

EASTER, April 9, 2023 ***“Joy in the World Christ is Alive!”***

How are you feeling this morning? Dare I ask if you feel a little wired on chocolate and sugar? Maybe the jelly beans and the eggs aren't sitting real well but it is Easter morning and our hearts are filled with joy! There is Joy in the world—because Jesus is alive!

It is the day of resurrection when Christians around the world greet the day with a smile on their faces, joy in the heart and minds wandering and wondering with questions of who, how, why, what and of course! For Easter Day confirms the prophecy of long ago which leads us into the future== One would come to save the people. Jesus purpose was fulfilled as he rose from death. And He is alive forevermore. Now it is up to us to draw closer to God, to come with expectant hearts to the garden where he was buried to see for ourselves what Mary saw that morning.

We know that Jesus died on the cross, was buried because this was His purpose as laid out by God the Father. But the story does not end there—he rose from death. The stone was rolled away from the entrance of the tomb; the grave clothes were left neatly where his body was and Jesus got up as he breathed again. He wobbled at first as he walked but soon he was outside breathing in the morning air. This is how we check for life—is the person breathing in and exhaling air? Jesus was most certainly breathing as he got out of the tomb and walked around.

May be you have been doing that these last days—breathing in the morning air and filling up your lungs with fresh clean air. Just imagine Jesus getting up from his place of rest walking towards the stone door, it opens and it is early morning still dark but soon the sun will shine. He experiences the warmth of a new day and he breathes in. Good clean air and his lungs fill up to breathe in and out—with the pulse of life once again. Jesus is alive!

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to mourn. Jesus had saved her and turned her life around. She followed with the disciples and called him teacher. When she arrived at the tomb, she saw that the stone had been removed. She then went to see Simon Peter and the other disciple and told them her theory that Jesus' body was gone. Simon Peter and the other disciple ran back to the tomb to check it out and when they got there they bent down and looked in. They saw the cloth that had been on Jesus' head not lying with the other wrappings but were still unsure. They returned home. Mary stayed at the tomb and walked around a bit; she then looked into the tomb and saw angels. They asked her why she was crying. She shared her theory that Jesus' body was stolen. But then as she turned around the gardener was there and in anger, Mary asked him where Jesus' body was. She did not know who it was—until he said her name, Mary. Jesus was alive and in front of her. He was talking with her and she was overjoyed; overwhelmed and wondering what to do—Jesus told her go and tell the disciples- I am alive. She went to the disciples and announced, 'I have seen the Lord.'"

Mary's emotions were all over the place in those days. She cried and was grieving Jesus' death. After all he had changed her life and now what? He was dead. She went to pay her respects to Jesus but saw that the tomb was open. It shouldn't have been open as it had been sealed and guarded. She told the disciples but they were not understanding what happened either. They returned home. What else could they do? But Mary stayed and cried some more. She saw angels who told her Jesus wasn't there but she just didn't know. She got angry and even told the gardener to go and find him. But when this man spoke her name- Mary's life was renewed! Jesus was alive!

How significant is this statement? If this happened, it changes our lives completely. Just think on this- Christianity is based on the resurrection of Jesus. Some people might say, "I struggle with that part of being a Christian- how could one be dead and rise to new life? But I like Jesus teachings and miracles. 'But our faith teaches us that Jesus rose from the dead and we should accept what he said; because if Jesus didn't rise the dead, then why worry about any of what he said. Are you looking for proof? Look at what happened afterward! There are churches all around the world and people have believed in Jesus and his resurrection for 2000 years! The songs we sing and the words we hear have been shared since Peter gave his account in Acts 10 :39. Peter says, 'We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear- not to all people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.' And when Peter was sharing this- the Spirit of God fell upon those who heard.

Jesus was alive-- But how? What defined his being alive? The fundamental characteristics of living organisms include: having an organized structure, requiring energy, responding to stimuli and adapting to environmental changes, and being capable of reproduction, growth, movement, metabolism, and death. Jesus was physically present with Mary, he breathed and responded to Mary's angry statements, he moved and eventually he even showed the marks of death to those who doubted. He ate and drank with the disciples and he moved. Jesus was alive. But what does this mean for us living on earth 2000 years later?

After Jesus' death the entire community adopted new beliefs. Who ever thought of resurrection? Was that even possible? Yet Jesus raised Lazarus to live again, but Jesus was the one who had died and now he was alive? Christians now had a resurrection centred view of reality. Jesus had a transformed body that could walk through walls yet eat food. And Jesus' resurrection does bring its challenges.

N.T. Wright states: *The early Christians did not to invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus... Nobody was expecting this kind of thing; no kind of conversion experience would have invented it; no matter how guilty (or how forgiven) they felt, no matter how many hours they pored over the scriptures. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own.*

So my question to you is this? DO you believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ? Even if you can't believe in this, you should want it to be true! Just think about this for a moment. As people, we care deeply about justice for the poor, the need to alleviate hunger and disease and of course caring for the environment. But if you believe that the world came into existence by accident and everything will eventually burn up why worry about other people? Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing you do will make any difference?

But as Christians we believe that Jesus lived, died and rose again. Jesus is alive- we sing about it: Google Easter hymns—16 million+ responses come up. Pray about it and even reflect, read and share stories about Jesus teachings and how Paul's life changed so much that he had to tell others of Jesus Christ as his Saviour. I Corinthians 15: . . . He appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time... then he appear to James then to all the apostles. He also appeared to me.

Jesus is alive and because we believe there is infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world. The message of Jesus' resurrection is that the world matters. Jesus being alive means in the world where there is injustice, violence and degradation God calls us to work and plan with God's guidance and energy that they there will be victory over all. But we must believe in the resurrection of Jesus! And to know that Jesus is alive in our hearts and minds leads us to a stronger faith. Let us be filled with joy knowing that Christ is alive!

Let us pray.

God we sing "Joy in the world Christ is alive," because the tune is familiar. Yet the words we say hold promises of what is to occur. Help us to laugh and sing; to understand your truth, your gift of grace; to realize that Jesus is the One who saves us and that eternal life is made possible because Jesus is alive. Bless us this day as we rejoice and sing together as we pray together and as we grow to understand and have hope renewed and restored through your son Our Saviour, Jesus. Amen.