

MESSAGE FOR EASTER SUNDAY

4TH APRIL 2021.

In our world, we are taught that; “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is”. So many of us have been taken in by empty promises and so we are wary of anything or anyone that tells us that we can have something for nothing. Empty promises, the world is full of them – face creams that promise no wrinkles etc...

But God does not work that way, God never made a promise that was too good to be true. Instead of promises full of emptiness, for Easter he gave us emptiness that is full of promise. God gave us three promises for Easter and each one is marked by something empty. An empty cross, empty tomb and empty grave clothes. The very fact that each one of these is empty assures us that God’s promises are real because they could not hold Jesus. Jesus could not be contained by the cross, the tomb or even his burial clothes and therefore we can be sure of the fullness of God’s promises in our lives.

Let us begin with the empty cross because the fact that the cross was empty provides us with the promise of forgiven sins.

Let us go back to that first Easter morning just before the sun has risen. A group of Jesus’ women followers are on their way to a tomb. It is the tomb where Jesus was buried. They have been walking now for about half an hour and any conversations they are having are very subdued. The task before them is a sad one because they are going to anoint the body of Jesus. As they come to the top of a rise in the path, they all stop. Motionless and quiet, they stare off into the distance.

Let us look with them this morning, off to the right, just outside the city stands a gruesome reminder of the events of just a few days ago. Three crosses and as yesterday was the Sabbath nobody has taken them down yet. There they stand; an empty reminder of the horror of Friday, and the one in the middle is the one that Jesus was hung on.

Covered in blood stains from Jesus’ hands, feet; head and from the blood that poured from him when a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear to make sure he was dead.

Do not let anyone tell you that he wasn’t really dead, that he was just faking it and that his body was stolen from the grave. There was no question, Jesus was dead, the soldiers saw it and those that loved him saw it.

The empty cross. Empty of Jesus’ body, but full – full of God’s promises. Full of hope, for you and for me. The promise of the empty cross is that we stand forgiven because it was on that cross that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Sin: there is a word that is not popular nowadays. It is a word that is not politically correct in some churches today. Yet the simple fact is that we have all sinned, every one of us. The only person who has ever lived and never sinned is Jesus Christ.

It was on the cross that Jesus offered his perfect, sinless life on behalf of each one of us. Nobody else has ever lived perfectly and then offered his perfect life for our salvation. That is why the Bible tells us that “there is no other name given under heaven by which we can be saved”. When Jesus Christ breathed his last he cried “It is finished”. The penalty was paid. On that cross – that empty cross – It was there that his blood was spilt for our salvation.

Let us get back to our ladies. After pausing briefly to view the cross, they continue on the path to the tomb. As they go, one of them wonders aloud – “who will move the stone for us?”

They have good reason to be concerned; the stone that was placed in front of the tomb was a large boulder, probably weighing upwards of a couple of tons. Not only that, but the Romans had also sealed it, so no one was allowed to move it without their permission.

Suddenly they feel the earth move! Frightened, they look at each other, not certain what to do. After a few minutes, things seem normal, so they continue on their way. As they approach the burial site, they are still wondering about what had happened when they come upon something more remarkable. The soldiers are all unconscious, the stone has been moved and an angel glowing like lightning is sitting on the stone. And the angel says "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here; He has risen!"

Why was the tomb empty? Because Jesus was alive and the second promise to us this morning is that we too can live even after we die.

After the angel had spoken to the women, they immediately went back to the Apostles and reported what had happened. With this incredible news, Peter and John immediately raced back to the tomb to see for themselves. When they got there, John stopped just outside the tomb, but Peter ran right in. It did not take them long to discover that the tomb was just the way the women had said it was, empty. But that is not all, inside Peter found the clothes that Jesus had been buried in. They too were empty, and this could only mean one thing – Jesus was alive! It would not be long before Jesus showed himself to Mary Magdalene, and to all the Apostles and eventually to over 500 people. He would sit down with them, walk with them, talk with them, and eat with them.

And that is the promise of the empty burial clothes – Jesus is alive and wants to fellowship with you. Jesus is not some vague phantom force out in the universe influencing people. He is a living Saviour, and he wants a personal relationship with each one of us just as he did with his disciples 2000 years ago. Each one of us can know Jesus' love, care, healing, and forgiveness. He says, "behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and open the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with me".

On that first Easter Sunday, as the women went to the tomb, they had no idea what was about to happen to them. They were not aware of the wonderful promises of that day. Off in the distance stood an empty cross – the promise that their sins were forgiven. At the end of their journey was an empty tomb- the promise of their eternal life. Inside the empty tomb were the empty burial clothes – the promise that they would once again have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ, their living saviour.

This Easter morning, we celebrate the fact that we too have those same promises because of what God achieved through Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection. As believers in Christ, we have the promise that our sins are forgiven, we have the promise of eternal life and we have the promise of a close personal relationship with our living saviour and that is why we sing hallelujahs.