take heart, it's not over yet.

In the words of Jesus to the Jewish teacher Nicodemus,

### **John 3:16 The Passion Translation (TPT)**

For this is how much God loved the world—he gave his one and only, unique Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in him will never perish but experience everlasting life.

For everyone listening to this message this Easter morning, you too can experience everlasting life if you place your trust and belief in him. Let me pray for you.