

Happy Easter! Its good to you see you!

Matthew said "*Suddenly Jesus met them*"...

They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said "do not be afraid".

His point is this: that when we lay hold of the risen Jesus - we need never be troubled again – for Easter Changes Everything.

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A little while ago I was playing a friend at this <Connect 4>.

It's a children's game called Connect 4.

Having lost the first game in precisely 4 moves (which given the title "connect 4" seems just about as dismal a performance as you could imagine)

I found myself concentrating, and as a result I won the next few games

"Eat dirt you Fellow Vicar in the Church of England" I thought.

*But given that we were all on a **Spiritual Retreat together** I got to wondering: why do people compete?*

Does it matter if we lose?

The Nike sports company said "second place is first loser."

But then they would say that, wouldn't they!?

Someone else said "whoever said, it doesn't matter whether you win or lose... probably lost."

Does it matter if we win or lose?

Well, I guess it depends on what's at stake.

If we find ourselves in a "life or death" struggle with a 4 year old over Tiddly-winks then may be we've lost the plot a little!

But there ARE times when winning really IS everything;

where a wholehearted dedication to coming out on top is literally "a matter of life and death".

Where to win, changes everything –

I want to say to you that Easter is such a time:

On Good Friday:

Jesus lay Dead on a cross and it looked like death had won,

the Disciples dreams lay in tatters, and

they had no idea what life was all about

So this morning I want to ask 3 questions:

Does it matter if there is no life after death?

Does it matter if there is no hope when our dreams are smashed?

Does it matter if life seems to have no ultimate purpose?

Yes! It matters.

For Easter changes everything and if we would take hold of the risen Jesus

1. He has the power to transform our view of Death.

Three friends were talking one day and one of them said "When you're dead and you're in your coffin and your friends are gathered around you – what would you like them to say about you?"

The first man said, "I'd like to hear them say that I was a fine businessman and a successful, fair, and honest man!"

The second said "I'd like to hear them say, that I was a wonderful husband, a great father, a real family man with time for my kids"

The third man thought and said, "I'd like to hear them say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

Most people would give anything – and I mean anything:

all of their life savings, all of their possessions, everything they own,

for just a few more weeks of healthy care-free living.

Simone's Father died when he was 42 and she was just a teenager – towards the end of his life he called her in to him and said “darling don't let anyone tell you this is what its all about – money, success, possessions - I would trade it all away to stay with you now”

Death takes everything we love away from us.

All the things we spend our life fighting tooth and nail to preserve, to protect, to keep - death steals them!

Sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, the capacity to speak, to communicate, to love – it takes everything.

Our friends, our family, our loved ones - It takes everyone.

You know there is a famous poem that people sometimes have at funerals that begins

“Death is not nothing at all”.

I find that really hard to accept, for it denies the reality of what has happened –

“Death is FAR FROM nothing at all”.

Death and the process of dying: hurts,

it steals, it breaks hearts, it shatters lives and it severs love.

And if there is nothing after death – then there is no hope.

But Easter changes this.

Jesus shows that death is defeated.

And let me tell you – it matters.

It matters that Jesus rose from the dead.

Because now we know that resurrection is not only possible –
but for those “who have laid hold of Jesus”, it is certain!

When little Emily Pett was dying and Martin and Karin were standing at her bed-side and she said “Dad who is that man standing next to you”. And there WAS no-one standing next to them – and yet still she insisted – the ‘kind man’...

The words of Jesus “Do not let your hearts be troubled. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And I will come back and take you to be with me” ring true and give hope.

When Eve's mother died on the operating table but minutes later was resuscitated. When she had recovered (and having not known that she had died) – she knew that she had glimpsed something beyond ‘incredibly profound’ – it changed Eve's view of death,

When Gary Habermas' wife, Debbie was dying from stomach cancer.

He said: “it was an awful time. It was the worst time in the world.”

He knew he only wanted to ask God one question:

“Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed?”

“Lord, why is she dying?”

“Lord, why?”

And yet he also sensed that God was responding by answering,

“Gary, did not I raise my Son from the dead?”

And he replied in his heart “Lord, I know that!

But what about Debbie!”

Yet again and again it seemed that God brought him back to the same response : “Gary, did I not, raise my Son Jesus from the dead?”

Until, eventually he understood.

He said later:

If God raised Jesus from the dead 2,000 years ago,

then there's an answer to Debbie's death

There is an answer to everyone's death

If there's a resurrection, there's a heaven.

If Jesus was raised, Debbie was raised.

If Debbie was raised then I will be too, and we shall meet.’’

When Dr. Habermas (with all his despair) laid hold of the risen Jesus – he found everything changed!

For Debbie, for Emily, for Eve’s mum,
for my friend Jo, for Mary Jones, for Ve Wolfe, for Jilly Milne – for **every** Christian I have ever carried out a
funeral service for –
Easter changes everything.
It can for you too.

Death is not the end of our existence,
It is not the end of our relationships;
It is not to be feared in that way

for Jesus Christ has won the battle,
he has come out on top and
It matters!

Easter transforms our view of death and gives us real hope for eternity
but it also give real hope for NOW
because, a risen

2. Jesus has the power to transform our smashed Dreams.

On Friday Mary was in tears standing at the foot of the cross
On Friday the disciples were running scared.
Oh Friday his followers were scattered like sheep without a shepherd.
The cynics were mocking Jesus saying “he could save others but he can’t save himself”
And the dreams of all those who had believed in him were in tatters.

You know I wondered whether I should spend my time this morning presenting to you all the logical
arguments for the resurrection:

Yet what relevance are these facts, when life suck!
For Mary “if God could not save Jesus then what possible relevance had he got to her life”.

But that changed when she **encountered** the risen Christ,
when she personally took hold of him.

*A little while ago Leslie came to me. She desperately wanted a baby. She said that everything she and her
husband had tried over the years had failed. She was almost at the end of the road and she feared she would
never fall pregnant.*

*She didn’t really know why she had come to talk with me – we had never met each other before. And as we
talked I knew that what she needed more than anything else in her life – was to encounter a risen Jesus.*

*For her to lay hold of Him, for her to trust him, for her to place her faith in him – that’s what she needed.
About 3 months later on an Alpha Course that’s what she did. Within weeks of that happening she was
pregnant with Henry.*

Smashed dreams transformed.

A little while ago I was talking with Rob.

He had loved Lucy for many, many years.

They’d been friends for a long time and now with a bunch of friends they had been sharing a falt together.

To put it bluntly - He really fancied her – but she’d never felt “even close” in the same way.

*In fact I knew that Lucy was coming to the end of her tether with Rob and she wondered whether the
friendship could even go on much longer.*

As we talked what Rob needed more than anything else in his life was to encounter a risen Jesus.

For Rob to lay hold of Him, for him to trust him – that's what he needed. And for the first time in his life that's what he did. A few months later he was going out with Lucy, a few months after that they were engaged, and in a few weeks time from now they will be married.

Smashed dreams transformed.

Trevor and I are good friends.

We met on an Alpha Course but Trevor was a troubled man.

Wracked with guilt over a marriage that had not lasted, he felt bitter and angry with God.

He buried himself in his work to escape his demons.

He had been living with Tracey for many years but there was no way he felt he could commit to her.

He met Jesus and Jesus turned his life upside down.

He gave Jesus his guilt, his bitterness, his anger and Jesus transformed him.

Before the Alpha Course had finished they were engaged and they married last year.

Last week Trevor said he has never had so much fun, and so much excitement in his life as a result of knowing Jesus.

Smashed dreams transformed.

I could go on with story after story: meeting Jesus transforms smashed dreams

NOW What I am absolutely NOT saying is that

God will give you whatever you want so long as we trust him.

I am NOT saying

Do an Alpha Course → get a Red Ferrari

Put your faith in Jesus → never lose your job

Follow Christ → get healed any illness

I am not saying that at all.

But I AM saying is that a living Jesus answers prayers,

and a living relationship with Jesus can take smashed dreams and work in them

That no matter how disappointed, how lost, or frustrated we are with life –

lay hold of Christ and God will transform our life.

He has been doing this for thousands of year, for 100s of millions of people and he can do it for you.

Easter changes everything.

He transforms our view of death

He transforms our smashed dreams.

3. He transforms our Agendas.

People have always been disappointed with Jesus,

People have always lost faith in him,

Its because they've always had their own agenda for him.

2000 years ago when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

The Zealots wanted to make him King

The Pharisees wanted his endorsement; and

the People wanted economic revival

Jesus was a huge disappointment to all of them.

He would not follow their agenda

He would not be pigeon holed for their use.

He would not dance to their tune.

He was God in Human form and the question he poses when he meets us is

“Who exactly is Lord here”

Who is God of your life – is it me or is it you?

That's the question Jesus always asks us

“Who is God in your life”

And *as soon* as they understood that they could not USE Jesus to further their own ends,
As soon as they realised how uncomfortable, how personally challenging it was going to be around him
“who claimed to be God in their life”

They got rid of him.

They threw everything they could at him: rumours, lies, betrayal, injustice - they threw it all at him.

They placed God in the dock, they allowed him no defence, they found him guilty and then quietly buried him.

They buried God so as never to never disturb them again.

The events of Holy week are a worked example of how humanity always treats Jesus when they realise he wants to be the centre of their life!

I can remember the first time I understood the claims of Jesus.

I can remember that he DID NOT promise to deliver what I thought I needed to make me happy.

- He would not conform to my agenda for him!

So I treated him with indifference, I ignored his claims, I selected a quiet burial site at the back of my mind and rolled a stone over him.

And then I wondered why God seemed so distant and so remote and so irrelevant to my world.

We all have needs, we all have our own agendas and we can all be very disappointed in God.

But when we meet the living Jesus His question remains:

Who is Lord here?

Whose agenda are we going to follow?

Who is going to be God in our life?

The Apostle Paul struggled with some unknown physical disability – he wanted God to heal him (that was his agenda for God) – yet instead God revealed his love to him more and more..

*Mary wanted Jesus to stay alongside her for the rest of her life – (that was her agenda) – yet God gave her his Holy Spirit who didn't just live alongside her – but lived IN her to stay **forever**.*

*The Disciples wanted Jesus take up where he left off – they wanted an easy life - Jesus got **them** to take up where he left off - and he gave them a purposeful life.*

Becoming a Christian, following Christ, trusting him

doesn't mean that suddenly everything in our life is going to get sorted (although God DOES (miraculously) answer prayer)

IT means, rather,

His Spirit gives us:

strength, reveals his love, and reminds us of his presence so that we can overcome life's deep disappointments.

There are many in our church that struggle from physical limitations, with fragile mental-health, or relational trauma - we are just a normal bunch of everyday people!

But laying hold of a Risen Jesus

i) means we realise that God loves us enough to die for us AND to come back for us – THIS IS OUR VALUE.

I think none of us would have blamed God if on that Easter Sunday Jesus was so disgusted by the way humanity had treated him that he got up, dusted himself down and left this world to its own devices forever.

But he didn't.

He neatly folds the graves clothes, he rolls the stone away and he comes back for more....

He took everything we threw at him: and came back for more
And the evening I realised that was the evening when my whole attitude to the disappointments of life changed.

Taking hold of a risen Jesus shows us how valuable we are
it also shows us that

ii) His presence lives in us forever.

Christianity is not simply a religion or a set of rules.

It is a living relationship with God, a living God, a risen Jesus.

It is the knowledge of his presence, his approval, his peace that transforms every Christian's ability to overcome extreme persecution, disasters and trauma's in life.

It is his presence with us NOW that makes this difference!

Take hold of him and he becomes a living God living in us

He values us

He will never leave us; and

iii) He has a plan for us

a plan for you to stand for something of eternal value

a plan for you to do something in people's lives of eternal consequence;

a plan for you that means, we don't just fritter our life away on ourselves but on something with an eternal purpose.

laying hold, really grasping the reality of a risen Jesus –

making Him Lord of our life

transforms our view of death

transforms our smashed dreams

transforms our purpose in this world

And this could be yours if you would lay hold of this truth

and Make God (make Jesus) God of your life.

Centre your life on him.

he will

give you eternal purpose in this world

transform your smashed dreams

and give you sure hope in death

Easter Changes Everything.