

## Easter Day Te Rā o te Aranga

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022

White

**OT:** Isaiah 65:17-25; **Epistle:** Acts 10:34-43; **Gospel:** Luke 24:1-12

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### **Old Testament: Isaiah 65:17-25 NRSV The Glorious New Creation**

<sup>17</sup> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.

<sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I am creating;  
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,  
and its people as a delight.

<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,  
or the cry of distress.

<sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it  
an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

<sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

<sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

<sup>23</sup> They shall not labour in vain,  
or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—  
and their descendants as well.

<sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
says the Lord.

### **Epistle: Acts 10:34-43 NRSV Gentiles Hear the Good News**

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

### **Gospel: Luke 24:1-12 NRSV The Resurrection of Jesus**

**24** But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup> Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

[pause]

*Holy God,  
through signs of grace you reveal your glory to all the world.  
Open our eyes to see the hidden and surprising wonders that you perform,  
that we may believe with our minds  
and trust in our hearts  
that you alone are the God of all creation.  
Through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray.  
**Amen.***

I don't know about you, but I love Easter Sunday morning. In fact I love it more than any other day in the year. More than Christmas, or my birthday, or the first day of Spring, or the beginning of summer, or the last day of winter, or *any* other day that there is.

Because Easter Sunday morning is a day that is filled with hope, and new possibilities, and new beginnings. Death has been defeated, the old has gone and the new has come.

It is a day that defies logic, and yet fills the heart with joy and peace and anticipation.

It is a day of miracles and majesty rolled together.

[pause]

Can you picture the scene, it is early dawn, and they came to the tomb. Their hearts still breaking after the horrors of Good Friday and the cruelty of the cross. Their hearts pounding in fear at being found out, at being identified as one of those who had followed him. Fearful that they too would be rounded up, tortured, beaten, humiliated, and then stripped bare and cruelly and painfully executed by crucifixion.

And that was no easy death. Not quick. Not quiet. Not peaceful.

But agonising and cruel, slow and painful, excruciating and gruesome.

And so, in the early hours of dawn they came to the tomb to fulfil their final duty to their master, their teacher, their friend. To anoint his body with spices.

But when they arrived, the stone was rolled away, the guards gone, the scene far from what they had expected, for his body was not there. It was missing.

In the days to come rumours would circulate that these very disciples had stolen his body, hiding it in another place, perpetrating the greatest fraud of all history – but we know that is not what happened.

[pause]

They were terrified, more so when two men approached them, their clothes and faces dazzling – reminiscent of the dazzling figures that met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, or the legends of that other great liberator of God's people; Moses, whose very face radiated with the glory of God after he had been in God's presence on Mount Sinai. They say that after that encounter Moses was never able to show his face in public again, not because of shame, but because of the dazzling glory that remained – etched into his face. For the remainder of his life his face had to be covered – so that those who looked upon him did not fear.

Maybe this is why the women bowed their faces to the ground, fearful of what the strangers might do, and what might happen to them as a result.

But instead of some dreadful outcome, instead these mean spoke words of hope and encouragement.

*Why do you look for the living among the dead? they asked. He is not here, but He has risen.*

And then they remembered his words to them, a half whispered promise of things to come, words spoken years earlier in headier and happier times.

And so they ran to tell the others, and soon Peter ran back to the tomb...Peter who had denied Jesus, Peter for whom the cock had crowed...Peter who Jesus had called the rock on which the church would be built.

He ran to the tomb, and he found it just as the women had told him...the tomb was empty and the linens that had wrapped his broken body were abandoned, as empty as the tomb.

[pause]

How quickly things can change.

One minute the depths of despair, the next something remarkably different and unexpected.

Hope.

That is the gift we celebrate today.

Hope for better things.

Sin defeated, death conquered, the old things passed away...new life, new hopes, new possibilities.

[pause]

Over the past two years we have all been in a bit of a dark place. We have been in the tomb that is the pandemic, and while the end is not exactly here, it is closer than it has ever been.

But on the other side things will not be the same.

You see the Jesus who met the disciples following the visit to the empty tomb was different to the Jesus who had been placed in it.

The crucified Jesus became the resurrected Jesus. He was different, never the same. His old and broken body transformed into a new and resurrected one.

And there was no going back.

For us, life beyond the pandemic will be different for all. In many ways we come out wearier of our health, more cautious about the risks of disease, habits have changed, and things that we had never imagined becoming the norm, have become second nature to us, like wearing masks, and greeting each other by the touch of an elbow.

Somehow I think children in the future will look at us oddly when we mention blowing out candles on a birthday cake...somehow I think that that ritual will be no more.

[pause]

For others the pandemic has meant a reassessment. What is life all about, and what are our priorities. What is important, and what is not.

Some have made big decisions, like Dr Bloomfield who has decided to leave his job as Director General a year earlier than expected.

And while concerts and events are starting to be booked in again, people remain wary of things like conferences and commuting into work.

Working from home has become a new normal, that has meant for many a reprioritization of life.

Even life here has changed.

We worship in new ways, unfamiliar ways, reimagined ways.

[pause]

Life after calvary was different for the disciples, and different for the world. It was a time of reimagining, a time of new things, a time of new beginnings...but most importantly a time filled with hope.

As I said, at the beginning...I love Easter Sunday morning...it is my favourite days of the year...for it is a day that speaks of endless possibilities, and endless new beginnings.

Who will we become as the gathered people of God when the pandemic is no more? Will we be a people of hope? A people who speak words of encouragement? A people with generosity of spirit, and kindness of heart?

A people who see the best in others? A people who dream of better things? A people renewed and restored by resurrection hope?

Yes I love Easter Sunday morning, for it marks both an ending and a new beginning...for all of us.

Amen.