

**April 12, 2020**  
**How Do We Celebrate Easter in 2020?**  
**Matthew 28:1-10**

This Easter is unlike any other Easter any of us have been through. Typically, on Easter, we gather together. We sing together. We celebrate together. We rejoice in Jesus' resurrection together. It's a time of joy, laughter, chocolate, and fun. But the world is a scarier and darker place than it has been for generations. We cannot come together and encourage one another the way we have every year. While we know, intellectually, that this is a time to celebrate Jesus' triumph over evil, we are very aware of the presence of evil in our world.

So what is the Good News of Easter for us, in 2020?

***1. Jesus has risen ... come and see (Matthew 28:6, 9)***

The Christian claim for almost two thousand years is that Good Friday was not the end for Jesus. His body did not end up dead and buried. Or, like many criminals of his time, on a garbage heap. He arose. He is alive.

If this claim is true, it is the most significant event in human history. Abraham never rose again. Moses never rose again. Mohammed never rose again. Buddha never rose again. Only Jesus rose again.

The challenge of history is that we can come and see. Objectively we can seek historical evidence for the resurrection (if that is what you need, consider N.T. Wright on [Why Jesus' Resurrection Really Happened](#) (audio) or [Can a Scientist Believe in the Resurrection](#) (audio), or William Lane Craig, [The Resurrection of Jesus](#) (print)).

We sometimes forget that people back in Jesus' day were just as surprised as any of us would be, today, if someone were to rise from the dead. Everybody in Jesus' world, like everyone in the modern world, knew perfectly well dead people don't live again. People back then didn't think some people get resurrected and Jesus is just one of the lucky ones. They believed, as we do, that NOBODY ever gets raised from the dead (this side of eternity). Therefore, if Jesus did rise from the dead, their whole reality is being completely altered.

Christianity has been accused of stubbornly holding on to its belief in the resurrection of Jesus in the face of facts, for of course resurrection is impossible, according to scientific principles with which God created His universe. This is precisely the point. The resurrection represents the staggering entry of the Person and Power of God into time and space and God acts in a way that mind-blowingly alters reality. This is not God doing business as usual. This is God, the Creator, decisively stepping into His Creation and changing reality.

Yes, God raising Jesus from dead is impossible. So is an angel coming from heaven, going to the tomb, and rolling back the stone. It's all impossible, unless you are the One who is the Creator, in the first place, and can rewrite the rules about what is and what isn't possible. The encouraging message for us, this Easter, is that God specializes in doing the impossible.

Giving us the courage to face impossible fears. Giving us comfort to face impossible sorrows. Giving us hope to endure impossible loneliness. Giving us inspiration to find meaning, purpose, and guidance in impossible situations.

Michael Card sings a beautiful song that reminds us that, because Jesus arose from the dead, we can have hope – even in the midst of COVID-19.

## [Love Crucified Arose](#)

### 2. ***"Do not be afraid" (28:5, 10)***

Love Crucified, Arose, and so we have hope. The same God who raised Jesus is from the dead is with us.

On one hand, nothing changes. Even though a company of Roman soldiers are so afraid that they shake and become like dead men (28:4), the Romans are still in control. The Jewish high priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees are still the religious rulers. At the moment when the women come to the tomb, the resurrection had changed very little ... yet. Outside of the little grove around the empty tomb, the world is still a scary, oppressive, dark place.

Jesus has risen, but the disciples are still in danger from both Jewish and Roman authorities. Jesus appears to His friends and followers, but they continue to hide in back rooms, behind locked doors. Followers of Jesus will be abused, persecuted, arrested, and stoned to death.

On the other hand, everything changes. God is rewriting the textbook on life, the universe, and everything. We now live in a world where Jesus has risen triumphantly from the dead. Where resurrection is now possible. Where the power of sin and death has been ultimately destroyed. Where hope and joy are more real than ever before because evil has been overcome, one and for all, forever. The resurrection changes everything.

Yes, Jesus had risen! The first believers had new hope, new purpose, new meaning, new passion – new life – in Jesus. The Holy Spirit was in each one of them, giving comfort, strength, peace, joy, hope, and inspiration. They faced life with a profound peace and confidence knowing that *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). BUT ... they still lived in a dangerous, difficult, hard world.

Typically, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate that *"God's in his heaven - all's right with the world"* because, compared to now, all did actually seem pretty right with the world.

But this Easter we have more in common with those first disciples than we'd like. All is NOT right with our world. It wasn't in the 1st Century. It isn't in the 21st Century. Ours is a dangerous, difficult, hard world, too. Perhaps for the first time since the World War 2 or the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918, we can identify with those first believers. Jesus HAS risen; the power of sin and death HAS been broken. But evil is still very much part of the world.

What was the message those first disciples needed to hear?

"Do not be afraid"(28:5, 10). The women hear this message twice: once from an angel, once from Jesus. It's what they need to hear. It's what we need to hear.

Throughout Scripture, when great events happen – whether it's good things like Moses leading the Israelites to freedom , or the angel announcing to Mary that she will bear God's son – or tough things, like escaping slavery in Egypt, staring down Goliath, or walking on water, God knows we are afraid. He often begins conversations with, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Why should we NOT be afraid? Because Jesus HAS risen. He HAS defeated the power of sin and death. The King of Creation, the Risen Jesus, the indwelling Holy Spirit are with us. That does not necessarily mean He will protect us from every danger or dark place. Psalm 23 reminds us that, "*Even though I walk through the darkest valley (implying we might well find ourselves there), I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*" It DOES mean no matter what may or may not happen, we are never alone. Jesus is with us. His Presence comforts us. His Power strengthens us. His peace is with us.

### [You Never Let Go](#)

#### **3. *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me (28:10)***

In previous years, Easter has always seemed like a done deal to me. Jesus rose. We gather to celebrate. It's all good. All is well with the world. Not this year. Like those first disciples, we know Jesus has risen. We have experienced His genuine presence in our lives, His joy, His healing, His love, His forgiveness, His wisdom, His comfort, and much more. But this year, more than ever, we are also aware that we live in an awkward in-between time. Yes, Jesus has risen and the power of sin and death is destroyed. But evil is still among us. Easter is very real. But we are waiting to see Jesus bring complete justice, order, and healing.

Think for a moment about that day – one day, some day – when we all be back together again. When as a church, we can gather for worship again. When, as families, we can gather for a grand family reunion again. When, as a community, we can go to concerts again, hockey games again, weddings again. When we can hug again, shake hands again, play sports again. Imagine what that will be like. Won't it be glorious!

In meantime, life is pretty drab. Pretty lonely. Pretty frustrating. Pretty hollow. We are eagerly anticipating something so much more, but we are stuck here. For now.

But imagine if this social distancing and self-isolation were all you knew? So to you, who knew nothing else, this is just normal. This is the "good" life. Imagine you never knew there was such a thing as a real hug from a grandparent, or a real birthday party, or a real church service. Imagine someone tried to explain to you that one day you could actually be part of a crowd of 6000 in the Enmax Centre? That you actually could go into a church? You could go to school? You wouldn't believe it. It would seem incredible.

What if, life – even in the best of times (a few short weeks ago?) – is, in comparison with being with Jesus one day, some day, as drab and dull as this time of isolation is compared

with “normal” life. What if life – even when we thought we had it so good – is just a shadow of what life will be, when we’re with Jesus, for all eternity? What is life – real life with the Risen Jesus, one day, some day, is going to be even more wonderful than the end of social distancing and COVID-19? What if there is something more to look forward to? It seems incredible. We cannot imagine it. But that’s the reality Easter is inviting us to consider.

In “normal” times, we may not really think about the future because, for most us, normal life is pretty good. We talk vaguely about being with Jesus, but we’re having a good time right now we’re not really sure a future with Him could be much better. What if life with Jesus, when we see Him face to face, really will be even more wonderful than the end of this isolation? Maybe, when we actually see Jesus, we will be transformed as His disciples were transformed?

CS Lewis describes life, as we know it, as only the land of shadows. Real life, he says, hasn’t begun yet. Ultimately, we are all waiting for the fulfilment of “being with Jesus” fully on that day of days. Believe it or not, Easter is a foretaste to something much more wonderful to come. Easter is a promise of something even more glorious to come.

Paul asks this question, *“Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love?”* He goes on, *“Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?”* Maybe that’s how we’re feeling at the moment.

How does Paul answer? *“No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:36-39).

This is the Good News of Easter. Jesus is ALWAYS with us. He HAS risen. He HAS destroyed the power of sin and death. We do not need to be afraid. Nothing and no one can ever separate us from Him. One day, some day, this crisis will end, and we will be back together again. Even more than that, one day, some day, we will be with HIM, face to face.

Yes, it will be great together again with friends and family. Look forward to that with eager anticipation. But there is something even greater awaiting us, too – the grandest reunion of all grand reunions when we are together with Jesus on that glorious day of days.

We can face today, and every day, without fear, for He is with us THIS day. And He will be with us – every moment, of every day forever, and ever ...Amen.