

Easter Service 2018

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Sabina. Thank you so much, everyone, for being here. It's a joy to welcome you to church this morning. To what is, honestly, this is just the best day ever. We just celebrate the glorious news that Jesus is alive.

My name is Graham, the minister here at the church, and it's just so good to welcome you this morning. Lesser known fact about me. I'm quarter English. Don't judge me.

Quarter is the key term there, quarter English. But you know why I'm quarter English? Because my gran was from this little place in northwest London called Finchley. Has anyone ever been to Finchley? A few people? She was from Finchley.

I remember going up with my brother, and as well as her talking about going up apples and pears and the fact that we were in Barney Rubble, she used to sing to us. And this is one of the songs that she used to sing to us.

Now, don't leave me dying on the stage here as I try and sing this, okay? I even put the words on the screen for you. I'm forever blowing bubbles. Pretty bubbles in the air.

[1 : 05] They fly so high. They reach the sky. Then like my dreams, they fade and die. Fortune's always hiding.

I've looked everywhere. I'm forever blowing bubbles. Pretty bubbles in the air.

I kind of wait to listen to that back in the recording and see what it sounds like. But I've found subsequently since those days of my gran that this is an extremely popular song.

We heard it? And I think there's a reason why it's an extremely popular song. Because it taps into an experience that we all know to be true as human beings, doesn't it?

Things in life that come our way that we've got really high hopes for. And in an instant, they're burst. Aren't they? They're just bubbles. They're burst.

[2 : 05] Well, in our story this morning, we're going to eavesdrop in on two men who are making a journey. It's a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem back west to Emmaus.

Now, I don't know about you when you go on a journey, but I like to have music for my journey. It kind of sets the mood for where we're going. In our previous life, it was all about snow patrol. Now with two little girls, it's a lot more snow white.

But I like to have music that captures the mood for our journey. So here's the question I want you to think about. What is the music that captures the mood of this journey? What are Cleopas and his friends singing as they walk and they talk?

Well, surely, having seen the biggest bubble ever explode in the most spectacular of ways, surely they're singing bubbles.

You see, the despair centers around a king that they thought they had. Now, if you've got your Bibles here, turn with me back to that passage in Luke 24, and let's walk with these men and let's hear what they're saying as they journey towards Emmaus.

[3 : 15] This man, Jesus, verse 19, hear what they're saying about him. He was a prophet. And he was powerful in word and deed before God and all of the watching people.

We saw this man. And we loved this man. And we staked all, everything about our lives, we staked it on this man.

And the thing is, that for so long, this was looking so good. Jesus, he was, we saw him, we heard him do it.

He was outsmarting the smartest. He was dumbfounding the critics. His teaching was like that we'd never heard before. And the miracles that he was doing, we didn't even know how he was doing it. Left, right and center.

And we followed him all the way to Jerusalem because we thought that this was it. This was the moment when Jesus would be seated in front of all those people who for years mocked him and doubted him.

[4 : 24] He would be seen to be Israel's mighty king. The king that God had promised that he would send us. He would defeat all of our enemies and would rule for us.

We thought this was Jesus. But it turns out Jesus' fate was just like every other human being. And how are we feeling?

We're absolutely gutted. Because Jesus was just another bubble. An impressive bubble will give you that. A nice bubble, a wise bubble.

But he was just a bubble. Like everything and everything else. Except that he was burst in the most public, humiliating and gruesome of ways.

Do you want to know the saddest part of this? Is it some of our women that they got up early and went to the tomb on Sunday morning. We call them the Spice Girls. And they're trying to tell us that this tomb was empty.

[5 : 23] And they're trying to tell us that there was an angel. Two angels in fact that spoke to them and told them that he is alive. But do you see what they thought of that in those verses? Please can we stop all this nonsense now.

And let's all just go home. And let's all just get on with life. Verse 17 tells us that Cleopas and his friend are downcast. Gutted.

Crushed. Because life is just back to what it always was. Forecast. Short. Times of heavy rain. Occasional clouds. Fleeting moments of sunshine.

But it will be gone before you know it. We're forever blowing bubbles. Let me ask you, what is the song that captures your outlook on life this morning?

What is the song? In your heart of hearts, what are you singing? Is it like the lyrics to that John Lennon song? Imagine. You know the one that they sang at the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics?

[6 : 27] The one that said, imagine that there's no nations as the nations paraded around. I love that. John Lennon. What does it say? Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell below us.

Above us, only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. Living for today.

Getting into the right school. Getting the right grades. Getting the right degree. Getting the dream job. Getting married. Getting the house. Getting more cash.

Getting the kids. So that they can go to the right school. And they can get the right grades. And they can get the right degree. And they can get the right job. On and on it goes. Is this it?

Is there more to life than this? My favorite actor growing up was a man called Jim Carrey. Loved Jim Carrey films.

[7 : 23] This is what he said as you look back on his life. I think everybody should get rich and famous. And do everything that they ever dreamed of. So that they can see that it's not the answer.

Jim Carrey. One of the most celebrated actors of our generation. What's the song that captures your outlook on life this morning? Cleopas and his friend are on this road to the maus.

They're singing bubbles. But verse 15. They're not alone on the journey. Jesus. Is walking alongside them. And he hears Cleopas and his friend's despair.

They tell him about a king they thought they had. And he responds by telling them about a book that they thought they'd read. I love this. Right?

Picture this. They tell Jesus about this man called Jesus who was crucified. And Jesus as he hears two men tell him about himself.

[8 : 24] Responds. Of course he was. Look what he says. Verse 26. They thought the Messiah have to suffer these things. Don't you get it? Says Jesus. Boys what you've witnessed is not the derailing of the plan.

What you've witnessed is the very fulfillment of the plan. And so I wonder if you're here this morning. What do you think the Bible is? What do you think it is?

Is it a religious self-help manual? Is it a dated moral book? I'll be honest with you. That's what I used to think it was before I became a Christian.

Did you think it was those things? I treated it like a magic eight ball. You kind of shook it and opened it and see what came. The Bible is at its very essence. It's a story. It's a story about a great

God who created us.

A great God who created us in his image. But we through our first parents, Adam and Eve, we rebelled against him. The sin disease entered the human race.

[9 : 29] I remember growing up a really easy way that my Sunday school teacher taught me how to know what sin is. He says, sorry God, I'm in charge. No to your rules. Sorry God, I'm in charge.

No to your rules. Sin's a big deal. It's a big deal. We rebelled against this God. This God who loves us. This God who made us. That we slap stuff in his face. Sin is a big deal.

And sin is so big that it separated us from this great God. And to save us. Because he loves us. And to demonstrate to the world how great he is.

God initiated the wisest plot to the greatest story in all of human history. He sent his son to live and to die in our place.

So that a way could be opened up for us to come to know him. Friends, God didn't give us his word, the Bible, to answer every one of our questions.

[10 : 32] That was not his primary purpose. He gave us it primarily to show us the solution to our biggest problem. And our biggest problem is that we are separated from the God who made us.

And let me tell you that it's a far greater deal than we think it is. But back to the story. Do you not find it really interesting that Jesus hasn't revealed his true identity to these two men yet?

They see him but they don't really see him. That's fascinating. It's not really interesting. I want to know why he's doing that. If I were Jesus, what I would have done? I would have jumped out from behind a bush. I would have bought one of those massive novelty candles and popped it up with my scars and said, Here I am.

He's not doing that. Why is he doing it this way? Surely it's because he wants them to understand the story. To understand that central to God's story is this Messiah hero who would be the lamb that dies to buy back his people.

And he would be the lion that roars. As God exalts him, raises him from the grave, declares him to the watching world that that is my king.

[11 : 44] And he's seated on his throne. And he is risen from the grave. This is my king, says God to the world. And it's a story that will culminate in this king returning as heaven's champion to make all things new.

To put all wrongs to right. You see, death will not be the end of the story for those who have repented of their sin and who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord, Savior and King. Why?

Because it wasn't the end of the story for Jesus. It's incredible, isn't it? As you hear stories of Christians like we're hearing five, ten minutes ago about John Campbell, Frank Reed, people who trusted in Jesus.

Death is not the end for them. It is the pain that they were going through. Hey, guess what? There's a resurrection body coming. This is our king. This is the story. This is what God has done.

And isn't understanding the story going to be so important for these men when one day soon they will not be able to physically see Jesus anymore because he will have ascended into heaven.

[12 : 49] That's where we are in the story this morning. And that's why this is recorded for us. So we can see and trust these eyewitness sightings of the risen Jesus. Not just one, not just ten, but Paul would tell us 1 Corinthians 15, you can check it out later, to over 500 at one time.

This stands up. As one writer puts it, that is evidence that demands a verdict. So that when we can't physically see Jesus, we too can trust him.

Because we know that he is risen and that we know where we are in God's great story. And so from explaining a book that they thought they'd read, suddenly they see the true identity of a man that they thought they knew.

During this meal, what happens? Their eyes are opened and they see that it's Jesus. What do they say to each other? Verse 32. Feel the fire of this verse. Didn't our hearts burn within us?

As he opened the scriptures to us. We felt it. We knew it was true that God's king really is risen.

That life as we know it, everything has changed. And so having discovered the true identity of a man they thought they knew, they find themselves finally making a trip they never in a million years thought that they'd make.

[14 : 09] I don't think Jerusalem had a train station back in those days. I'm pretty certain of that one. But if it did, you can imagine these two men at the beginning of this chapter. They have bought a one-way ticket out of there.

What we see in verse 33. They cannot get back soon enough. As soon as they find out this news about Jesus. Because the news that Jesus has risen has transformed these two individuals' lives. Their hope has been reignited. Life as they know it flipped on its head. Where there was no hope, now there's hope. Where there was no purpose, now there's purpose. Where there was no life, now there is life.

And where did they go as soon as they get back to Jerusalem? Straight for their fellow believers. Why? Because it turns out the Spice Girls were right.

So you can imagine that they screamed the verses, the verse, sorry, verse 34. They screamed it to their fellow believers that sum this all up, verse 34. It is true.

[15:13] It is true. He has risen. And that changes everything. Here's the question for you this morning as we work towards the close.

Do you believe it's true? Do you believe it's true? That this man Jesus is alive. That the grave could not hold him.

That the greatest story ever told is true. And here's the best bit. We're not invited to grab the popcorn, recline in the lazy boy, and turn on the TV as we watch this story.

We are invited. God himself invites us through his word this morning to come and be part of this story. Jesus, Easter's champion. The one who holds the keys of death and life holds them out to you this morning and says, come and receive forgiveness.

Come and receive life to the full. So what song are you singing now, Cleopas and friend? Are you still singing bubbles?

[16:16] Oh no. Oh no. What are you singing now? Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb. Lovingly he greets us, scatters fears and gloom.

Let the church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing. For her Lord now liveth. Death hath lost its sting.

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son. Endless is the victory thou or death hast won. Let me pray.

God, we thank you for this morning and the glorious news that we celebrate today that Jesus is not dead, but he is alive.

Oh, would you help each one of us this morning, dear Father, as we respond to this message, to understand your story and to understand that that day changes our every day.

[17:21] That because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow. And that because Jesus lives, all fear is gone because we know that he holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives.

Thank you so much, dear Father, that you love us. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.