

# Christ is Risen

a sermon preached on

## Easter Sunday

12 April 2009

at

### St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Mark 16: 1-8

Easter is the greatest of all Christian feasts, and the season of Eastertide lists fifty days from Easter Day until the Feast of Pentecost.

It was St Gregory who said – “Easter was like the sun among the stars of the other festivals. It is the heart of the sacred calendar, around which all of the other Christian festivals have meaning and purpose.”

Today is the summit of the Christian year. As we journey into Easter week, we consider that death was only the beginning. We can't appreciate the greatness of Jesus' resurrection unless we acknowledge the full reality of his death. Jesus died in darkness, but he trusted enough in God to face the darkness, and to wait for the resurrection. His leap of faith was not in vain.

On the third day – God raised him up.

Jesus entered the darkness of death and emerged victorious. The burden had been lifted from him. He had conquered death.

For those who have read John Bunyan's “Pilgrim's Progress”, you may remember this passage:

“Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus, till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from his shoulders and fell off his back and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart,  
“He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.”

Bunyan concludes:

“Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on his way singing.”

Easter is a time for joyful leaps and singing hearts.

This story gives us some idea of the joy the disciples also experienced that first Easter. Jesus, their leader and friend, had broken the chains of death through the power of God.

As we go through life we all experience little deaths. We get a foretaste of death when we live in bitterness, loneliness, sadness and despair. In times like these the world tends to close in on us, and we may feel that we have one foot in the grave, but we also experience little resurrections, when we know love, acceptance and forgiveness; when we open our hearts to others and to life, the world opens up and we emerge from the tomb.

At an Easter Mass in Russian, when the country was under communist rule and it was dangerous to openly profess one's Christian faith, someone at the rear of the church lit a candle, a single point of light not able to pierce the darkness. Then there was another, and another. In less than a minute the church was a blaze of light. Each candle lit up the face behind it, a face mirrored with suffering, but now that suffering turned into

joy because of the knowledge that Christ is Risen. These people did not debate or doubt the resurrection. They had experienced it in their lives!

Without Easter, the story of Jesus would have been little better than a flare in the night. Darkness would still have had the last word. So let us not be afraid to celebrate the light the risen Christ has brought into our world of darkness.

Christ is risen – let us arise in Him. Christ enters new life – let us live in Him.

ALLELUIA – CHRIST IS RISEN!

References: F. McCarthy  
D. O'Leary

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