

## Easter Sunday – 9am

May I offer my own welcome to you all, on this most *wonderful* day of the Christian year. If Good Friday is indeed “good”, then there is a sense in which *Resurrection Sunday* (excuse the grammar) is GOODER!

I have to say though, that my great *fear* about the responsibility of preaching today, is that I will *feel* that I am simply “going through the motions”, in re-telling a familiar story to you all.

Most us here know what happens on Easter Day ... So why do we need to be reminded *yet* again? The temptation thus for any preacher or speaker, is perhaps to try and “dress up”, or slightly distort, or even “add to” the Easter story, in an effort to make it ... fresh ... or ... edgy? or even (God forbid!) ... more crowd-pleasing!

Maybe I should have taken the lead of one recent church, and arrived this morning dressed in a *Star Wars* costume!

Well the correct and God-honouring way forward I believe, can be found in the words of a hymn, that was written by Katherine Hankey in 1866:

Tell me the story slowly,  
that I may take it in,  
that wonderful redemption,  
God’s remedy for sin.  
Tell me the story often,  
for I forget so soon;  
the early dew of morning,  
has passed away at noon.  
Tell me the old, old story,  
tell me the old, old story,  
Tell me the old, old story,  
of Jesus and His love.

And friends, on this resurrection Sunday, this is exactly what I *should* do and what I *intend* to do!

Well for those of here who follow an AFL team (and I assume that is most of us), I wonder what *year* you would nominate, if I asked you ... rhetorically: ‘in recent history, which was the greatest Grand Final?’ As an ex-Sydney person myself, I would probably nominate 2005, when Leo Barry took that stunning pack mark, in the dying seconds, to give the Swans its first victory, with a very small points margin.

Or perhaps *then* 2006 needs to be mentioned, where the losers of 2005 – West Coast, won against Sydney – this time by a single point.

Or perhaps some of the more seasoned spectators here, would nominate 1989, where Hawthorn beat Geelong by a single goal and there were a series of famous moments: Dermott Brereton being *hammered* at the opening bounce, Robert DiPierdomenico playing with a punctured lung, Gary Ablett Snr kicking nine goals.

Or perhaps then Geelong’s great moment in 2007, giving Port Adelaide an absolute shellacking by 119 points, the biggest Grand Final margin in history.

Or perhaps we dare mention 2010, where Collingwood were victors, but only after the match was played

*again*, after a draw with St. Kilda the week before.

Who knows? Perhaps in 30 years time I'll be speaking *again* on Easter Day and I'll ask the same question, and be able to mention the Gold Coast Suns' *recent* win!

Well regardless of whether the arena is sport or film or holidays, we do feel don't we that an *experienced* event, is so much sweeter or memorable, if there is a great sense of drama or intrigue, or a great *twist* in the unfolding events?

So what was it like then on the *first* Easter Sunday?

Well it has to be said that the day of the *Resurrection* of Jesus, for all its drama, intrigue and twists, (amazingly!), is very *unglamorous* ... almost ... almost *forgettable* ... it is a pretty ordinary day!

The gospel writer – Mark, is renowned for giving his reader a very *earthy* and “call it as you see it”-type *edge* to his gospel. There's no room in his writing for the *airbrushing* of people's character or recorded events in the life of Jesus.

His ending to his gospel in chapter 16 is somewhat *abrupt* ... anti-climactic ... and almost incoherent. Have a look there with me at verse 8, at the top of page 830:

'So they went out (that's the three women), and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.'

Well so ordinary and *uninspiring* perhaps is this ending, that it seems that over time, early Christians had sought to attach, a more *inspiring* epilogue to this gospel, hence the two headings on page 830 indicating: “a shorter ending” and “a longer ending” of Mark.

But I think that we ought to accept, that what is written here in verse 8, is the way that *God* in his providence has decided, that this gospel of Mark should end.

And yet what an enigmatic ending it is!

Did the women *really* expect to find a dead body to anoint? How *did* the three women expect to remove the tomb stone? How long was this young bloke in white waiting for? Why didn't Jesus wait for them ... why did he leave? What were the women actually afraid of?

The first Easter was not a celebratory festival; it was not a Moomba parade ... it wasn't a pre-match spectacle ... it wasn't a New Years Eve-type celebration ...

It was lonely, early, quiet, confusing, restrained and *terrifying* all at once!

And in many ways, this very *temperate* and ordinary account, is actually most appropriate, when we have considered the very ordinary sort of *death*, that Jesus had just endured on the Friday beforehand – crucifixion was not a grand exit designed for mighty martyrs, but a ghastly execution, reserved for treacherous troublemakers.

Tomorrow is Anzac Day. And it seems that *this* particular day and event has almost become Australia's de-facto Australia Day; war historian and author Les Carlyon once commented that: “In Australia, Gallipoli is also a state of mind, a place in the heart, and the stuff of warm inner glows for those of us who were lucky enough not to have been there. Gallipoli is part of the folklore, one of the few words spoken in Australia with something approaching reverence ... [it] gave Australia a sense of the worth of its people.”

Yearly attendance at the Gallipoli peninsula, continues to burgeon, there is now the need for a stage and lights and a sound system and plenty of colour!

But of course this consolidating and perhaps perceived “glossing up” of Anzac Day, has brought about at times, some forms of criticism; it is reckoned that the Day is losing some of its *solemnity* the odorous stink of war is being glamourised ... there is nothing *celebratory* about young blood being spilt, about bloated corpses, about putrid trenches, about grieving widows and children.

And in a similar vein, there was nothing *glamorous* about the crucifixion (young blood was spilt on that day also ...Jesus was only 33) and yet Jesus actually uses this same imagery, to describe the *ordinariness* of the life, of the person who intends to be a follower of him.

In our second reading from Mark chapter 8 on page 820, how does Jesus describe in verse 34, the life of the person who wants to follow him? Popularity? Prestige? Power? Prosperity? No!

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow me”.

It’s a pretty *ordinary* life isn’t it? Not glamorous, and very suggestive of a life involving hardship.

I’m sure that a good number of us here, are familiar with the famous advertisement, supposedly placed by the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton in a London newspaper, seeking recruits, for his 1914 Imperial trans-antarctic expedition.

**Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.**

What a wonderful metaphor, for what it means to take up one’s cross.

And yet there is a great *irony* here, in the description of what life looks like, for the follower of Jesus.

For in many ways, the *ordinary* life of the follower of Jesus, is actually quite ... extraordinary. Because it entails following an *extraordinary* person.

From Mark chapter 9 on page 820: Three very ordinary men – fisherman – Peter, James and John, were allowed to see just a *glimpse* of what the future held, not only for Jesus but also for those who follow him.

Have a look with me at verses 2 and 3: Jesus “was transfigured before them ... and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.”

The transfiguration of Jesus, gives a visible foretaste of Jesus’ resurrected glory.

I’m sure many of us here, have travelled back down the Hume Highway at some point, perhaps after a visit north of the border. And when you reach just south of Craigieburn, every so often the road turns and the foreground clears, and you can see that curious grey silhouette, of various tall buildings of Melbourne ... and you know that *that* represents home.

And then every few minutes the view becomes clearer and clearer and more defined.

And then all of sudden you’re on top of the Bolte Bridge (after passing through your third toll gate!) you look to your left, and you can *see* now the grandeur of the city and can start to identify individual places. And you know *now* that you are home.

The transfiguration gives that ... almost-there-but-not-quite-yet picture, of the *grandeur* of the Resurrection, of an extraordinary man. Extraordinary because there is no *precedent* for resurrection. In Psalm 89, Ethan the Ezrahite asks: “What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?”. Who indeed?

Only *one* man. The one man who has defeated sin and thus defeated death. The one man who has absorbed *our* sin and thus absorbed *our* death. The one man who was raised to life and thus we can “rise with him”.

The man ... Jesus. This was no mere *zombie* experience – a rotting corpse being given a second lease of life.

This was no ancient Greek theory of resurrection in play – a dead body but a living soul.

It was also more than what North American bishop, John Shelby Spong currently claims, that it was a mere resurrection *mental awakening*, in the minds of the disciples.

The resurrection of Jesus is a once-for-all time, bodily defeat of death, that *guarantees* eternal life beyond *this* life – our short earthly existence. An extraordinary promise. But made good by an *extraordinary* man.

So friends, for all of us here, daily life ... now ... does not need to be so ... *ordinary*.

Or what other terms we might describe a “so ordinary life” as:  
so rat race ... so Groundhog Day ... so monotonous ... so pointless?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, not only assures us that we can die well, but that we can NOW also *live* well, if we are willing to take up our Cross daily and follow him.

Some of us here continue to wrestle with various addictions ... the resurrection defeats the grip of those vices. Some of us have bodies that are weighed down with illness ... the resurrection promises an untainted body one day. Some of us here perhaps lack a life with purpose ... the resurrection provides a life *full of reasons* to live.

And the starting point for this sort of *extraordinary* life, began on that very *ordinary* Sunday morning. And the way to begin this new walk, is through walking *with* Jesus ... away from the grave.

This is the essence of “Christ-ianity”. It is not ... (again, pardon the grammar) “good-ianity” It’s not ... “Y’know I’m not really such a bad person-ianity”. It’s not ... “I’ll have a chat to God later-ianity”. It is resurrection-ianity. It began almost two thousand years ago, and it *can* begin again today.

Friends, there is absolutely *no* reason, why you have to walk out of that back church door today and continue to live an *ordinary* life. Today *could* be, if you choose to believe and follow Jesus, today *could* be, an extraordinary day.

Tell me the same old story when you have cause to fear  
That this world’s empty glory is costing me too dear.  
Yes, and when that world’s glory  
is dawning on my soul,  
Tell me the old, old story:  
“Christ Jesus makes thee whole.” **Amen.**