

# **The Resurrection is a Game Changer**

Sermon for Easter Day, Year A,  
Livestreamed Eucharist @ St Philip's, O'Connor, ACT, Australia

## **The Reverend Canon Professor Scott Cowdell**

Acts 10: 34-43; Easter Anthems; Colossians 3: 1-4; Matthew 28: 1-10

+In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Before Easter Day we lived in a very different world. Jesus' death on Good Friday perfectly illustrated what the world used to be like. It used to be the case that might makes right. It used to be the case that it's good for one person to die if that will keep a lid on disquiet and help preserve the status quo. It used to be the case that even bitter enemies can make a reliable peace by all directing their blame and their pent-up hostility onto one person, or one category of people. It used to be the case that religion could be relied on as a force for social cohesion, tired perhaps though still necessary.

But since Easter Day we live in a new world, with new possibilities. Now we know that history's endless victim-making factory, which is still working at industrial strength, doesn't go unchallenged any more. There are plenty who are prepared to put a spanner in its works. Now we know that venerable institutions are not

automatically innocent, while people who are excluded and shamed as a matter of policy may not be guilty. Now we know that for all its willingness to remain dreary and formulaic, religion at least has the capacity to be disruptive, and often in a good way—to foster surprising, world-transforming holiness and not just rusted on social conformity.

And how has all this become possible? What's happened in the Good Friday world to give it this Easter Sunday future? And the answer of course is Jesus' resurrection, which is the ultimate game changer.

St Peter testifies in Acts today that a reality has erupted in history in which even former turncoats like him are picked up, dusted-off, and given a new vocation as witnesses to this game change. The Colossians writer today welcomes it in mystical language, as being caught up into a new depth and richness of being beyond all the old disappointments and inevitabilities: it's as if you've died, he says, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. As our Easter Anthems testify, an imaginative miracle, a moral miracle, a psychological miracle is now taking place among us: see yourselves as dead to sin, we're commanded, and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, take that, violence; take that, anxiety and depression; take that, addiction; take that, personal defeat; and take that, suicide—none of you can get the better of us anymore because, after all, we are

baptised, which means that our lives are sacramentally, officially, hidden with Christ in God. Now there's an Easter egg worth unwrapping, and savouring, and we'll have a chance to begin doing that in a few minutes when we renew our baptismal vows.

Friends, what erupted from that tomb on Easter morning was indeed like lightning. It was a jailbreak, with guards knocked out and authorities mocked. It was heaven showing its true colours; the Angels are now on Jesus' team, and they're not fooling around. And if that's not enough it was a feminist revolution, too, with women called and sent out as witnesses in a world where that sort of thing just didn't happen. And it was all about forgiveness, as the risen Jesus set out to meet up again with his brothers—that is, with the ones who'd abandoned him. And if Jesus is eager to be with them, don't be surprised this Easter if he's eager to be with you, too.

One last thing, and you'll need to humour me here. Friends, I have an inkling. Perhaps right now the whole world is sensing a game change. Perhaps we'll come out the other end of this COVID-19 emergency in six months or a year and not be content with how things used to be. Perhaps the sense of powerlessness and frustration that's grown over recent decades in the West might give way before this profound shock to our system. Perhaps this enforced break from more of the

same will prove to be not only terribly costly but also terribly freeing and terribly galvanising.

We see hints of this possibility emerging already in the right-wing media. Nervous voices from the worlds of politics and business are anxious for a quick return to things as they were: “let’s get back to neo-liberal principles and the free market as soon as possible.”

They’re worried that this huge disruption to the normal habits and expectations of life, and with time to get used to thinking and acting differently, the public might start getting ideas. Well, I hope that they do. Perhaps COVID-19, despite the tragedy it represents for so many, will nevertheless prove to be a system reboot, a game changer. Once we’ve dealt with this crisis and come out the other end, what might we feel confident to tackle next—climate change, sustainable living, the rebuilding of social capital, even a universal basic income? And why not? Because thanks to Easter Day we know that these things can happen, that we’re not trapped in the same old same old.

The Lord be with you ...