

Conversion to such foolishness. An Easter morning sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, on April 1, 2018 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: I CORINTHIANS 4:8-13
MARK 16:1-8

Jesus is alive!

That was the rumour which spread through
Jerusalem that first Easter morning.

Women came to the tomb early in the morning – the
first witnesses to the resurrection.

Jesus' first appearance was also to a woman –
Mary Magdalene
She was in the garden near the tomb, stricken with
grief

The one who had accepted and forgiven her,
The one whom she loved so deeply, was gone
Mary saw a figure she thought was the gardener –
she called to him, wondering if he knew where they
had taken her Lord.

Then a familiar voice replied – “Mary”

She looked up and recognized him – “Master”

Her Lord had come back

And the heart of the woman who had been cleansed
by his love leapt for joy.

Mary went straight to the disciples with the
simply testimony “I have seen the Lord”

Their excitement must have been enormous!

For the disciples were in hiding behind locked doors from fear of the authorities the Bible tells us They had seen what had happened to their leader, And they were AFRAID they would be next. So they huddled in secret.

The women who had come to the tomb were told by the “young men in shining garments” -**go tell the disciples and Peter.**

Peter and John run to the tomb – John, younger and faster than Peter, Arrived first and waited at the entrance, Peering into the darkness Peter – always the impulsive Peter – did not stop at the entrance – he went straight inside He had to see He had to know

They saw the empty tomb and they believed. Then the two walkers on the Emmaus Road – lamenting about all that had happened. They are joined by a stranger who asked them about the event about which they are describing. They do not recognize that this is no stranger, but Jesus – until he comes into their house with them for rest and refreshment, And breaks the bread They too also rush to tell the disciples. Could it be?

It was too good to be true....

A world that had ended for them three days earlier now seemed to be opening again...

Then Jesus came and stood among them —
 “Peace be with you” he said as he looked into their eyes.

I wonder what they must have felt at that moment....

The disciple Thomas is not there. When the others told him, he did not believe it!

I wonder-- was Thomas so wounded by pain and disillusionment, mixed with bitterness and cynicism that he could not let himself believe it

**Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands,
 Unless I put my fingers in the place the marks
 were**

And my hands into his side, I will not believe”

A week later, Jesus came back to his disciples
 This time, Thomas was present.

Jesus says -**Thomas, put your finger here and see
 my hands. Put out your hand and place it in my
 side**

Do not be faithless, but believing.

Thomas did not have to...he had seen the marks of
 Jesus suffering.

With tears in his eyes Thomas cries out **My lord
 and my God.**

For Thomas,

For all of them-unbelief was turned to belief when they saw their Lord and the markings of his suffering.

They were converted by the Resurrection

When the disciples saw Jesus, they came out of hiding

Until then *they had been covering behind closed doors, controlled by fear.*

They had feared the Jewish authorizes and the Romans who stood behind them

They had feared the power of the soldiers, the courts, the temples

And they had been afraid of their own faithlessness and inadequacy.

Until they saw Jesus,

The disciples viewed the world the way others did

The central reality of their lives had been the power of the system

And their own powerlessness

But when they saw Jesus — *they unlocked the doors, came out and began turning the world upside down*

The disciples knew another reality then — one that was truer, greater, stronger, and a more compelling authority than the realities that had paralyzed them with fear

Jesus had risen and Jesus was Lord!

Today, Jesus stands among us,

With the marks of his suffering plainly visible.
He knows us,
He knows our fears
We are afraid of economic hardship and
diminishing resources
Of the hostility between black, white, red, brown
and yellow peoples
Of a growing and very volatile gulf between rich
and poor
Of the hurt between men and woman
Of capricious violence
Of the drift toward nuclear holocaust
And of the ways that restoring broken fellowship
with others might disrupt our lives and our
security.
We fear for ourselves, our children and our
grandchildren

Like the disciples so many of us are afraid of
the power of the systems of the world
Like them, too, we fear our own powerlessness,
weakness and sense of inadequacy.
So many of us are insecure, frightened of our own
emotions and wary of trusting one another.
The guilt of our sin and those places in us which are
broken often overwhelm
Above all, so many of us fear pain and suffering
and even death itself.

So many of us too are hiding behind locked doors and are afraid to come out
Jesus knows our fears.

He wants us *to know his resurrection.*

He says, **Go and tell my disciples that I have risen and that I am going before him.**

And go tell...he slowly repeats each of our names.
Tell him.

Tell her that we need not be afraid anymore.

Even Peter who betrayed Jesus

Even Thomas who doubted Jesus.

Jesus does not hold our fears against us.

To the cynical, skeptical, and faithless – Jesus stands among us – showing us his hands and his side

And tells us – reach out and touch him.

DO NOT DOUBT, BUT BELIEVE.

Jesus died for our sins, our doubts and our fears.

He rose from the grave to demonstrate his victory over them and to set us free from their power.

He wants each of us – like Peter, Thomas, Mary and the others – to know his resurrection

He wanted them to know, and he wants us to know that his love for his disciples has no doubts

Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Most of the disciples' contemporaries considered them "fools for believing"

The Jews did, the Romans did, and much of the known world did!

But no one doubted that the disciples believed.

The disciples continued to preach and live out the Good News.

And the Good News is essentially this – when all that sin had done or could ever do was laid on Jesus, it did not overcome him

Death could not swallow him

The grave was denied its victory said Paul in the 15th chapter of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth

Nothing is stronger than Jesus' victory – nothing past, nothing present and nothing future!!

Jesus bore the full weight of the world's sin and overcame it all

Today, as then, his people together to confess

Christ has died,

Christ is risen,

Christ will come again.

What about you and me today?

I wonder, do we still doubt that this kind of love shown by God through his son, Jesus, still makes much sense in our complex, technological world.

Daily, we – you and I-are invited to celebrate the victory of Jesus and to live in the world showing we believe it to be true!

We are invited to experiment with its truth by risking our security,

Comfort,
 Resources,
 Time,
 Energy,
 And our very lives for the sake of his victory,
*We are invited to demonstrate to the world, with our
 lives,
 That we have been converted by the RESURRECTION.*

Like Jesus' other disciples, who were
 controlled by their fear, WE can be converted by
 seeing the resurrected Christ.

Whenever we act in obedience to Jesus, we are
 demonstrating his victory.

Every time we act upon Jesus' lordship in our lives,
 Are reconciled to a brother or sister – biological or
 spiritual

Refuse to be controlled by the economic system,
 Deny the absolute power of the government; claim
 Christ's freedom over our fear

Tear down the walls of race, class and sex,
 Love our enemies – not just the people we like
 Stand with the poor

Or act for peace – we are demonstrating the victory
 of Christ in the world

We are those who evaluate themselves and the
 whole world in the light of Christ's victory.

Foolish, being fools for this one called Jesus?

Certainly that is one of the least offensive terms levelled at those who follow Jesus.

And yet, even still – the greatest threat to any system in this world is the existence of fools who do not believe in the ultimate reality of that system.

Without the Resurrection, the defeated followers of Jesu would have simply faded away
He would have been just another prophet who was
kills

BUT the resurrection validated the way of Jesus –
for it established the authority of his Lordship
At the same time, the resurrected INVALIDATED
the authority of the world's systems

If we believe the resurrection,
If we seek to live the whole of our lives, trusting
and obeying Jesus,
The world will consider us to be unreasonable,
unrealistic, maybe even irresponsible, and definitely
irrelevant.

Yet, the resurrection convinces us of God's
wisdom

We finally know God's power to heal us and to
transform our relationship to the world

So on Easter morning,
And each day of our lives
We celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ –
which triumphs over every other reality

WE HAVE SEEN THE LORD – we see him in the lives of our brothers and sisters – biological and/or spiritual.

We discover him in the faces of the poor and in the faces of our children and grandchildren

We see him in the lives of Christians who have suffering and died because they believe

And presently we will see the Lord in the bread and wine

He shows us, as he did his disciples, the evidence of his suffering.

He invites us to reach out, take, eat and drink.

He wants us to remember him,

To see him and to know his victory.

His way IS LIFE – THE WORLD’S WAY--IS DEATH!

And so, we stand before the world as fools – fools for Jesus

We are foolish enough to believe that Jesus’ way is stronger and truer than the way of the world

We rest secure in the knowledge that he has and will, overcome

We are called to be for Christ,--a people saved by his cross – and converted – finally by his resurrection

MAY GOD CONVERT EACH OF US TO SUCH FOOLISHNESS?

Amen – let us pray...