

Easter Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022.  
Luke 24:1-12, 1 Cor 15:17-26 & 57-58.

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
as think about your word, Easter and unanswered prayer,  
speaking into our pain, our confusion  
our struggles with faith, our sin guilt and shame.  
You know where we are at, take us forward.  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,  
to the praise of God the Father, your Father and our Father. Amen..

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We come to the end of our series on Unanswered Prayer. Easter speaks to us.

### **The Unexpected Happens**

When we stop our gospel reading where we do, by mid morning of that first Easter, we have three terrified confused women, a bunch of grumpy argumentative disciples, and a perplexed Peter! What happened on that first Easter was something nobody expected!

Yet the Easter story, the Easter event, challenges us to holding our mind and our whole life open to God who does unexpected things, even in the midst of mess, confusion, darkness, silence, unanswered prayers. God does life transforming things that you'd have never imagined in your wildest dreams! Paul years later in Ephesians would write, how God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to that power that is at work within us." And what is that power – he wrote a few pages earlier – "that power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead." Easter, reminds us, as we wrestle with unanswered prayer, that what God can be doing in and round our situations, in the pain, the times we feel God was silence, prayers were not answered as we wanted, what he is doing within us and others, can be more than we can imagine.

The women who came to the tomb that morning, had followed Jesus from Galilee – their lives transformed from meeting and following Jesus. They were there at the crucifixion – stood watching all that took place. They followed Joseph as he buried Jesus, seeing how he did it and where he was buried. They went home, prepared spices and then rested for the Sabbath, waiting for this morning...

### **Questions in the heart**

As they rested, as they walked, what was in their hearts – the fact they take the spices, the come to anoint a dead body, not welcome a living Saviour. Mark Gospel records they asked each other : 'Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb?'

Were there other questions – between them or within their hearts? Questions like– how will they live with their sorrow, sorrow that may linger or shape them for years, that when they talk years later about Jesus, they will need to pause, to gather their emotions, it will still be so raw... Questions. Why have their

hopes, even their prayers, the hopes they shared with others in the nation, hopes that seemed to be biblically based, why have they come to nothing. Questions about where is God, when Jesus is in the grave, why has God not acted or spoke, why has he been silent.

Easter is a day of questions. But we hear questions throughout the day and in the days to come.

The angels: why do you look for the living among the dead?

But it is not only the angels who ask questions.

### **Jesus asks questions too.**

When we read it closely, how many times did, after Jesus was raised, does he greet people with questions? He asks questions; he does not give explanations why there was silence on the Saturday, why things went as they did on Thursday and Friday. This is how he responds to the mess, pain, confusion and failure within them, caused by the past days.

Jesus asks Mary: why are you weeping? He spoke to her pain of her loss.

The two disciples on the Emmaus Road – What are you discussing together ... don't you understand?' He spoke into their confusion.

When he appeared among the disciples in Jerusalem, 'why are you troubled, why do doubts arise in your minds?' He spoke into their struggles or even crisis of faith.

Some days later, by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asked Peter 'Do you love me more than these?' – Jesus spoke into his guilt.

Unanswered Prayer we know, can create a mess in our lives. There are prayers, like on Maundy Thursday, to which God says no – which may bring pain into our lives; there are prayers we pray that we long to be answered, and yet have not yet. Times like Good Friday, when we feel, where is God? Or on Holy Saturday, when there is silence, no explanation, no illumination or revelation from God, as if he has disappeared. However. To quote Pete Greig: "Jesus loves you too much to leave you for long in pain, confusion, doubt or a state of unbelief. He wants to help you deal with your pain, your confusion, your doubt and your sin."

We spent an evening on the psalms this past week with John. The psalms as we said can be grouped as 'psalms of orientation, disorientation and re / new orientation'. Orientation – all is great and right; disorientation – the world, God, our lives are now how we expected; reorientation / new orientation – the circumstances may have changed, God may have stepped in; if not, then there is a new perspective, a fresh perspective, attitude. The psalms will never invalidate your pain – the lament psalms are recorded within our word by the inspiration of the Spirit. But the psalms will not leave you there. The psalms groups sum up where the disciples are at.

On Easter day, Jesus ministering. He is again living out Isaiah 42 as he did, in the previous years. **"A bruised reed he will not break, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out."** (Isaiah 42:3).

He finds people, he is, you could say, like the good shepherd, seeking the lost sheep. He is raised, he goes to Mary; he goes to Peter; he appears on the Emmaus Road, he visits the upper room on the first Easter

evening; returns a week later when Thomas is present; and a third time in Galilee as they are finishing as he reaches out again to Peter. He does not invalidate their pain, confusion, do but he does not want to leave them there. They had times of orientation – the kingdom breaking in, God at work, Palm Sunday praises. Disorientation broke in – opposition, betrayal, trial, death, darkness, silence. And now Jesus seeks, individually, to bring reorientation / new orientation. And the risen Lord Jesus continues to seek to do that within us.

### **Addressing pain.**

It has been said, if your pain is not transformed, it will be transmitted to others.

If you experiences of unanswered prayer – past, or present – have left you with pain, hurting, weeping, like Mary, Jesus asks you the question, he asked her on Easter. Why are you weeping? And, John 20, tells us, thinking he was the gardener, she tells him. But the one we speak to is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. But tell him, lament. But when you are finished, listen, for what he may say in return – all it took was one word on that first Easter – Mary. We listen to the Lord, after we have cried out.

### **Addressing confusion.**

Maybe our disappointments over prayer have left us confused like the disciples on the Emmaus Road. What are you discussing? And so they brought their questions and confusion to Jesus ‘we had hoped he was the one.’ Do not run away from your questions. Bring them to the Lord. Be open to Jesus explaining the scriptures to you – his illumination, revelation, or reminding you of what you have known. He wants to help you make sense of things. So continue to study, to think, to talk about these with other believers, maybe within a Life Group. And you may find that you heart becomes slowly warmed or burning’ as you begin to see an answer...

### **Addressing Doubt.**

Maybe unanswered prayer has created an crisis or significant doubts in your faith – a shadow over everything or certain things, you no longer can pray or do. The disciples could not believe it – they did not believe it when the women told them that Jesus was raised, it seemed like nonsense to them. And at the end of the, day, ‘when Jesus appeared, why are you so troubled, why do doubts arise in your minds?’ Has your old confidence in God been eroded, you may be older, but are you better? Imagine Jesus stepping into your room – through your closed door – and he asks ‘why are your troubled? Why do doubts arise?’ Tell him. Again, share with others. Thomas, does not contain his doubts, he expressed them to those close to him. The first step may be like the father who said to Jesus ‘I do believe, help me in my unbelief.’

### **Addressing Sin.**

Or maybe in your struggles with disappointment, you have fallen into sin, or it has led you into sin. Like the Apostle Peter, you lied, or denied you were a Christian.

Peter ran to that tomb. Yet sometime on that day, Jesus and him had a private unrecorded meeting. The Lord sought him out. Like the Lord did for Mary. Jesus pursued them both. Jesus pursued Peter to begin to deal with his guilt and shame.

John 21 is another occasion – sometimes healing can be a process and sometimes we hold onto guilt, when the Lord has forgiven. Maybe also, for the other disciples, they needed to know of a public reconciliation with Jesus. Jesus wants to dismantle your shame and guilt and restore your relationship, and to renew your calling to serve him.

Unanswered Prayers. We come with Questions. Why does God say no to my prayers? Why are they not answered yet. Where was or is God? Why is he silent? All reflected in the days of Holy Week. Yet on Easter, Jesus comes with questions to heal and restore, to bind up the bruised reeds, to fan into flame smouldering wicks. And he seeks to do that with us. They needed his help. We do too.

### **Fresh perspective: Our Prayers Matter (The Throne Room)**

I said about reorientation.

In Revelation, we read descriptions of what God will do in the future. The opening words, about Jesus, the firstborn from the dead, the one who by his blood has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom and priests to serve him. When John sees Jesus, glorified, Jesus says: "Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, I am the living one, I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and hades.

As Jesus speaks to the churches, we then see a vision of heaven – after which the seals will be opened. They search for the one to open the seals, these last acts of judgement on the earth: See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, had triumphed – conquered – he is able to open the scroll and its seals.'

Victorious over death. He has won. He guides history. And in the midst of this We see each elder has a harp, and they hold golden bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints...." These are prayers before any seals are opened.

The prayers which are before the throne. What prayers were they? Could it be that prayers, that the believers thought were not answered and maybe even ignored, are like incense, of value, or beauty and pleasure, to the Lord and before him. They have not been ignored or disregarded. The Lamb has overcome. Our prayers matter.

### **Fresh Perspective: the Glory to Come (All will be Well)**

Second image.

Basilica de la Sagrada Familia – the Church of the Holy Family – or the Gaudi Cathedral in Barcelona. As you know, this has been a work in progress since the c19th. The Cathedral is to have three facades. The first – the Façade of the Nativity. This covers the birth and life of Jesus. The second façade – the Passion of Christ. These have been completed. The third has recently been began – the Glory Façade – Christ who reigns and will return. The question has been when will the Cathedral be completed. The official hope is 2026...

You visit. The façade of Nativity and of the Passion you can see and enjoy. We too, are in that position. We enjoy the messages of Christmas and Easter as they stand before us, tower over us. Yet we await the completion of the story when Christ's glory will be fully revealed. He will come and those who belong to him, the end will come, death the last enemy defeated.

As we wait for that glory to come, we have confidence. The official position, the Cathedral will be completed. We have confidence that all will be well. Maybe that is the perspective we hold in the midst in our unanswered prayer, it will be well.

We have to say, that the ultimate answers to humanity's greatest needs have come through Jesus own unanswered prayers. Easter is where it all begins., Easter is the start. Not the finish of the new story. As the former General Secretary of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold once prayed: 'For all that has been. THANKS. For all that shall be, YES.

Let us finish.

Final words.

**<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.**