

Hold on to Hope - Easter Sunday Celebration

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Bible Reading: 1 Cor 15: 3-8 and 12-20a

Intro - Spring is in the air, daffodils, that were buried dormant beneath the earth, have exploded into life, reminder of Resurrection, Jesus coming to life from the grave...

Easter Joke - Newsflash - A man was driving home last night when the Easter Bunny jumped out in front of him. Bang! To the man's horror the Rabbit was killed outright. He was distraught and burst into tears.

A woman heard the crash and stopped her car. "What happened? Why are you so upset?"

The man recounted the incident and through his tears said that, because of him, there might not be any more Easter. The woman told the man not to worry. She went to her car boot, and pulled out a spray can. She walked over to the dead Bunny, and sprayed the entire can onto the little furry animal. Miraculously the Easter Bunny jumped up, and ran off, pausing every few seconds to turn round and wave! The man couldn't believe his eyes! "What was it that you sprayed on the Easter Bunny?" The woman shows him a can of her hairspray. "What good can that do?" said the man. "Read the label on the can..."

It read as follows... "Brings dead hair back to life and adds permanent wave."

Lego Easter story

Song - Forever

Song - What a beautiful name

Prayer led by Marie Cook (2.26)

"Jesus coming back to life after being crucified...?!" It may well seem a silly fairy tale to many today.

"What a joke! He would have had to have been God to have done that!" Mmmm... We believe that Jesus coming back from the dead offers us real hope and purpose.

"How can we know that Jesus came back to life?" 1. The tomb was definitely EMPTY. 2. His dead body has definitely never been FOUND. 3. Lives were TRANSFORMED. 4. Lives are still being CHANGED.

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead gives us hope that this life might not be all there is...

Unless there is something after this life, then life in and of itself is meaningless and pointless. It is all

about having a good time while we are here, but then nothing. What's the point?!

Is this why we're so obsessed about prolonging life? Because we feel there is nothing else, so we have to somehow keep this lot going? And then, sadly, reality dawns and we are sat at another funeral. Most there will be full of grief. Why? Because of the loss of a friend or loved one, yes that's understandable, but it is also because of the finality of death. People feel that's it. I will 'never' see that person again... their smile, that face, times with them, being together... I will 'never' hear their voice, their laugh... never feel their warm embrace, their love, comfort, assurance and encouragement. Depressing.

There is only hope of something beyond this life because of what Jesus did on that first Easter morning.

He was dead but now is alive. It was Good Friday... the day was dark, heads hung low, there appeared no hope... but now it's Easter Sunday!!!! Light bursts forth, heads can be lifted, and there is hope!!

Because of Jesus!!! Here's a Top 10 for Easter Sunday!

Because of Jesus coming back to life...

- Death is not the end
- There is hope for something after death
- The Bible can be seen as trustworthy
- Our lives can now have a purpose because this is not all there is
- We can know that he was who he claimed to be
- We can know that he must have been God
- We can have reason to believe that he is still alive now
- We can have reason to believe that he is interested in us right now
- We should live in the light of eternity
- We need to make a response to him - was he a liar, lunatic, or LORD...?

Song - Pieces (by Amanda Cook)

Song - Jesus I love you (led by Maria)

To discover just how important, key and essential the Resurrection is, we're going to hear what the Apostle Paul said to one Church. His words are just as relevant for us to hear today...

1 Cor 15: 3-8 and 12-20a - Tory Barrow

Intro to Message part 2! Easter is one of those days that people come to Church who might not usually, and you might be watching this even though you don't normally go to Church! If so, you're welcome! Hope it's not a case of saying, "See you next year!" It is also the time that those who have a faith, and at one time made a commitment but have somehow lost interest or got busy with other stuff, suddenly decide to turn up at Church! And that might be a reason you're watching today! If that's you, then you're welcome too! But God's Word does give us a gentle nudge... that we "Hold on to Hope"... and we CAN do that because of Jesus... Here are 3 things Paul encourages us in...

Hold on to what matters most (3-4) - I can remember hours of discussion on the type of flooring we should have here in the main hall when we were planning for the new Church building... I can remember debates on the type of bread we should use for communion, whose photos should be on a board of who's who in the Church, and in what order, and I can even remember conversation on the type of toilet paper we should use!

The Bible says we should focus on what matters most, namely that Jesus died, for the purpose of saving us, that he was buried as he was dead, but that he came back to life physically, as he promised and as

God's Word predicts, to demonstrate he was the Son of God and had power even over death.

As the prophet Hosea foretold, "Where O death is your sting?" (13: 14).

The founder of every other religion died and stayed dead. Jesus rose again.

Hold on to the historical evidence (5-8) - Jesus appeared to people 'after' he had died. There is only one way you can do that... by coming back to life again! People had a hint at what was possible because he had raised Lazarus to life (John 11). But he had also given his audiences a clue under a different name, that one would die and be raised to life on the third day. So they shouldn't have been surprised. But we are.

The Bible states that people saw him after he was supposed to have died - this was no David Copperfield stunt. Peter, the other apostles... "well yes of course they'd have said that!" "After that he appeared to more than 500... most of whom are still living" (15: 6). That's impressive. Why? Because any one of them could have denied it... but they didn't. They could have grabbed the dead body and presented it.

The reality is that a transformation in Jesus' followers took place. This is evidence of the reality of the Resurrection. This little band of disciples went from hiding to preaching in a very short time. They were willing to go through horrible torture and death. Lee Strobel writes, "Nobody willingly dies for something that they know is false." (Case for Easter, p.88). But they knew it to be true. They knew Jesus had died, they knew there was an empty tomb, and they had seen Him.

Then Paul says, "And then he appeared to me." So what? Paul was at that time anti-Jesus and was murdering Christians. It was the risen Jesus who turned him around and he gave up his life to follow him and tell others about him, despite facing both persecution and hardship as a result. Why? Because of a hoax?!

Moreover, Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland points out, "within weeks of the resurrection, not just one, but an entire community of at least ten thousand Jews were willing to give up the very sociological and theological traditions that had given them their national identity." (Resurrection. p. 60). Why... unless true?!

Hold on to the fact that Jesus came back from the dead (12-20) - Without the Resurrection there is no Christian faith because our faith stands on the death AND Resurrection of our founder!

If Jesus didn't die, then our sin has not been dealt with so WE will be judged and face eternal punishment. Just as bad... those that we knew and loved who have died and we had thought they'd gone to be with God... is all one big fat hope-less lie...

Christians talk about Jesus dying on a cross for their sin, but if that was it and Jesus stayed dead, what would that really have accomplished? What reassurance would you have? We wouldn't know God was satisfied and that the issue of our sin was settled. The guarantee of the meaning of the crucifixion is the resurrection.

If Jesus did not come back to life after his death then we can't be sure that there can even be life after death!

Paul is right, we are to be most pitied... because we are even giving our time here, our money to support what we believe is important, when we might as well just eat, drink and be merry...

"BUT... Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (20) and that makes ALL the difference...

Billy Graham once said that, "There is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived or that Alexander the Great died at the age of thirty-three."

Because Jesus was raised... our wrongs CAN be forgiven... we CAN have a purpose for our lives... we CAN have the power to change our lives... and there IS life after the grave. That is what we mean when we say there is hope in Jesus. And that is why we should aim to 'Hold on to Hope'.

How can that become real for us...? 3 things the Bible teaches for a fresh start.

A = Admit. Admit that you have done wrong, fallen short of God's standard

B = Believe. Believe in who Jesus is and in what he came to do for you and now IS alive

C = Commit. Commit your life to the One who gave his life for you - hand over the controls to God NOW!

Song - This is amazing grace

Puppets

Celebrations

Close by Maria

Easter Quiz... if you want the answers then you'll have to ask!! (See how many you get without cheating!)

- According to Matthew's Gospel how many times in Gethsemane did Jesus pray, "But not my will, yours be done"?
- What was the name of the soldier whose ear was cut off by Peter?
- Who issued a warning because they'd suffered through having a dream about Jesus?
- Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the Cross of Jesus, but can you name his two sons? (You'll get 1 point for each!)
- "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was written on the notice about Jesus on the Cross, but what were the 3 languages it was written in? (You'll get 1 point for each!)
- "Today you will be with me in paradise" Jesus affirmed the criminal on the next cross, who turned to him, but who is the only Gospel writer to record these words?
- According to John, when Jesus revealed himself to Mary by using her name, what was her first response to him?

Maximum score will be 10 out of 10.

>> To check your answers, look up Matthew 26: 44, John 18: 10, Matthew 27: 19, Mark 15: 21, John 19: 20, and John 20: 16.

Can anyone beat Gloria Enwright's 8 out of 10...?!