

Sunday Sermon Notes – Easter Sunday 12th April 2020

From Rev'd Jilleen Chambers

Easter Sunday! It is the day when Christians around the world (usually) joyously gather and shout – Christ is risen! Alleluia! And respond with – He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Traditionally, the Easter or Christ candle is lit from a fire outside the church.

The minister enters the darkened church (which represents the tomb) holding the lit candle and stopping three times, holds it high proclaiming:

The Light of Christ! The congregation responds: Thanks be to God!

The Christ candle is set on its stand and the candles in the church lit from it. And the lights in the church are turned on.

It is a wonderful reminder of how the light of Christ has entered into our hearts and lives driving away all darkness before it.

Easter Sunday is a wondrous day of triumph! The day when heaven triumphed over death and the grave! Easter Sunday declares that ultimately, God is in control. On this most joyous day of the Christian year, we celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, from the dead and marvel afresh at the wonder and grace of God.

We join with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary and rejoice at the wonder of the empty tomb and sing: 'Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!' and 'Yours be the glory risen conquering Son'

Jesus Christ has broken the power of death and our chains are forever broken – we are set free as sin and death have no more dominion over us. Easter Sunday declares that we are a forgiven people and the way to eternal life is opened to us. We are called brothers and sisters by Jesus and thus sons and daughters of the living God – see Matthew 28: 10 and John 1: 12.

I like doing jigsaw puzzles and also cross stitch. As you do a jigsaw or cross stitch, the picture starts to come together as one piece is added to another to form the whole. One piece on its own may look very nondescript or even weird but when it is fitted to its companion, new details of colour and pattern emerge. There may be many pieces that look very alike – for example, a blue sky – but there are shadings in the blue. Each piece only has one place where it will properly fit – you can't force them to fit. And doing jigsaws teaches patience and perseverance – ultimately it does come together (though it doesn't help if a piece is lost).

Our understanding of God can be like doing a jigsaw. It takes care and time to put the pieces together. We can learn something more about God every day of our lives. We may have read a Bible verse many times before but suddenly it has more meaning for us. Sometimes we can be confused by the God story and not understand it – such as my first reaction to the Good Friday story. It intrigued me but I did not understand it.

To grow our understanding of God we look at how God has been revealed through the Bible. We see God's interactions with people throughout history: look with wonder at the story of creation – the formation of the universe, the stars and our world over millions of years – God's awesome power and patience. God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; Moses and the Exodus from Egypt – the Ten Commandments that teach us how to live with God and other people; Joshua and the people of Israel; King David, Solomon and the Prophets.

What has God done and how has God called his people to live? We hear God's call to care for the

destitute, widows and orphans, and anger at dishonesty; we see God's compassion, forbearance, and forgiveness, with God's love and justice revealed side by side.

Hundreds of years later, our gaze shifts to another large and very important section of the puzzle full of colour and wonder – an angel, a young woman named Mary and her husband, Joseph. A wondrous baby born in a manger – God incarnate – heralded by angels; and adored by humble shepherds and magi from the East.

Thirty years later, the grown man calls twelve disciples, teaching all who flock to hear him, about the kingdom of God that has now come among them; salt and light; caring for one another – love others as you love yourself. Jesus' compassion, his teachings on prayer, power and forgiveness, all reveal and provide greater understanding of our picture of God and God's love for this world.

Almost 2,000 years ago a very large and amazing section of the puzzle is revealed in a kaleidoscope of colour, action, treachery, agony and death. The raising of Lazarus; Jesus entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; overturned tables of money lenders in the temple; the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday – this is my body given for you; this is my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins, do this in remembrance of me; washing the disciples feet. There is the shock and sorrow of the crucifixion of an innocent man on Good Friday – three crosses on a stony hill – this day you will be in paradise with me. Jesus died that we may be forgiven. Jesus revealed as words never can, the wonder and enormity of God's love for the people of this world. Three days later there is the explosive wonder of the resurrection!

Is there more to our puzzle? Yes, much more – we still have the fire of Pentecost to come and the story of God's actions in and through the Church. And of course there are our parts of the puzzle to include. How does our life intersect with God? Where are we in God's plans and actions? Easter Sunday reveals to us that God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is with us, for us, passionately loves and cares for us, and God will never, never leave us; we are called to be his children, brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Sadly, this Easter Sunday we are unable to gather as the people of God to celebrate the wonder of Easter and sing our anthems of praise. For many of us, it will be the first Easter Sunday service we have missed for many years – for me it was probably when my children were babies. It is not like any other Easter Sunday we have known before. We are in isolation, unable to gather and told to stay home with police enforcing these directives. No friends or family coming for the traditional Easter gathering nor can we go camping – unless you camp in your own backyard.

Thankfully the battle against the virus is gradually on the improve in Australia but other places in the world have been devastated and the death toll is staggering even in the richest nations of the world. Please pray for the nations that lack medical resources – Africa, India, Pacific nations, South America ... for refugees, the list could go on. The world is very much in need of resurrection – physically and spiritually.

Even today, in the midst of COVID-19, the message of Easter Sunday is renewed hope. Just when Jesus' disciples thought all hope was gone, resurrection turned their sorrow into unspeakable joy! God is in the business of resurrection and renewal: resurrection in the world and in our own lives.

What new piece of the puzzle will you fit into your life today? How and where do you see God at work in and through you and your family and friends today? Easter Resurrection promises us that God hasn't finished working in this world.

The Lord be with you.
Rev'd Jilleen