

# Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 20 April 2025 - Easter Day

**Lectionary Readings** (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Acts 10.34-43 or Isaiah 65.17-end; Psalm 118.1-2, 14-24 [or 118.14-24]; 1 Corinthians 15.19-26 or Acts 10.34-43; John 20.1-18 or Luke 24.1-12 **\*\*Acts must be read\*\***

## Homily

**Today's homily has been written by the Revd Steven Rothwell, Curate Training Officer and Training Incumbent**

What games did you play as a child? Tag? Sardines? Follow the Leader? When I was a child, one of the places we used to play in was the churchyard. We spent hours playing 'hide and seek', 'bulldog', and making camps. We weren't being disrespectful - as children we had not yet learned the full significance of life and death. Today, as someone who works for the church [*insert your role here i.e. churchwarden, LLM, ALM etc*] I've spent a fair bit of my time in churchyards, only now I'm being far more serious because I'm likely to be conducting a funeral [*or meeting the DAC, mowing the grass, clearing up – whatever is appropriate*]. Playing fun games in the churchyard is no longer on the agenda.

Sooner or later this happens for all of us. Confronted with the realities of death, churchyards, cemeteries and tombs are places of mourning. They are places we visit and remember past lives. I doubt if we think about the future too much when we are standing in a churchyard. There are two highly significant incidents concerning graves (or tombs) and they both contain elements of the miraculous and they both point to the future. The first incident is the raising of Lazarus and the second is the story of the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection.

It is assumed that Lazarus has reached the end of his life, he is entombed, and his closest family and friends are mourning. But Jesus calls him out from the tomb and reinstates his life. There is a future for Lazarus because, for Jesus, the grave is not the end of the story. Raising Lazarus from the grave is a pretty strong clue as to what might come later, although it's clearer for us to see with two thousand years of hindsight, than it was for Jesus' followers.

On Easter morning we are back at a tomb, only this one is empty. Imagine being Mary Magdalene. After surviving the unthinkable horror of that Friday, on the first day of the week in the early morning darkness, she arrives at the tomb. She is probably feeling sad, exhausted, maybe confused and angry. Maybe she feels hesitant and unsure about what she will do when she gets to the tomb. I wonder if she's ever had to deal with a dead body before. She may be wondering *how will I get into the tomb? Who will roll away the stone? When she arrives, the stone has already moved. The tomb is empty; the body is gone.*

*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and I don't know where they have laid him. There was nothing she could do. They have taken him away, and I don't know where. It was more than she could bear.*

"Why are you weeping?" the angel asks. Mary might well have asked the angel, "Why not? If you're not weeping, you haven't been paying attention." When all hope appears to be lost, what can one do but weep?

Only a short time ago Mary and the other disciples had been with Jesus, and they had confronted death head on. They watched as Lazarus emerged from the grave. He'd been there for four days yet walked right out when Jesus called him. But now this grave is empty. And Jesus isn't here to do the calling-out. Besides, he can't exactly call out himself...*can he?*

Jesus had dared them to imagine a different world, a world where masters wash servants' feet; and the winner is the one who comes in last, a world where 5,000 people are fed with little more than a packed lunch. Then they were like children playing in the churchyard. But now... *they've taken away my Lord.* It appears the game is over; Mary's team had lost. The graveyard is symbolic of the death of all that Jesus had imagined.

But the game is not over. As she sits weeping, the one she had mistaken for the gardener calls her name. Just as Jesus called out Lazarus from the tomb so he now calls Mary out from her despair. Mary recognizes Jesus. God is still in the game. The powers of death have not won. Not only that but all the rules have changed too.

Mary realizes she is not helpless. There are things that she can do. She moves from weeping to witnessing. *I have seen the Lord!* Mary discovers new purpose, new possibility. Disciples don't have to play by the old rules. In raising Jesus from the dead, God breaks free. And that means that Mary is free to imagine the world in a whole new way.

The hope of the resurrection is that this world is not just the place where Jesus died; this world is where Jesus lives. And because Jesus lives, because God has broken the power of sin and death, we have been set free to live as well. Sometimes that is hard to believe. When the news is bad, when life is tragic, when we only see sorrow, it is hard to believe. Some days it is hard to see with eyes of faith. That is why we need each other, we need to be together in church, so that in those times when our sight is obscured by tears, we can hold on to one another's faith. That is why we need the Lord's Supper. The sacrament of the eucharist is at the heart of our worship because it reminds us that when the game feels like it's over, we are still playing. When we look with eyes of faith, when we listen with ears of hope, in the bread that is broken, in the cup that is poured, we discover anew Mary's gospel: *I have seen the Lord!*

Can we dare to imagine a different world, a world not imprisoned by the powers of sin and death, but set free for love, justice, peace?

This is a day to celebrate - we have been set free. Even though the tears may be filling up in our eyes at the sorrow of this world, we can get up from the table and follow our leader. Once again, we can run through the churchyards and the streets and the parks and the fields, joyfully proclaiming that Christ is risen. Alleluia!