

EASTER SUNDAY 2011

AN EASTER MYSTERY

This address began with a box with other boxes inside – four of them altogether, with two little Easter eggs inside each one plus a message. Parcel 1 has parcel 2 inside + a written message; Parcel 2 has parcel 3 inside + a written message; parcel 3 has parcel 4 inside + a written message; parcel 4 has a message!

Do we get presents at Easter? We get Easter eggs, but what if you don't like chocolate? At birthdays and Christmas we get presents, but even the best Easter egg doesn't always compare with presents. However, we have lots of Easter eggs in Church today and going to give them as presents to people in the community, people who might not get an Easter egg today! Hold on, I also have a present here, but needs someone to open it... What do you find?

1. Freedom from fear I don't know about you, but I think Easter first time around must have been a bit scary, frightening. Two women, both called Mary, went to the tomb where they'd put Jesus' body on Friday evening, but what did they find? The stone was rolled away and there was no body inside. What was their first reaction? To be afraid! Yet the first thing the angel and Jesus also says is: *"Don't be afraid!"* That's easier said than done, but ... later when they saw Jesus alive, they began to realise that there is nothing to be afraid of; it's OK! Jesus is alive and His friends all rejoice in Jesus' being alive; later still they realise that because Jesus lives there is no need to be afraid of anything anymore because Jesus will be with them everywhere they go!

2. Peace a violent earthquake; an angel like lightning; a stone rolling; the guards so afraid that they fainted. Yet, later in the evening Jesus said *"Peace be with you"*. This is something more than not being afraid; the peace that Jesus gives is all about life being made complete, about people finding that life makes sense to them now. The peace that Jesus gave His friends helped them see that with Jesus life is complete, that Jesus meets their deepest needs and that above all He brings them to God to know God's love in their hearts. The same peace is for us; Jesus makes our life complete, brings us to God and meets our deepest needs.

3. A message to tell – the women were not to keep the news to themselves: *"Go quickly and tell disciples... go and tell my brothers..."* they were not to keep this news to themselves; they were to tell others what they've seen, what they've discovered; they are to tell the others that Jesus is alive. Who do you want to tell that Jesus is raised? Is there anyone? Your friend, perhaps; someone in the family? Maybe we're frightened to tell people about Jesus, but all of Jesus' friends became so excited by the Easter story that they couldn't help themselves; everywhere they went, they were telling people that Jesus had died and that God had raised Him from dead, the great miracle that would change the world. This is still the great miracle that changes the world and changes us and changes others.

4. Raised to life with Christ – more later.

WE BELIEVE...

Here are some sentences that tell us some of the truths that Christians have believed ever since the first Easter. They didn't believe them all immediately; some of the people on Easter Sunday were a bit confused, not sure what to believe, but as they

met Jesus and knew that the message was true “He has risen!” they later put some of the things they believed into words.

This is a very simple little piece. I’m going to read a sentence out loud and all I ask you to do in your heart is to say “*Yes, I believe that too!*” each time. This might be a way of helping us to understand what Easter is all about and what we believe about Jesus. Some of these sentences are about the story itself and some are about what the story means for us. See how you get on. You might find some that you’re not sure about, or that you’d want to put a question mark after; that’s fine. See how you get on.

We believe that Jesus died on a cross.

We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

We believe that after his resurrection, Jesus’ friends saw and touched him.

We believe that Jesus’ death sets us free from our sins.

We believe that we have new life in Jesus.

We believe that one day we will live with Jesus in glory.

Yes, I believe that too!

NEW LIFE FOR US

Being alive means... “I am breathing and can eat chocolate”. What else can you do as a result of being alive?

New – don’t you just love word ‘new’! Have you got anything new this week? New shoes! A new car! Some new books! Or new clothes! A new gadget! There’s something shiny, fresh, untouched and exciting as you take something new out of the packet and open it up for first time or sit in a new car that just has that ‘new’ smell to it. New things will make your life better, add to your life, or so we’re told: we will be happier, more attractive, this new thing will solve your problems. But then the new fades, the shoes get scuffed, the clothes lose a button or there’s a hole; the car breaks down and you get tired of the gadget. New isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be because it fades so quickly.

New – God loves the word new! New creation, new covenant, new testament, new heaven, new earth. The new things that God does don’t fade away, don’t disappoint. Jesus was raised to new life: that really and truly means that He never died again and in fact, the new life that Jesus had wasn’t just coming back to life in our world, but going to be with God in a new kind of life altogether in heaven. Jesus shares God’s glory in a new way; Jesus is king over heaven and earth in a new way and one day will come back to the world to make it new all over again, the new heaven and new earth in His promise.

There is new life for us, but what does that mean? Here’s one answer: “Being alive means I am loved by God and am following Jesus”. This is the new kind of life Jesus gives us, life that lasts forever and that nothing can take away from us, life that is about the kind of people we are and life in relationship with God. Christ is raised to be with God and so we should think about life as God sees it. These two most important things in life can be summed up in this way:

1)I am loved by God – this is what the Easter story tells us all over again and in the most dramatic way; all of this happened because God loves us; Jesus died on cross because God loved the world and because Jesus loves us. So our new kind of life begins when we realise that we are people loved by Jesus; loved by Jesus as we are, loved by Jesus enough for Him to give up His life for us. This is the start of a new kind of life. This is a great message for our world, to tell people that they too are loved by God – it changes things completely for many people.

2)I am following Jesus: Paul says “*Set your...*” (Col 3:2) Be the kind of people Jesus wants us to be; learn to love God and to live in the ways Jesus teaches; learn to pray and read the bible; learn to have our priorities shaped by Jesus in the first place. We don’t get this all right all at once. When children learn to walk for the first time, they need a lot of help and support and fall over at times, but bit by bit they get stronger and stronger and eventually walking comes naturally; adults still trip over and fall and break things at times, so we never quite get it all right. It is the same with following Jesus: we learn what we should do and often we get it right, but still make mistakes, we still stumble, but new life means following Jesus.

“Jesus is our life”. He is at the centre of this new life that God gives. New life never fades away; God’s love is always new, new every day; following Jesus is always the best way to live life. The new life that Jesus gives us is full of love, blessing and grace; it is full of challenge too – that we follow Jesus faithfully. “Being alive means I am loved by God and am following Jesus.”