

Easter Sunday 17th April 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 24:1-12
Theme: “A morning *almost* beyond belief”
“Thank God for this great new day!!”

Introduction:

Some days are great days. Some days are even life-changing days, and *some days are just almost beyond belief*: they are so great and so life-changing.

Days like that don't come all that often in life.

And sometimes they come completely out of the blue, when you are least expecting them. Have you had days like this, days that are so great and so life-changing that they are almost beyond belief? I've had a few in my life: the day that I met my wife Jenine; the day that I went to Luther Seminary and was told that I could study there to become a pastor; the day that Jonathan was born; the day that Thomas appeared out of his mother head first rather than bottom first as we expected....

Part 1: ...for the women and the disciples

The first Easter Sunday morning was one of those sorts of the days for Jesus' friends. The One whom they thought was God's Messiah, God's King, God's unique Son, had been cruelly put to death on a cross on the Friday, and now it was the Sunday morning and some of the women were going to Jesus' tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. They would have been still grief stricken as they wandered in the half light of approaching dawn towards Jesus tomb.

But as the sun came over the horizon, something wonderful happened to change this dark day into a day almost beyond belief.

Let me read to you again how Luke describes what happened:

Very early on Sunday morning, the women went to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, so they went in; but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

By the way, who were these women who “went to the tomb”? Luke tells us a bit later:

The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and the Mary the mother of Jesus.... And the other women with them, *including Salome (Luke 24:10; cf. Mark 16:1).*

Sorry, I’m interrupting Luke’s narrative.... He goes on to say:

They, “*the women*”, stood there puzzled about this, when suddenly two men in bright shining clothes stood by them. Full of fear, the women bowed down to the ground, as the men said to them, “Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive. He is not here; he has been raised, *he is alive again!!*

Remember what he said to you while he was in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, be crucified, and three days later rise to life’ (Luke 24:1-7).

Imagine the joy in the faces of those women when those angels appeared to them and told them that Jesus was alive again! It would have been an incredibly dramatic change in facial expression: from grief and crying to smiling and rejoicing.

The only parallel that comes to my mind is the change in expression on my wife Jenine’s face when each of our boys were held up to her after their birth. Prior to their birth, Jenine’s face was wracked with pain, but after their birth, it was filled with joy.

The women went and told the apostles, *probably just Peter and John who would have been the only disciples in Jerusalem on that first Easter Sunday morning.* The others, it seems, were hiding in Bethany. The women went and told “the apostles”, but Luke tells us:

The apostles thought that what the women said was nonsense, and they did not believe them. Peter got up and ran to the tomb; he bent down and saw the linen wrappings and nothing else. Then he went back home, wondering about what had happened (*Luke 24:11-12; cf. John 20:1-3; Addendum 1 of events based on John Wenham's, "The Easter Enigma"*)

The disciples thought that what the women said was "nonsense", just the ravings of deluded women. They thought that the notion that Jesus was alive again was literally "beyond belief".

By the way, that's why I stated our for today as: "A morning *almost* beyond belief". The notion that a dead man can come back to life is *almost* beyond belief.

Peter and John's minds, and the rest of the disciples' minds, though, were quickly changed by events that occurred later in that day.

Word soon came to them that Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden by the tomb (*John 20:11-18; cf Mark 16:9-11*), and to a group of the women who were probably on the road to Bethany to tell the news about the empty tomb to most of the disciples there (*Matt. 28:8-10*).

Then Jesus appeared to Peter himself (*Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5*), and to Cleopas and his companion, on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13*). And finally that night, Jesus appeared to all the disciples, *bar Thomas, and of course Judas who had betrayed Jesus* (*Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23; cf. Addendum 2 re the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus*)

The disciples soon came to realise that that Sunday was indeed a day almost beyond belief: it was so great a day, and so life-transforming a day!!

Why was it a such a life-transforming day for the disciples and Jesus' friends in general?

- * Because it meant that their Lord and their dear Friend wasn't dead, but that he was alive. And that they could go on talking to him and being with him.
- * But more than that, it meant that Jesus was who he said he was: namely God's Son who had been sent by God to suffer and to die for us on a cross.

When Jesus had died on the cross, they had thought the seemingly impossible: that maybe Jesus wasn't who he said he was. For doesn't the old Testament say:

If a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him the same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse (Deut. 21:22-23 NIV).

They had thought that Jesus had died "accursed" by God, and that incredibly he wasn't who he said he was: God's Messiah and more than that, "the Son of God".

The raising of Jesus from the dead by God the Father changed all that. Now, they knew that Jesus *was* who he said he was. And as Jesus explained to them why he had to suffer and die on the cross, they came to understand that sure Jesus died "accursed" by God, but he did it for them and for everyone: he took on himself the "curse" that we deserve from God for our sin (Luke 24:44-49; cf. Gal. 3:10-14).

- * And furthermore, it pointed them towards a glorious future: if God could raise Jesus from the dead and give him a wonderful new body, couldn't God do that for them!?

God's resurrection of Jesus from the dead, *with a new resurrection body*, reminded them that death *really* isn't the end, and that one day

also God would raise them from the dead. Sure, they believed that *on the Last Day* God would raise them to life again, *but now they knew for certain that it would happen* (John 11:23-24; cf. Matt. 22:23-33).

Part 2: “...for us”

Yes, the women and the disciples thought that Easter Sunday was “a day *almost* beyond belief”. It was such incredible day for them.

And that Easter Sunday is likewise a mind-boggling, life-transforming day for us!!

- * It means for us first of all that *Jesus is alive*. I know that it is stating the obvious, but it means for us that Jesus isn't dead in a grave somewhere, but that he is alive. He is alive, and he offers to be not only our Lord and our Saviour, but also our companion and friend.

Loneliness is one of the biggest curses that people live under. It is in itself, one the main causes of suicide, particularly among students. And yet, because Jesus is alive and because he promises us that he is with us always to the end of the age (*Matt. 28:20*), we can face the future knowing that come what may we will always have one Friend at least to talk to, someone who will stand by us and support us, no matter what... (*Green, Christ is risen, so what?, p. 70-72*).

- * Secondly, Easter Sunday is a life-transforming day for us in that it indicates to us that we can believe what Jesus tells us (*hold up the Bible*). God's raising of Jesus from the dead is his stamp of approval on Jesus.

It is God's way of saying to us that Jesus is who he said he was, *namely God's Son and our Saviour*. It is God's way of saying to us that Jesus really did suffer and die “for us” as he said he would, that Jesus really has taken upon himself the blame and the punishment that we deserve like he said he would (*e.g., Mk 10:45*). God's raising of Jesus from the dead is God's gigantic shout of “yes” to Jesus!

So we don't have to be sorrowful and downcast and full of despair about our “sins”: they have been taken care of by Jesus on the cross.

And we don't have to worry about the future and facing up to God when we die: because as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour, we are each God's forgiven child, *because of what Jesus did for us on the cross (Mk 10:45; Luke 18:14; Rom. 3:20-25, 28; 5:1; 8:1).*

- * Finally, that first Easter Sunday is a life-transforming day for us in that means for us that death isn't the end. God's raising of Jesus from the dead points us ahead to our own resurrection.

As Paul puts it in one of his letters:

The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised (1 Cor. 15:20).

Jesus will come again, as he said, at the Last Day, and he will awaken us from our sleep of death, just as he was awakened. And he will give us a new body, just like his resurrection body. Then we will live with him in God's new kingdom (Matt. 24:29-44; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-44, 51-57).

So we don't have to worry about what will happen to us when we die, and we don't have to grieve over the death of family and friends who are Christians "as those who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The resurrection of Jesus points us to the wonderful new future that we will have as God's forgiven children....

Conclusion:

As I said at the start, "some days are great days, some days are even life-changing days, and *some days are just almost beyond belief*: they are so great and so life-changing". Easter Sunday was one such day: a day so great that it was almost beyond belief.

May we always remember and cherish this day, above all days. And let's never forget what it means for us: that Jesus is alive and not dead, that all he said and did has God's seal of approval on it, and that death is not the end but simply the gateway to the wonderful new life that God has in store for us.

Appendix 1

One of the best books on what actually happened on that first Easter Sunday morning is a book by John Wenham, entitled *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection stories in conflict?* John Wenham examines all the evidence and this is what he thinks happened. He writes that we must picture something like this:

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Clopas, *Mary's husband*, set off from Bethany, where the disciples had fled to and where some of the women had gone also, while it was still dark. By the time they had arrived at John's house in Jerusalem it was getting light. Anointing was women's work, so Clopas went no further, but the other two Marys, joined now by Salome with the ointments, continued on their way to the tomb....

They were troubled by another matter – how to move the gravestone. They were probably reassured by the recollection that Joseph of Arimathea, whose tomb it was, probably has a gardener (or more probably a night watchman) who could still be on duty. By the time they reached the garden it was full daylight and as they approached the tomb they saw to their astonishment that the great stone had been rolled right away from the entrance.

Mary Magdalene at once jumped to the conclusion that the body had been taken (*cf. John 20:1-2*). She dashed off to tell Peter and John in John's house in Jerusalem, leaving the two older women standing there lost for words (*p. 82-83*).

Appendix 2

The resurrection appearances of Jesus:

- * **Mary Magdalene** (*John 20:1-18; Mk 16:9-11*)

- * **The other women, probably on the road to Bethany** (*Matthew 28:8-10*)

- * **Peter** (*Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5*)

- * **Cleopas and his companion** (*Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13*)

- * **The first appearance to the disciples** (*Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23*)

- * **The second appearance to the disciples** (*John 20:24-29*)

- * **The third appearance to the disciples in Galilee** (*John 21:1-19*)

- * **The appearance to the 500** (*1 Cor. 15:6; Matthew 28:16-20*)

- * **The appearance to James** (*1 Cor. 15:7*)

- * **The farewell appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem** (*Luke 24:50-52; Acts 21:4-11; Mark 16:14-20; 1 Cor. 15:7*)

- * **The appearance to Paul** (*1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:1-20*).