

## Sermon Easter Sunday 2018

**Acts 10:34-43 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Mark 16:1-8**

I want to first refer to the passage from Acts, the address Peter gives in the home of Cornelius. He makes the point that he and the apostles were witnesses, not only to what Jesus did during his short ministry, but also to his resurrection. Witnesses are essential in the demonstrating truth. It is virtually impossible to convict someone in court without witnesses. So we have the testimony of Peter, and indeed other disciples, to the risen Christ.

Then there is the evidence of the empty tomb, as discovered by the women. Initially, according to Mark's account, they were so frightened that they told no one but you can't keep something like that to yourself for long, and so they soon told Peter and the others. As we read in Luke's and John's gospels, Peter himself ran to the tomb to see for himself that Jesus had indeed gone.

It is interesting that it was women who discovered the empty tomb. It actually cements the authenticity of the story. In those days the word of women was not deemed to be very reliable. Unfortunately, that was the way it was. So if you were wanting to make up a story about the resurrection, you certainly wouldn't ascribe the discovery to women because they just weren't considered to be reliable, and their testimony in court would not be accepted.

I want to come back to this issue of evidence in a moment. One of the most interesting points in Mark's account is that the angel tells the women to go and give the message to the disciples, including Peter. He actually names Peter. Why would he do that? Well, as we know, not long before Jesus died, Peter denied having anything to do with him. Last Sunday Bishop John gave an excellent sermon on this very incident. It was more than likely the last time Peter saw Jesus before his death. There is no record of him being present at the crucifixion. I think it is a message of forgiveness to Peter. It is Jesus's way of saying to Peter, 'It is ok. You are very important to me. I am still going to need you to build my church.'

It is a message to all of us. Every single one of us metaphorically denies Jesus at times through what we do or say. But we are forgiven. Jesus still loves us and still needs us to continue to build his church. Despite our weaknesses, we all have a role to play, every single one of us.

Just to come back to this issue of witnesses. There is so much evidence which gives witness to the fact that Jesus, albeit the spirit of Jesus, is alive and well throughout our world today. I can point to the Christian religion with well over 2 billion adherents; to art, music and architecture inspired by Jesus. But in the end, it is the personal witness of each one of us, our experience through worship and prayer. I know that each one of us can testify to experiences, some of them very powerful, of answered prayer. Most of these would be private and very personal, but I think of that occasion exactly two months ago when we gathered around Shenali because her baby had stopped growing and the doctors were worried. We all prayed with her, calling upon the spirit of Jesus, he who healed hundreds, and what do you know, the baby immediately begins growing again.

The unbeliever would say that it was just coincidence. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury early last century, said, 'When I pray, coincidences happen. When I don't pray, they don't happen.' Amen to that. We all know exactly why the baby started to grow again.

The Resurrection brings us a message of hope and new beginnings, and these new beginnings come in many and various guises. The real evidence of the Resurrection lies with our personal experiences and how our faith shapes us and gives us security and hope as we move forward in our lives. In death there is hope and new life. In death, the best is yet to come. Let me finish with a story.

*There was a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. She met with her minister to finalise arrangements for her funeral. Everything was in order, and the minister was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something important. 'There's one more thing,' she said, 'I want to be buried with a fork in my hand.'*

*The woman explained, 'In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always*

*remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared away, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favourite part because I knew that something better was coming, like rich chocolate cake. So I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them, 'Keep your fork. The best is yet to come.'*

*The minister's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the woman. He knew that she understood so very well that death leads to a new beginning.*

*At the funeral people were walking by the casket, seeing the fork placed in her hand. During his message, the minister told the people of the conversation he had with the woman shortly before she died. He told them about the fork and about what it symbolized to her. The minister told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork and told them that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it either.*

Easter is the most important time of the year for us. It is a time for celebration. It conveys a sense of hope, a message that the best is yet to come.

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