

Easter Sunday Service 2017

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[0 : 0 0] So, I've got three points today, and in a minute I'm going to invite you children to move to the side to help me with these three points. And my really hope is that all of us can get these three points as we focus in on what Jesus offers us, what the risen Jesus offers us this Easter.

The first thing that I'm going to try and point us to right throughout this passage in Luke 24 is that the risen Jesus offers us his presence.

His presence. When he came to the frightened disciples, second point, what was the first thing he said to them? It was another P. Can any of you who are not my children tell me what that P is, Joe?

Peace. The risen Jesus offers his presence, and the risen Jesus comes along and says, peace be with you. One of the final things that he said to them just at the end of the reading was he said, Wait here, because you're going to receive something else.

It was another P. Did any of you get it? Yes. One of you. What did you say? Power. Excellent. The risen Jesus this morning offers all of us his presence.

[1 : 1 2] He offers us peace, and he offers us power. Now, all those who are at school, please go to this site here, where you are going to help us all, hopefully by the end of the service, really make sure that we remember those three words, because you're going to do some beautiful posters for us that will have those three words.

Presence, peace, and power. And while the children work quietly away, hopefully the rest of us will really be able to focus in on what this passage has for us as we think through these three words.

Let me turn you first of all then to those initial verses in Luke 24, which we saw right at the start of our time together. These women, they were away searching, and in verse 2 we read, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Those women, they were looking for Jesus' body. They wanted to find Jesus present, albeit that they thought he would be dead. But we read in verse 2 that they were looking for Jesus in the wrong place.

And the obvious question that's come to me as I've prepared this, as I've thought about the wonder of Easter, and the offer that Jesus makes to come alongside and be present with me in my every situation, is do I sometimes look for him in the wrong place?

[2 : 3 1] Maybe sometimes I assume that he is only found when I come to church. Or maybe sometimes I don't bother looking for him at all.

Maybe sometimes I live my life as though he is not alive, as though he is not present. Or maybe sometimes through chasing wealth, through chasing power, through getting caught up in the busyness of life, I find that I am searching in the wrong place, and I'm not finding the risen Jesus.

Let's carry on in our passage. Because in verse 13 onwards, as we enter into the story of the two people on the road to Emmaus, we find these wonderful words in verse 15.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, so there are these two, they're on a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They're very sad because they're talking about all of the events that have taken place around the death of Jesus Christ.

They had hoped that he was going to be the one who would be Messiah, the one who would be Savior. And they're having this conversation, and they're having their walk. And as this happens, verse 15, Jesus himself came up and walked with them.

[3 : 48] Just a walk. Nothing very spiritual. Not going to the place of worship. Just a walk. But that Easter day, Jesus himself presences himself among them and walks with them.

Just a conversation. Just the two of them, or so they thought. But they're joined by a third person. They're joined by the risen, present Lord Jesus, who comes along and walks with them.

And yet we read for some reason that at that point, they were kept from recognizing him. And again, the question comes to my mind around whether we might both be looking for Jesus in the wrong place, yes, or whether sometimes we are failing to recognize the presence of Jesus right next to us.

Are there times where we might assume that we are alone? Where we might assume that we are not engaged in any sort of activity that God could possibly be interested in or caring about?

We're just walking. We're just talking. We're just going about our normal daily business. We're just working. We're just cleaning the house. We're just getting ready to sleep.

[5 : 11] Or we're just waking up. Is it possible that even in these situations, the risen Jesus wants to show us today that he is the one who wants to presence himself with us?

He is the one, after all, who was described as he came to earth as Emmanuel, God with us. And I hope that this morning we might recognize him, the risen Jesus, as the one who is still Emmanuel, God with us.

Let's carry on in our story as we come to these wonderful verses as this stranger to them, Jesus himself, tells them or seeks to explain to them that they shouldn't be surprised by what has happened.

Because actually the scriptures of old had been full of prophecies around what would happen to the Messiah, around how he must suffer, around how he must die a sacrificial death in which he would pay for the sins of all those who would eventually trust him.

And in verse 30, having urged this stranger to stay with him, he takes bread, gives thanks, read it with me if you can, breaks the bread and begins to give it to them.

[6 : 38] And then in verse 31, Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

And he disappeared from their sight. Isn't it interesting that it's as Jesus takes bread, and as he offers them bread that day, that their eyes are opened, and they recognize that this is not just a stranger.

They recognize that actually Jesus is alive, and has been present with them. He offers them bread.

In the same way Jesus today, as some have already remembered, and as we remembered on Friday, offers us bread. He offers us bread, and he invites us to gather.

He says we're two or three gathered together in his name. There he will be among them. And there we can take bread still. And as we take bread, we can remember his body.

[7 : 49] We can remember his death for us. And we can take the cup, and we can remember his blood shed for us. And get this, in just the same way, as Jesus was present with those two, as they took bread.

Jesus offers to be present with us, as we take bread together. And it's not the case that it's just, it's just the fact that Jesus will be present with us, in that moment of communion, as we take bread.

The wonderful truth of the risen Jesus, told time and time again, as we look at our New Testaments, at the unfolding of the story of Christianity, is that Jesus offers to be present with us, and indeed offers to join us, in our mealtimes.

And indeed invites himself, if we will only allow him, to be present with us, as we take bread. Revelation chapter 3 verse 20, says this, Jesus speaking, to a church, that has not allowed him, his place.

Maybe somebody could get the door, please. Jesus says, here I am, I stand at the door, and knock. If anyone hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in, and I will eat, with that person, and they with me.

[9 : 13] The risen Jesus. Can we pause? Can we shut out any other distractions? Can we think about our hearts, and lives this morning? Where is Jesus?

Does he have a place, right at the center of our lives? Are we conscious of his presence? Or is it possibly the case, that he's been shut outside?

Maybe forever. Maybe only more recently, through whatever's been going on, in our lives, that you know about, and that God knows about. If that's the case, is it possible that today, we can hear him, we can sense him, in our worship, in our reading, we can know, our spirits are telling us, that he is standing outside the door, knocking.

And he's saying, he wants us to experience, for the first time, or once again, the joy of his presence. He wants us to know, what it is to have Jesus, right beside us.

He wants us to know, what it is to have a saviour. He wants us to know, what it is not to journey, through life alone, but to have that Lord, and saviour, present with us.

[10 : 31] As I was reflecting on this, I thought of a book, that I've been reading, over the last couple of weeks, on holiday. It's the story of Saru, it's also now the film, Lion. It's a story, of a five-year-old boy, in India, who gets lost, on a long, long train journey, right?

And he ends up adopted, in Australia, and the story, centres around, his attempts, to find his family, back in India, 25 years later.

And there was one bit, of the story, that really moved me, I found myself, with a tear in my eye, I must be getting, a bit emotional, these days. As, it's the point, where the mother, who has given up, all hope, of ever seeing her son again, right?

The mother, assumes her son is dead, 25 years later. The mother, suddenly, in a normal, everyday, kind of day, doing her, normal things, in a small village, in India, sees this boy, approach her, and she knows, immediately, that this boy, is her long lost son.

And she says, this, he reports, that she said, as I walked, towards her, she was shivering, she felt cold, she had thunder, in her head.

[11 : 52] And he says, I had thunder, in my head too. That little phrase, that idea, of that, that image, of the reuniting, of the mother, and the son, 25 years later, the thunder, in the head, that they both had, reminds me a little bit, about what those two, on the road to Emmaus, said, as they realised, that actually, the person, who had come alongside them, was the risen Jesus, and they said, were not our hearts, burning, within us, as he talked to us.

Didn't we have thunder, in our heads, as we realised, that actually, it was the risen Jesus, who was present, who was walking, alongside us. They had only been, without Jesus, for a number of days, but they thought, that all hope was gone.

They thought, that they would never, ever see him again, and yet, a few days later, they were able, to welcome him, back into their presence, as the risen Lord, never again to die, the one who had, beaten death.

I wonder if some of us, have been without Jesus, for much more, than a few days. I wonder if some of us, are a bit more like, the mother of Saru. I wonder if some of us, have gone for 25 years, or thereabouts, maybe more.

25 years, perhaps thinking, that Jesus is dead. Perhaps thinking, that Jesus, is irrelevant. Perhaps thinking, that we will never, have any sort of, relationship with Jesus.

[13 : 27] And my prayer, this Easter Sunday, and the prayer of many others, in this church here, is that we might, recognize the risen Jesus, as he walks towards us.

As he steps towards us, and says that he longs, to have a relationship, with us. As he's died, to pay the price, for our sin. As he's there, to be our risen, Lord and Saviour.

And is it just possible, that even today, whether we've never, known him before, or whether we just, recognize that we've, pushed him to the margins, a bit, despite being Christians, despite being those, who have, accepted Jesus as Saviour.

Is it just possible, we could allow, we could allow, the risen Jesus, who wants to be present, with us. The great I am, the one who is God, with us. Could we just invite him, to be present with us?

Could we invite him, to stand beside us? Could we invite him, to have our lives, to have our all, to be our Lord, to be our Saviour? Maybe we could have thunder, in our heads today.

[14 : 36] Maybe we could have, our hearts burning, within us, as the risen Jesus, steps right, into our situation, because we believe, that he absolutely, can do that, because he's every bit, as alive today, as he is, in the passages, that we're reading.

The final opportunity then, when Jesus, presences himself, in Luke chapter 24, is there in verses 36, to 43. And we'll spend, the last few minutes, of our time, looking at this, passage here.

While they're still talking, Jesus, stands, among them. Do you notice, that Jesus, always seems to come, in ways that people, didn't expect, and at times, that people, didn't quite expect?

Tom Wright says this, Easter is always, a surprise. Whether in the sudden, surges of God's grace, overturning tragedy, in our own lives, or in the world.

Let's just dwell, on that for a moment, because I pray, I long that some of us, this morning, might experience, some surprise, this Easter. Maybe this day, doesn't need to just, pan out, exactly as we thought, it probably would.

[15 : 56] Maybe Easter, can be a surprise, as we discover, that Jesus, wants to step, into our situation, and wants to stand, right with us. Maybe we might discover, a sudden surge, of God's grace, overturning tragedy, in our own lives, or in the world, around us.

And notice how Jesus comes, to these disciples, who are frightened, and who are full of doubt, and I recognise, it's ever so likely, as I look around, that some of you, are full of doubt, and scepticism, this morning.

And this service, isn't the point, at which we are, going into, all of the intellectual, reasons, as to why, those of us, who are Christians, are convinced, that there is a sound, robust, intellectual case, for celebrating, as we do this morning.

But what I do want, to draw out, is to point you, to how Jesus, dealt with the doubts, that were there, in the minds, of those first followers.

He didn't berate them, for their doubts. He acknowledged, that the doubts, were there. And he says, I invite you, to take a really good look.

[17 : 16] Tell you what, I know your doubts, are there. Don't run away though. Just stay in this moment. Verse 39, Look at my hands, and my feet.

It is I myself. Touch me, and see. A ghost does not have, flesh and bones, as you see, I have. And if you're, full of doubt, this morning, if you're sceptical, about this whole idea, of Jesus being alive, of Jesus, from 2000 years ago, being present, with us today, if you're sceptical, about the idea, of Easter surprises, if you're not convinced, about the idea, of sudden surges, of God's grace, then can encourage you, not to run away.

But to take some time today, and in the week ahead, as it were, to look at his hands, and feet, and to touch him, and see.

The best way, I can suggest for you, to do that, is to take one of these, gospels of Luke, that are available, on the way out, and just to take some time, yourself, to read it.

Read it from cover, to cover. And in so doing, perhaps you will be able, to look at his hands, and his feet. Perhaps you'll be able, to touch him, and see.

[18 : 34] And I pray, that you might discover, the risen Jesus, and his presence, with you. Two things, as he presences himself, he offers, as hopefully we'll see, in a few minutes, from the children, he offers two things, to these, frightened disciples.

And the first thing he offers, in verse 36, and it's repeated, time and time, and time again, as the offer of Jesus, in the accounts, of the resurrection, he says, peace, be with you.

He doesn't come, to condemn. He comes, to offer, peace. Peace, be with you. And I suppose, we can think of a number, of ways, in which, Jesus offers us, peace, even today.

I want to turn you, to the verse, in the Bible, which is the verse, that really, opened up, what being a Christian, means for me. And I've shared this, with some of you, before.

But it's a verse, that speaks about peace. And it's really the verse, through which, as I reflected on, I realised, for the first time, with some degree of certainty, that I was a Christian.

[19 : 47] And it's Romans chapter 5, and verse 1. I think I'd been looking, for a kind of, special experience. I'd been looking, for some special feelings. Maybe a flash of light, a bit like, sort of Paul, you know, on his way to, Tarsus.

And I wasn't getting, any feelings, and so I was thinking, maybe I wasn't a Christian. And then I read this, in Romans 5, verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified, through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, since we have been justified, through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe this is the verse, that some of you need to allow, just to sink into your hearts, and minds.

You might not be feeling, that sense of God's, very real presence. But God's word, would remind us this morning, that through faith, in Jesus Christ, we have been justified.

We have been made right, with God. That it's not about, what we do, or how we feel, or what we've done, or what we will do. It's about what Jesus has done. It's about the fact, that he has gone to the cross.

[21 : 02] That he has died. That he has taken our sin, and shame. That he has risen from the dead, conquering death, and hell, and the grave. And now those of us, who will simply, trust in that, who will simply rely on him, God's word says, have been justified, and through that, now can experience, peace with God.

The risen Jesus, comes to us today, and says, peace be with you. Do you need to know, that peace, in the midst of all, of the, restlessness, of our lives, and of the world around us.

Hear the risen Jesus, say to you today, peace be with you. And it's peace, with God.

It's also peace, despite the circumstances, that we might find ourselves, in today. It's a remarkable, offer of peace, even in the middle, of the crisis, that we might, be so conscious of, this day.

I'm sure like many, I've been reading, of the terrible situation, that our Christian brothers, and sisters, in Egypt, have experienced, just over the last week.

[22 : 21] As some of them, going into a place of worship, have found themselves, killed, or have lost, families, and loved ones. And how can it be, that even in that situation, they go back, to their places of worship today.

And they hear these words, from the risen Jesus, saying to them, despite their situation, peace, be with you. If those Christians, in Egypt, can enjoy something, of the peace, that the risen Jesus offers, then so can we.

Peace, with God. Peace, despite, our situation. And then finally, this final, thing, this final offer, this final blessing, that Jesus pours out, on his disciples, that first Easter morning, is set out, as a promise, at the end of the passage, that Alistair reads.

Let's turn again to it. In verse 46, he reminds them, that the scriptures, had said, that the Messiah, would suffer, and rise from the dead, and repentance, and forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name, to all nations.

And he says, I am going to send you, what my father has promised, in verse 49, but stay in the city, until you have been clothed, with power, from on high.

[23 : 45] I think we, need to recognize, this morning, brothers and sisters, in Christ, that the same power, that raised Jesus, from the dead, 2000 years ago, is the same power, that is available, to those of us, who follow Jesus Christ, today.

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18, says this, very, very clearly. He says, the apostle Paul, writing to, that church in Ephesus, says, I pray that the eyes, of your heart, may be enlightened, in order that you may know, the hope to which you is, he has called you, and that you may know, the incomparably, great power, for us who believe.

That power, is the same, as the mighty power, he exerted, when he raised Christ, from the dead. I think those are, incredible words. I'm not sure, I've really, let that sink in.

I'm not sure, I've got the, do we really get, the idea, that the power, that God exerted, when he raised Jesus Christ, from the dead, is the same power, available to all of us.

Available to us, as we now seek to, live with Jesus, walking beside us. Available to us, as we seek to, do the good works, that God has prepared, in advance for us to do, his word tells us.

[25 : 06] The same power, is available to us, as we seek to be, his witnesses, in our community, in our schools, in our villages, in our towns, in this place, in our workplaces.

The same power, is available to us, today. I noticed that, one of the newspaper, headlines this morning, the Sunday Herald, says this, on its page, on its front page, exclusive, church, in crisis.

Ironically, I went to a news agent, to try and buy the paper, and they weren't even, selling it. I think it's probably, the newspaper, that's in crisis, due to falling circulation, rather than the church, that's in crisis.

This church, is not in crisis. Yes, there may be many, not attending church, in this country, for all sorts of reasons, but let's this Easter morning, not for a minute, think that the church, is in crisis.

Jesus Christ, himself said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell, will not prevail, against it. Jesus Christ, the one, who in his risen power, presences himself, among us, offers us, his peace, and assures us, of his power.

[26 : 29] Let's pause, and let's pray, together. Lord Jesus, at this moment, would you simply, make us aware, would you make us aware, of your presence, with us.

Saviour, healer, Lord, would you help, all of us, to open the doors, of our hearts, and welcome you in.

And would you help us, to live this week, as those, who have the risen Lord, present, with us. Assure us all, deep in our hearts, of your peace, this morning God.

Assure us, despite our sin, our failure, and rebellion, assure us, that as we turn to you, Lord Jesus, as our saviour, as we trust, in all that you have, done for us, through your, death and resurrection, we can experience, peace, and empower us, empower us, as individuals, and as a church, to speak, boldly for you, to do radical acts, of kindness, and mercy, to be your hands, and feet, in this world.

We ask, in Jesus name, Amen.