

## **Opening Slide**

Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here.

### **Song: He Has Risen**

*He has risen*

*He has risen*

*He has risen*

*Jesus is alive*

When the life flowed from His body  
Seemed like Jesus' mission failed  
But His sacrifice accomplished  
Vict'ry over sin and hell

In the grave God did not leave Him  
For His body to decay  
Raised to life - the Great Awakening  
Satan's pow'r He overcame

If there were no resurrection  
We ourselves could not be raised  
But the son of God is living  
So our hope is not in vain

When the Lord rides out of heaven  
Mighty angels at His side  
They will sound the final trumpet  
From the grave we shall arise

He has given life immortal  
We shall see Him face to face  
Through eternity we'll praise Him  
Christ the champion of our faith

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### **Poem: Recognising You**

Jesus in the garden, newly risen from the dead,  
who stood by weeping Mary, and who heard the words she said  
as if you were the gardener, till at last your shepherd's voice  
called her 'Mary' and with one word gave her reason to rejoice,  
Jesus in the garden, ever new but still the same,  
help me recognise you in the speaking of my name.

Jesus on the journey, fellow traveller on the road,  
who met two sad disciples, walking with them as you showed  
the meaning of the scriptures that predicted you would rise,  
but only when you blessed the meal could they believe their eyes.  
Jesus on the journey, meet me where my hopes have fled,  
help me recognise you in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus in the locked room, breaking through despair and doubt,  
who comforted your friends when they had shut the whole world out,  
who came again for Thomas, and revealed your hands and side  
so that he could touch and know you as alive, though you had died.  
Jesus in the locked room, breaking through our self-built bars,  
help me recognise you in the touching of your scars.

Jesus on the shoreline, cooking breakfast for your friends,  
who offered guilty Peter one more chance to make amends,  
who filled a net with fish for him, and helped him to recall  
the first catch that convinced him to respond to your first call.  
Jesus on the shoreline, know my best, forgive my worst,  
help me recognise you in the way I met you first.

Words © Amy Scott Robinson  
Visuals © Richard Lyall

### **Song: You Laid Aside Your Majesty**

You laid aside Your majesty  
Gave up everything for me,  
Suffered at the hands of those You had created.  
You took all my guilt and shame,  
When You died and rose again;  
Now today You reign,  
In heaven and earth exalted.

I really want to worship You, my Lord,  
You have won my heart  
And I am Yours for ever and ever;  
I will love You.  
You are the only one who died for me,  
Gave Your life to set me free,  
So I lift my voice to You in adoration.

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**Song: All Heaven Declares**

All Heaven declares  
The glory of the risen Lord  
Who can compare  
With the beauty of the Lord

Forever He will be  
The lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow to Thee  
And worship Him alone

I will proclaim  
The glory of the risen Lord  
Who once was slain  
To reconcile man to God

Forever You will be  
The lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow to Thee  
And worship You alone

Forever You will be  
The lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow to Thee  
And worship You alone  
Lord, I worship You alone

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[Mark 16:1-8](#)

A couple of years ago in the run-up to Christmas, I couldn't get any inspiration for what to preach about at the Christmas Eve Midnight Communion service.

That's not a good place for a preacher to be in, and certainly not me. I like to have all my thoughts for a sermon or address prepared and organised. Extempore preaching is just not for me.

But on this occasion I strangely didn't feel stressed about the prospect. I offered some thoughts around John chapter 1 verse 5:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

I linked it to my experiences of bereavement, losing my mother in February 2014 and my father in August 2017. I explained how that Advent hope of the light in the darkness had made sense of my experience. I had just enough light in the darkness. This was my hope: just enough light in the darkness.

Those of you who bought the book 'Merry Christmas Everyone' to which I contributed a chapter may recall that this is what I wrote about there. It's important to me.

So why am I beginning an Easter Day message with a reference to Christmas? Because I think there's something similar going on here.

Just look at Mark's account. It only has eight verses, far fewer than the other Gospels. Granted, your Bible may offer you other possible endings to Mark, but these are most likely additions from other writers who couldn't cope with the short and stark way in which Mark ends his account with the women still afraid, despite being told by the young man robed in white not to be alarmed. It does feel like a strange ending. Some scholars assume that we have lost the original ending to the Gospel, and that it would have all been tidied up much more neatly than this.

But what if this really is the end? I think it surprisingly might be quite fitting. Why do I think that? Let me explain.

Mark's Gospel makes great play on the suffering of Jesus and teaches that his disciples will also suffer. That's why the first of three prophecies Jesus makes of his betrayal and death leads to him telling those gathered around him that if anyone wants to be his disciple, he or she must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.

And there are strong reasons for thinking that Mark emphasises these elements of Jesus' life and message because he is writing to Christians in Rome facing persecution under the Emperor Nero in the AD 60s. They need to hear

that suffering for your faith is par for the course according to Jesus himself, but they also need to have a glimpse of hope, and eight verses in Mark 16 give them that.

I don't know about you, but when I am going through a bad patch in life, the sort of people who come along and give me a hearty slap on the back, explaining all my troubles in ways that God hasn't, and telling me how great things will be soon, are actually people to whom I want to give a hearty slap on the back, but not in the same way. A dose of triumphalism is not what the doctor orders at those times for me.

However, a gentle pointer towards hope is much more likely to act as medicine to my soul, and I think that's what the young man robed in white gives the women at the tomb:

<sup>6</sup> 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."' "

He just says it the once. He doesn't labour the point. He doesn't repeat it. He doesn't bang a fist. One gentle statement and he leaves it at that, knowing, I think, that the women's mindset may not change immediately but the miraculous reality will seep in over time.

And what the robed young man – or let's be straightforward, angel – says in that one gentle statement is something that starts the healing process in every part of the women.

**Healing of their *emotions*** begins here:

'Do not be alarmed.'

What is more natural in the Bible when human beings encounter heavenly beings than a sense of fear? These encounters are often accompanied by human dread of the Almighty.

But the first thing the angel says begins the process of moving the women from fear to peace. We know it isn't instant, because the last verse of the reading says they were trembling, bewildered, and afraid.

However, the message of the Resurrection is that even in this most powerful and awe-inspiring work of God, there is no need to fear. This is the work of the God who does not want us to be afraid. It is a key way in which he begins to take away fear from us, for this is the conquest of death, that event which provokes a fearfulness of God.

May our terror of God begin to subside this Easter. 'Do not be alarmed.'

**Healing of their *minds*** also begins here.

'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.'

Were their minds playing tricks on them? Well, it certainly wasn't a hallucination, as such events are usually solitary experiences (whereas there were three women present here) and involve things that the hallucinating person expects (and the women don't expect the Resurrection).

So the angel points to where the body of Jesus had been. It isn't that the empty tomb of itself proves the Resurrection, and opponents of Jesus soon came up with their own theories about why the grave was empty (although their objections were all doomed to failure). But the empty tomb is one part of the jigsaw. Other jigsaw pieces will follow. Before long the women will believe.

This Easter, stop believing the lies that only weak-minded people believe in God and believe the biblical accounts. The evidence shows otherwise. Those who think they are more mature because they don't believe in God are actually falling for that most basic of human sins, namely pride.

So be reassured in your mind this Easter about the truth of Jesus and the veracity of the Gospel.

Finally, **healing of their *spirits*** begins here too.

'But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

Why 'his disciples and Peter'? Wasn't Peter one of the disciples? Is this a mark of how Peter felt following his three denials that he knew Jesus? Did he perhaps no longer consider himself a disciple? It rather sounds like it.

Here the angel is telling the fearful women to convey a message that human failure doesn't have the final word: the grace of God does. Jesus has risen *for* his followers, not to condemn them.

What are those reasons why we think we have put ourselves outside the boundaries of God's love? Let the Resurrection be the reminder that Jesus is calling us back, not casting us out.

Let Easter Day remind us this year that our shame and sin has got nothing on the grace and mercy of God. Jesus rose to meet and restore his disciples, including us.

Like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, it may also take us time to heal of our brokenness. But today, facing the truth that Jesus is alive, let the healing begin.

Let our fearful emotions give way to joy and peace.

Let our faithless minds give way to confidence in Jesus and his Gospel.

And let our shamed spirits bask in the light of God's merciful love in Jesus.

Thus may it be a Happy Easter.

**Song: Because He Lives**

In the early morning light  
Mary made her way  
One more time to say goodbye  
Where her Master lay  
Tears of sorrow turn to joy  
Hear the angels say  
You won't find the Saviour here  
Christ is risen today

*Because he lives*

*Because he lives*

*We have a hope that will remain*

*Because he gives*

*Eternal life*

*To those who call upon his Name*

As we journey through this world  
Singing God's great song  
Age to age the story told  
Of the Risen One  
Holy fire breathe on us

Resurrection power  
Signs and wonders follow us  
Every waking hour

*Because he lives*  
*Because he lives*  
*We have a hope that will remain*  
*Because he gives*  
*Eternal life*  
*To those who call upon his Name*

[Bridge:]

Jesus lives x 4

*Because he lives*  
*Because he lives*  
*We have a hope that will remain*  
*Because he gives*  
*Eternal life*  
*To those who call upon his Name*

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### **Response in Song and Prayer: Listen To The Words**

Listen to the words  
of the risen Christ:  
*peace be with you.*  
Come and see his hands  
and the wound in his side:  
*peace be with you.*  
With the eyes of faith  
are you ready to see?  
*Peace be with you.*  
Come with all your doubts  
for it's time to believe:  
*peace be with you,*  
*peace be with you.*

Let the breath of God now fill me;  
wholeness, fullness, life within me.

Full forgiveness given freely,  
I receive as Jesus sends me.

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Spoken prayers by Sara and Sam Hargreaves © engageworship

### **Hymn: Thine Be The Glory**

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the Church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
for her Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;  
life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

Words: Edmond Louis Budry (1854-1932) translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875-1939)

Music: G F Handel

Video: St Paul's Church, Sarisbury Green

### **Blessing: The Peace Of God Prayer**

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
In the battles of the day and the anxieties of the night.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
When folks are unreasonable and circumstances challenge you.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
When those you love misunderstand and fail to appreciate.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
When the pressure's too great and threatens to overwhelm you.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
When mountains and mole hills all look alike.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds,**  
Because of Jesus, and his extraordinary compassion.

**May the peace of God enrich your hearts and minds.**

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