

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Easter Day, 8 April 2012
Rev Rebecca Newland

We are Easter people

Mark 16.1-8

Have you ever seen or heard of an event so disconcerting, it 'stopped you in your tracks'? So amazing, you just had to talk about it to others?

I remember when I heard that Princess Diana had been killed in that tunnel in Paris. My sister-in-law told me and my first reaction was shock and disbelief. After we had talked some more the truth started to land. Another event in recent memory was the destruction of the two towers in New York. I was working as a community carer at the time and turned up at a client's house to shower the patient. The family told me what had happened, and again I couldn't take it in. After we had all sat glued to the television for a while, it all began to sink in. These have been big events during my life. I am sure you could all name similar occasions in your lifetime.

The Resurrection should stand as the eternal "Big Thing." But, after 2,000 years, it receives the lip service of the routine and the stale. "Yes, yes," the non-participating Christian will say, "Jesus rose from the dead. (What does that have to do with me?)." Or the Resurrection is dismissed as a fairytale or a myth. But the resurrection was an event that changed the world. In fact it's given Richard Dawkins a very good living—just to name one.

Yet it was also an event that happened at a particular time and place in history. The Romans occupied Palestine, and the people of the land were desperate to be free. The civil and religious leaders placed impossible burdens on the common people. They were taxed to the brink of starvation and revolt. It was a violent world where anyone who rebelled against the Romans or broke their laws could be, and often was, crucified. Crucifixion was a painful, slow death. It wasn't just execution, it was torture. Rome was incredibly powerful, the most powerful empire then known.

It seems, as we look at world history or different nations and cultures, that we human beings are enthralled with power; in some way we love power. We humans will also turn whole groups of people into scapegoats so we can keep our power or keep what we want or think belongs to us. We turn on other people, we exclude them, ridicule them and dehumanise. We can take this to another level where we lock them up and end up killing them—or simply kill them.

This is the world of Jesus. In this world he teaches us about service and how simple acts of practical love act like seeds that blossom into the fruit of the Kingdom. He healed, forgave and loved. It seems like it is all for nothing as he ends up violently killed on a cross, betrayed by his friends. Yet Easter morning tells us that this is not the end of the story.

In our Gospel from Mark, three women who turn up to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial are told that he has been raised and has gone ahead of them and the other disciples to Galilee. If they go there, they will see him. Now the women didn't jump up and down and say "Alleluia!" They didn't sing hymns and praise God. They ran away! Terrified and amazed, they said nothing to anyone. This reaction also seems to say that what Jesus had taught, lived and died for had been for nothing.

Yet this ending presents us with questions that go to the heart of our lives as followers of Christ Jesus. What will you do, now that you have heard that Christ has been raised? Will you continue to follow Jesus to Galilee and anywhere else, despite fear and uncertainty? If Jesus

truly is the resurrected Lord who showed us the path of loving service and radical non-violence will you keep following even though you have the story of his new life second hand? Will you step out in trust, and keep stepping out, trusting that the Lord really is showing you the way, really is before you and beckoning you on?

This is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. We commit ourselves to the path, we walk in his footsteps, putting into practice all he has taught us. We do that even when the going gets really, really tough, even when we are doubtful and uncertain. You see, certainty is not important. There is nothing certain in life except death and taxes, as they say. The thing is to live with the uncertainty and the questions. There is no better guide than Jesus to help us in this task.

He lived in a world of uncertainty and fear, of violence and terror, but he didn't oppose this world with power and might. He didn't come with an army of angels. He didn't wield a sword. He embodied and taught something quite different—the Kingdom of God that begins as a small seed and from the bottom up transforms the world. This is what the gathered community of Christians are; we cultivate the seed of the good news in our hearts and relationships and, bit-by-bit, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we bear good fruit.

Beryl Gowty, one of our very loved church members (even though she lives in Brisbane now!), said that we here at St Philip's are Easter people. I think she is right, because you are people that live the love of Christ in very practical and real ways—you do loving service very well. You are people who have a heart for social justice and peace. You are a people who are radically inclusive of all people. You welcome all and create space for anyone to heal and grow. You are a people who know how to celebrate — my goodness do we know how to celebrate. Alleluia!! We really do live on the other side of the Resurrection. And, you are people who faithfully keep following our Lord through uncertainty and doubt, to Galilee and beyond.

When we follow the Lord, when we deepen our love and connection to him, we find a truth and power greater than any power or principality. Our identity, our being, is grounded in the one who so loved us, everyone else and all creation that nothing can ever bind us again. One man, one death, one resurrection. Much, much, much fruit. This is an event that blows my mind!!

Jesus Christ is risen, alleluia! He is risen indeed, alleluia!