

Paper Church



EASTER SUNDAY 2020

Prepared by Kaye Reid

Why do you look for the living among the dead? (Luke 24: 5-6 NIV)
He is not here; he has risen, just as he said (Matthew 28:6 NIV)

Easter Sunday

Today is not a day to mourn
Today is not a day for sorrow
Today is not a day to linger on what has been lost, or to linger on mistakes
Today is not a day to be bound by shame, or fear, or despair
Today
Easter Sunday
Today is a day to remember
Today is a day to have hope
Today is a day for new things to be born
For things that have seemingly died, to be reborn
All that was lost is now found
He has risen from the grave. He has conquered death.
His life gives US life, gives us freedom
Today
Even though we are apart
We come together
In unity
As one Church, His church
Across the whole world
To celebrate and to rejoice
to affirm our hope
and to share it with our world.
Christ is risen. He is risen indeed
Today is Easter Sunday

(Visuals and words by Jess and Daniel Hammond, Inside Out, 2020)

Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV) read by David Brown
Jesus Has Risen

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.



(Sunrise at the Maroondah Dawn Service, 2019, photo by Kaye Reid)

See a sunrise

On the first Sunday of Advent last December, Tim Brewster invited us to write on a small piece of paper three things we would like to do during that Advent. I don't remember what two of them were although the piece of paper is stuck on my wall in the church office but I'm not there to look at it and be reminded. But I do remember that one of the things was that I wanted to see a sunrise that Advent. Well be careful what you wish for.

A week or two later our youngest daughter started a new job stacking shelves in a supermarket in Lilydale. This was huge for us. She had been trying to get a job just like this for four years. As we made our way through all the anxiety of a new beginning like this, when she was finally ready to start after all the induction processes, we got her first week's roster. She was working most mornings for a few hours, starting at 6am. 6am! And we need to drive her every day. That means waking up in the 5s. That is not even daytime that is during the night still! Its dark then!

Initially she was only working a few hours and I needed to stay nearby for support as needed. I discovered that cafes in Lilydale don't even open until the slightly more civilised time of 7am. So, I found myself doing a couple of laps walking around Lilydale Lake from 6am to 7am each morning. And then off to a café to sit outside at 7am, I was smashing life - exercise, meditation, listen to French conversation while walking, and then sometimes it was music, podcasts, and then a yummy breakfast, on to my laptop to start work, sitting outside at the cafe. All by 9am. And I needed a nap by 11am.

I can tell you that on the day she started sunrise was at 5:48am. I have seen so many sunrises. In those weeks leading up to Christmas I was in a fog of tiredness. One of the up sides was that I had achieved that one Advent goal. Sunrise. Tick. Although soon it was dark in the mornings. January became February. The sun still hadn't risen and I'd already exercised for an hour and was home and could go back to bed. Still I have seen so many amazing sunrises. New dawns. Watching the horizon. Watching the way everything changes and is fresh and full of possibilities. And different every time.

Last week I went looking for a good sunrise location for Easter Sunday to watch the dawn. We live within walking distance from the allegedly highest point in urban Melbourne. Richardson Road in Croydon. It's the street opposite Luther College. It's about 200 metres above sea level which is really not very high. I left home just before 7am for a 7:35am sunrise. It was stunning along the way - the colours – although I couldn't quite get a full view as I was walking along Croydon Hills Drive and Yarra Road but it was stunning, looking towards the new horizon. But as I got closer to Richardson Road, it was settling into a regular nice light blue sky. I had discovered that the stunning bit with the glimpses of colour and possibilities was before the dawn. The new dawn is when the light is shining. Wonderful. But the glimpses beforehand, the play of light is stunning.

Watching Movies and the narrative arc

Like nearly all of us I am now home more at night. The people in my household like to watch movies. While I like some really well-made movies, generally, I find the narrative arc frustrating and predictable. A story will be going along well and I kind of internally sigh

(actually maybe it's out loud) because it's still going to need to have a complication that is going to mess it all up. And often on what I think is a pretty lame foundation. And then there will be an often predictable resolution eventually that ties in elements that you've already been shown.

I hope I haven't just ruined watching movies for you forever. My husband Paul is aware that he doesn't have a great memory. The gift of this when it comes to watching movies is that he can watch the same movie again without necessarily remembering what is going to happen. This is great value. Although it leaves the rest of us incredulous.

Easter

Every year we go through the journey of Easter. We remember. We rehearse it again. We follow the story and we know how it goes. Sometimes we don't even follow the narrative arc, we go straight from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. From peak to peak and miss the complication and, therefore, the resolution.

I'm always very conscious that we are always post Easter. By 2,000 years. Sometimes we need to immerse ourselves in the journey through Easter week, through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday (and what do you even do with Easter Saturday?). You've got to immerse yourself in the depths to really experience the contrasting high. You've got to start in the darkness to experience the stunning sunrise before the new dawn.

We are at a very particular and unique moment in time as we experience this Easter 2020. As some people have said already this has been the Lentiest Lent as we have shifted to isolation and a physical shut down of all but essential services for the sake of each other. We are in a global pandemic and none of us have done this before. As a world we are metaphorically somewhere in Holy Week. Perhaps we are in Maundy Thursday or Good Friday or the no man's land of Easter Saturday. We don't know where exactly because we don't know how long or exactly how it will go.

Naturally we can be feeling despair. That we are lost, disrupted, unsettled, uncertain. And it resonates so easily with how the followers of Jesus were feeling too. Jesus was going to change everything, he was going to save their world. They were bewildered. Had they got it wrong?

And if the story stopped at Easter Saturday and didn't go any further then that is where we would be stuck too. In despair. Lost. In darkness.

Pattern

But we are not. Because Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Because Easter reveals the deep truth about our world and our existence. A pattern of life and death. But it doesn't end there. A pattern of life and death and inexplicably new life. Of resurrection. Of new life. Of restoration. Of reconciliation. Of renewal. Of seeds. Of seasons. Of leaves that fall. Of winter and dormant trees. And of spring and new life. New growth. New buds. New leaves. A pattern of life and death and resurrection. Of new life. Until and towards eternity.

Jesus had told some of the disciples after the events of Palm Sunday, recorded in John 12:23-24, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless

a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

We see the same pattern in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The prodigal son who has to die to bad habits and pride before he experiences new life, while his brother must die to self-interest before joy can enter in (Luke 15:11-32).

And in his encounters, Jesus also invites a kind of dying that can lead to new life. The Samaritan woman at the well experiences new life only after dying to her former life and its false expectations (John 4:4-42). Zaccheus experiences the new life of salvation when he repents of extortion and dies to a way of life that was marked by greed (Luke 19:1-10).

Like the disciples. Despair turns to possibilities. Although it might not yet be clear. Or not well understood. We think of the couple travelling back from Jerusalem to Emmaus a few days after the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus keeps journeying with us. Interpreting for us. Transforming us. So, we see and be differently.

Looking back to look ahead

So we celebrate this particular Easter Sunday while as a world together we are somewhere in between Maundy Thursday and Easter Saturday. But we know the pattern that constitutes our world from eternity to eternity. From before the beginning of life and death and new life.

So, we look for the signs, the glimpses, of this new life even while we are still waiting. We participate in being these signs these glimpses. As we are a good neighbour. As we work on our relationship in the pressure cooker of our isolating households. As we work on our relationships over the phone and on Skype. As we invest in social connection on Zoom from our loving sacrificial physical distance. As we invest in not letting anyone fall through a gap. As we seek to be our best self. Our best self. Do the work. Let God’s transforming love do the work. The honest hard work.

We are bearers of hope this Easter Sunday in ways we have probably not known before. As we sit in the darkness with our world. Of not knowing yet how long and how this will go. We carry with us the hope, the joy, the reassurance, the strength, the courage. We know how this story goes. We know the pattern of life and death and resurrection. Of new life. Of glimpses of light and goodness, what Jesus called the Kingdom of God, and it makes for a stunning sunrise.

This is a moment when I’m glad the narrative arc is predictable. I’m glad I know how this story ends. I can’t predict yet exactly how it will all come together but there are plenty of signs and glimpses.

What might we become? What good might come from this? What has already? What will have changed irrevocably for the good?

Glimpses and signs

I have seen glimpses and signs. Rainbows. Bear hunts. Chalk drawings. Creativity. Imagination. Sharing of resources. Love your neighbour Melbourne Facebook group.

WhatsApp and text message groups with neighbours. Video calls and front door surprises. Less planes in the sky. Less production. Less pollution. Less travel time. Less traffic. We have seen the capacity of technology and global cooperation. We have seen generosity and sharing from the Arts and Entertainment industries. It is less flash, less curated, simple, raw, authentic and generous.

I don't want to romanticise what is happening by only recognising the good. There is so much disruption and grief and loss. But let's also look for the glimpses and the signs. And call them out and share them with others.

Many of us will have already seen a poem written by Kitty O'Meara that resonates not because it represents all of our realities right now but because it speaks of a hope of what good can come from this time, what new (or old) things can emerge that helps us to be our best selves and our best communities.

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.

The sunrise is there all along

Having seen a lot of sunrises now I've discovered that some are stunning and others are a non-event. I've made my way around Lilydale Lake in the dark and cold and wet when it's been all clouded over. And it takes much longer for the light to tip over the darkness and it's not stunning. But because I've seen so many sunrises I know the pattern now and so I know what is still happening even though my ability to see it is obscured by cloud. So, on those days I remind myself that the new day is still dawning, the sun does rise and it shines just as powerfully. It is just my view of it that is obscured by cloud. But I know it is there and I can even picture it and have faith in it because I've done this before, I know the pattern, I've seen the stunning sunrise so many times before. It's like taking off up into the sky in a plane - back before these times of isolation and no travel - on a grey cloudy day, and then breaking through the clouds and emerging on the other side almost blinded by the intensity of sunlight, the brightness, the blue sky. That was there all along.

We are all have a very different experience at the moment. Different than whatever normal was, but also different from each other. Some of us are super busy, and some at greater risk than others, and some are also bored, lonely, and struggling, and lots of spaces in between. It's important that we acknowledge that for ourselves and for each other. Together we all have choices and hopes about our future and who we will be in that future.

Arundhati Roy recently wrote:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Sending

During this time of isolation. Watch some sunrises. And remember this pattern of life and death and resurrection. Watch from darkness through the glimpses and stunning signs as the colours play out possibilities and as the new dawn erupts. Get outside if you can. And allow yourself to feel it. You can feel the hope. The new life and the new possibilities. And take that into your days. Into your household. Your relationships. Your actions. And live into the new life. Show others the new life. And let's live into the new horizon we have before us.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:19 NIV)

*And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."
(Revelation 21:5 ESV)*

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

Note: You can use this paper church communion guide or join us on Zoom at 11am Easter Sunday to share in communion together via the link rngwd.com/communion or the Zoom app with meeting code 623-487-346 and password 237957.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers which is especially poignant today on Easter Sunday. Bring to mind the journey of these last few days since Maundy Thursday.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with: think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours, give thanks for them, consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time, give thanks for them.

Communion is an embodiment of our unity with Jesus, with others around our suburbs, and with all followers around the world and across all time.

Allow these words of institution to invite you into participation: (Luke 22:19 and Mt 26:27)

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

The Bread (take / share your food in this moment)

This is the body of Christ, the bread of life—given for you. Amen.

The Cup (take / share your drink in this moment)

This is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation—shed for you. Amen.

Easter Sunday Prayer

Lord God

You loved this world so much, that you gave your one and only Son, that we might know
your love and be called your children too.

Lord, help us to see the patterns of the world that you have created, to see life and death
and new life, and to live in the joy and grace of Easter Sunday, everyday.

Let us be filled with gratitude for your sacrifice.

Let us have eyes that look upon the sunrise and see Your grace and rejoice in our salvation.

Help us to walk in the power of your grace and tell your good news to the world.

All for your glory do we pray, Lord,

Amen.