

Guest Preacher - Rev. Gordon Matheson

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

[0 : 00] Well, would you turn with me in your Bibles, please, back to Mark 16. We'll read again verses 6 and 7 of this chapter.

! This is the words of the angel who's in the tomb. He said to them, Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. Amen. Let's bow in prayer just for a moment. Heavenly Father, grant to us today your Spirit to help us as we study your Word together, as we think on these verses, as we think on the wonder of them.

Help us to see our lives in this passage. Make it, we pray, relevant to us and help us to grasp that your love towards your people is great.

[1 : 16] And so we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. There's a good chance if you're of a certain generation and age, you will remember where you were at momentous times.

So if you were asked, where were you when you heard the news of the shooting of John F. Kennedy, I'm sure for some there would be an immediate sense of, yep, I remember that day. I remember when that news broke. I'm sure for others it might be the day of the attacks on 9-11. And the surrealness of it.

But it kind of burns into your memory the circumstances that you were in and what happened. Equally, there's some times where there's good things that happen. And you remember everything around it.

I can remember the blossom on the trees outside Rigmores Hospital the day our first child was born.

[2 : 34] Kind of looking out the window at that on Hannah's birthday. I can remember details about our wedding day as well. Just different things that kind of stick with you.

So all of us have moments like that in our lives where the details really stay with us. And the resurrection of Jesus, you have to kind of, if you can for a moment, just try and put yourself in the shoes of the first witnesses to that.

You've got Mary Magdalene and the other women who have gone to the tomb of Jesus. Some of the detail around this is really concerning them. I think it's really interesting the way Mark has recorded for us the wee, almost a wee side note about their concern about the stone.

Not just saying who's going to move it for us, but then the recognition. It was very large. There's almost a sort of earthliness to the story and authenticity to it.

That these were really the thoughts of these eyewitnesses themselves. As you look at the stories and the accounts of the resurrection and the other gospels, again, there's little details that sit there and that bring home the fact that these are eyewitness accounts of what went on to be for them and what they later realized were truly an earth-shattering, life-defining, world-changing moment in their experience.

[4 : 05] And one of the kind of features of all of these different stories and all of these different accounts as you look at them is, first of all, the fear that was created.

The empty tomb created alarm in those who saw it. And there's, you know, again, you can look at all the different gospel accounts and you'll see different people expressing this in different ways. There's the Roman guard detail, first of all. The moment of the resurrection for them is absolutely terrifying. And they are utterly incapacitated by fear at that moment.

You've got the woman who are looking into the tomb and they're seeing the body of Jesus isn't there in this passage. And for them, the fear is palpable. Because they know there's no simple explanation for what has happened.

The simplest explanation would certainly be that someone came and took the body of Jesus. It's interesting, in fact, that Mary kind of feels this way. She, even after hearing, perhaps, from this angel, we know from the other gospels, as she turns around to see Jesus, as the others have left the tomb, left the scene.

[5 : 26] And she assumes it's the gardener. And she says, if you've taken his body, tell me where you've laid him so that I can go and take him away. The simplest explanation, the one that seems to perhaps possibly make some sense, they know can't really be the case.

The Roman guard detail rules out the possibility of some of Jesus' friends coming and taking his body away. The seal of Pontius Pilate on the tomb means that no one would have dared open that tomb on pain of death.

So the chance of one of Jesus' enemies somehow coming to desecrate the scene is probably ruled out as well. And as you work through all of the plausible explanations, you're left with a sense of fear, a sense of uncertainty.

Because this seems to be real. Jesus is not here. What is going on? What is happening?

You might say, and we might say, because we're so used to the story. We become very comfortable, don't we, with the story of the resurrection. We testify to it every week in our churches.

[6 : 50] We remember the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week, every Sunday when we gather. We make a slightly bigger deal of it at Easter. So every year we remember the resurrection of Jesus.

The words of Cranmer that are enshrined almost in the Book of Common Prayer, when we lay people to rest in the grave, we say we do so in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection, don't we?

Every time we go to bury a fellow believer who has died, we comfort ourselves with the words that one day they will rise again, that they will share in the resurrection and the hope of the resurrection of Jesus.

For us, the fact that Jesus has risen to life, in a sense we almost have a kind of casualness to that. But these women were afraid.

Because the joy of that situation hasn't come home to them yet. The uncertainty hasn't passed.

[8 : 02] And so here is an angel in the tomb, sitting, and his first words to them are, do not be afraid. Interestingly, that's often what angels say.

When angels appear to humans, they aren't always cuddly. They're often terrifying. This one isn't. Mark records it.

This one has the appearance of a young man. Not a blazing appearance of one of the seraphim. Not the terrifying appearance of some of the angels arrayed in their majesty. But this one is just like a young man dressed in white.

And yet his presence there, and the circumstances, are utterly terrifying. So they should.

I mean, as the women rule out in their minds, all of the plausible explanations, you're left with this startling acknowledgement. The dead man is risen.

[9 : 12] And that is something which we do not understand. It's one thing for us to talk about it, and one thing for us to hope in it, and one thing for us to comfort one another with these words.

But let us stop and think for a moment about the reality of it. death had been reversed. This is the stuff of medical miracles.

It's the stuff of, you know, the most strange of TV dramas. It's almost like science fiction. But it's really out there.

It's not something that you find in your day-to-day experience. It's not something that comes home to us. It is something which to us seems and feels utterly unnatural. And so I want us today, if nothing else, on this Easter Sunday, to remember not merely the good of the resurrection, and there is, and we'll come to that, but let us today remember the unnatural surprise and awe of this. And let's reflect on the resurrection of Jesus with that sense of wonder. This is not normal. And to try to understand what's actually going on here, because our experience is entirely shaped by the reality of the world in which we live, which falls under the curse of God.

[10 : 49] We know today that death is the consequence of our lives lived the way we live them. Sometimes it's because of the abuse of our bodies.

Someone who has smoked all their life dies of cancer. We think, well, that's kind of what you'd expect. Someone who's abused their body with alcoholism.

You kind of think, well, when their organs fail because of the amount of alcohol that has been in their system, we kind of don't, we just beat our breasts and say, well, it's sad, isn't it? It was such a waste. But it's a consequence, an understandable consequence of that kind of abuse. And actually, when you drill it down, every single one of us has the same reality. Death is the consequence of the lives we have lived. And that reaches all the way back to the very beginning of the story of the Bible.

[11 : 54] It's the consequence that God announced to Adam and Eve and said, because you live not in harmony with me, not in fellowship with me, not obeying my laws and working and living my way, but because you have chosen to rebel against me and you've chosen to do life your way according to your rules, the consequences of that are brought home.

And death will be inevitable. You will not have access to everlasting life. And so although we feel death is unnatural, the reality that we all know and the reality that comes home to all of us is that lying behind the wonderful story of the resurrection is the awfulness and the finality of a death. And what a death we're thinking about today. Because we have to understand the resurrection in light of the death of Jesus, which is why we need to have read not just the wonderful story of the empty tomb on the resurrection morning, we also need the story of Good Friday. We need the story of what happened the day before the Jewish Sabbath when Jesus was led out of Jerusalem carrying his cross and there on Golgotha's hill was nailed to it and lifted up and left there to die.

And we note some of the little details that Mark tells us when Joseph goes to retrieve the body of Jesus and goes to Pontius Pilate and says, can I have the body of Jesus please?

[13 : 39] He's died. I want to bury him before the Sabbath comes. We should note the little detail of Pontius Pilate's surprise. He's dead already?

This is a Roman governor who uses crucifixion to enforce the law. He knows that crucifixion is meant to be a slow, painful display of Roman power.

It's meant to be an agonizing, slow, painful death to stamp into people's minds the consequences of resisting the law. And Jesus has endured that death and died early.

for all the brutality that his body was exposed to, for all of the violence that was inflicted on him, for all of the horror of what was done to him, he died earlier than expected.

And again, we need to puzzle over that and wonder why. The details of it that come home to us. Mark tells us Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[14 : 53] And there at the cross, the one who the Gospels have told us about, the Son of God, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the one who comes as the child of promise, he says of God who has sent him and who has called his Father and who has tried to teach us.

We've actually said today already the words of the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, these are the words that Jesus used when he spoke to God continually in his own prayer life. His prayers were littered with these words, my Father.

Now, that relationship seems to be obscured. And at the cross, he can only cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

the forsakenness of the cross was real. It was the experience of Jesus that he went into that darkness and tasted the horror of the wrath of God.

That he experienced a real death. That he actually, in fact, surrendered himself to it. He cried out with a loud voice. We know from one of the other Gospels that what he actually cried out there is it is finished. The work is done.

[16 : 02] And then he bowed his head and died. He breathed his last. We need to understand the resurrection of Jesus against the backdrop of that death.

And it's simply this, to understand that somehow the resurrection tells us something about the death of Jesus. That somehow in all of that forsakenness and in all of that horror and in all of the brutality that he experienced, the resurrection says that was okay.

Now who can say that? Well, we can't. And if we look actually at the death of Jesus, what we ought to see and what we really should see is the great injustice of it.

Here is a righteous man who was condemned by the Roman and Jewish authorities. In one sense, the whole world is present there. Everything is at the cross saying, away with him. Crucify him.

We don't want him. Let's get rid of him. So there is a human injustice in the death of the cross. But who can say it's okay? Well, we can't. But there is someone who can.

[17 : 21] And that is God the Father. The Father can say of the death of Jesus, that's acceptable. It's a strange thing for us to comprehend, isn't it?

But the way the Father shows that the death of Jesus was acceptable is the Father says, death cannot hold him. Don't be afraid, the angel says.

He is risen. He's not here. See the place where they laid him. But go and tell the disciples and Peter that he is going before you into Galilee. And actually, we know, again from the other Gospels, well, it's not explicitly stated there, that's what the disciples were told to expect.

Jesus expected that death wouldn't hold him. He expected that he would see the disciples again. When he institutes the Lord's Supper, for example, he says, I will not taste this again until I taste it anew in the kingdom.

There's that sense that although there is a terrible cup to be drunk, it's momentary. Even the other thief who's crucified with Jesus along with him when he turns to him and says, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[18 : 49] Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise. That somehow Jesus knows that although death is there to be experienced and it will be experienced, it's not the end of the story.

And the reason is because the Father finds the death of Jesus acceptable. Quite simply, the Father says what Jesus has done has accomplished what it was meant to.

We can think of the death of Jesus as paying a bill, a bill that is required for the salvation of God's people, that all righteousness must be fulfilled.

That righteousness is the law of God, the full weight of our sin, the reason that we deserve to die falls on Jesus.

And in that terrifying place of Golgotha, it truly did. The darkness for three hours that shrouded the scene is that loss of the light of the presence of God the Father in this moment.

[20 : 11] That Jesus can say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? What he experiences there is hell. He experiences the abandonment of God, the wrath of God, the curse of God poured out upon him.

And the Father says, that was enough. And so the Father in his infinite grace and power and love for the obedience of his Son rolls away the impossibly heavy stone.

But does something more. He rolls away the impossibility of death itself. He does the impossible. He restores that broken body and gives everlasting life into the experience of his Son made flesh.

And on Easter, we remember that the death of Jesus was accepted. The resurrection is just a vindication of what Jesus has done.

[21 : 30] It's the Father's final stamp of approval on his Son and says, you have done everything that is therefore necessary for the following things to be true. And the following things are filled with hope.

So go and tell the disciples, interestingly, and Peter that he is going before you into Galilee. Go there and meet him. That's what the angel is saying.

Today, that's the same invitation that's extended to all of us. That's the same invitation that comes to us right now, right at this moment. God is saying to us, Jesus is there for you to meet.

He wants you to be with him. come to me. Come along. Join in. Stand with me. Be with me in this place of hope and a future and light rather than darkness.

And that today is our hope. That Jesus is today inviting us still, as he did the disciples, with the words, follow me.

[22 : 38] And so again, this is another lesson for Easter. It is a reminder to us that Jesus today is in a place where he can command us and say, follow me.

It's nice, isn't it, that we can celebrate Easter and we can say, isn't it lovely that death can be reversed, that there's hope, there's new life and all the rest of it. There's bunnies and lambs, there's new grass growing, everything's brighter because there's a hope of the resurrection.

Well, yes. But what do you say to the one who commands this? What do you say to the one who in the power of his resurrection is saying to you today, follow me.

Yield your life to me. Trust in me. Look to me for your future and your hope and your salvation. Rest in me for your justification. Rest in me to take away your sin and your guilt. Rest in me for your

sense of value and worth.

Rest in me for hope from your addictions and your slavery to sin. Rest in me for deliverance from the chains that bind you. Rest in me to take you out of the misery that your sin has brought you to. [23 : 46] Rest in me for that hope. I know an awful lot of people would say, well, nah. for all that he seems to have conquered death, for all that he seems to be victorious over the grave and its hold, I will not follow him.

I'll try and keep him at arm's length. It's a nice story. It's comforting when I'm going through sad times. But faith, trust, no, I can leave that for later.

The resurrection tells us that Jesus today commands our obedience. He offers us hope and life, yes, but he says, you must follow me.

You must go on. There's one last thing as well, just finally, and it is this. The angel promises them fellowship. So don't be afraid.

See the place where he was. Death could not hold him. Go and tell the disciples, and Peter especially, I should have noted that actually, Peter stands in particular a little note there, because Peter is a follower who failed.

[25 : 17] Peter's probably the inspiration, I suppose, for Mark's gospel. Mark relies on witnesses, the chief of them. When you go through the text and you analyze it closely, you realize Peter has to be the biggest influence on Mark for what he's writing and recording about the life of Jesus.

And that includes Peter's denial and Peter's failure. You know, his pride. Everyone else will abandon you. I won't. I'll even die for you, Jesus.

Yeah, a young girl says to him, weren't you one of Jesus' followers? And he's like, no, I don't know that Jesus at all. That Peter is restored. That Peter is hope given to him. So for us as Christians, when we fail, let's remember Peter as the one who is restored.

So go and tell the disciples and Peter that he's going before you into Galilee. and there you will see him just as he told you.

You know, the disciples, they thought they were never going to see Jesus again. The stone gets rolled against the tomb. Pilate's seal gets put in it. That's it. The woman, even when they're going in the morning, they're actually saying to themselves, okay, we want to anoint this body.

[26 : 30] We want to do the proper burial rites that we should have done a couple of days ago. We didn't. Let's try and make right in it. Even in doing that, they're not going with much hope because they're saying to one another, how do we get into the tomb?

Who's going to move the stone for us? How do we get in there? We're never going to see him again. Even in death, we're not going to see him. And the resurrection reverses all of it.

The resurrection just changes everything. You will see him. It's not just that you'll see him from a distance. It's not just that you'll see him through the haze and perhaps your eyes are deceiving you. You'll see him. You'll meet him. You'll talk to him. You'll be with him. You'll know him. You'll have fellowship. And that's the final hope of the resurrection for all of us.

It's that we'll see him. And we'll see those who are with him. because when he comes again, he's not coming alone. He will come and he will bring the saints like an army with banners.

[27 : 42] And it'll be a triumph. But we'll see one another. We'll have fellowship together. We'll see our loved ones who've already gone to be with Jesus.

We'll see one another. We'll know one another just as we'll know him. but we'll see him. We'll meet him and we'll have fellowship together and there will be joy everlasting.

That's what the resurrection means. The empty tomb means not only that there is something terrifying and unnatural has happened. It doesn't just mean that there has been a vindication of the death of Jesus and his authority to call us but also it means his promise is real.

You will be with me. You will see me. You will witness me. And that will never be taken from you.

That's the promise that we have today. That's the hope that we have today. That's what we long for today. That Christ is ours and in him there is hope.

[28 : 57] Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you today for the wonder of the resurrection. Help us to see today and grasp just how precious it is that Jesus has risen.

Help us to acknowledge the splendor and majesty of the risen Christ and to realize that today he is seated at your right hand having accomplished the work you sent him to do.

His death has purchased our salvation. It has taken away our sin and therefore there is no price left for us to pay. We can live free because of the death of Jesus but also we can live in obedience

