

Easter Sunday

Readings Isaiah 55:1 – 9, Mark 16:1 - 8

Thanks for coming. It is so good to see you on this celebration day. We have been remembering Jesus' death for the last couple of days. Today it's great to say

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Jesus is risen - now and for all eternity. Jesus rose again that first resurrection day and he lives forever. It is important for us to remember his death – too often we rush into celebrating and ignore Jesus' pain and suffering. Perhaps we just want to think happy thoughts?

However, today is a day for happy thoughts.

We are no longer mourning.

We're celebrating.

We are celebrate because today is Easter Day! We rejoice in the risen life of Christ.

The whole Christian faith hangs on the fact of his resurrection!

And today Jesus' life on earth is revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus's work on earth carries on – in the here and now.

I have a question for you:

When and where did you last see Jesus?

Think about it for a moment.

Some of you will be saying "I've never seen Jesus. What's she on about? I don't get visions. I've never seen Jesus."

Really! I don't believe you.

Jesus comes in all kinds of disguises. Most often he's not in the places we expect to see him.

Mother Theresa saw Jesus in the eyes of every person she encountered in the slums of Calcutta. Seeing Jesus enabled her to continue on with her work, even when it got tough. She took literally Jesus' words:

When you cared for the least of these, my brothers, you cared for me.¹

Back to my question: Where have you seen Jesus?

¹ The parable is in Matthew 25

I saw Jesus three or four weeks ago. I was sitting on the church steps with a distressed young woman. She pouring out her story between sobs. I was just listening.

A couple walked past - pushing their bikes and carrying bags of groceries. They were really scruffy; the guy was covered in tattoos. As they walked past they both stared – as you do.

The guy said to the young woman “Are you alright Love?”

I was thinking “Go away, clearly she is not alright. Give us some privacy.”

The young woman didn’t even notice him. She certainly wasn’t able to answer. From somewhere within me came the response “No she isn’t. Pray for her.”

There was the briefest of pauses, and then the man broke into prayer. He prayed in tongues (a private prayer language). He prayed briefly, as his partner held his bike. Then he walked over, put his hand on the young woman’s shoulder and said “You’ll be alright Love. The Lord is with you.”

Now I didn’t initially see Jesus in that man. I wrote him off because of his dress and his appearance. Shame on me!

As that man prayed, my eyes were opened and I saw Jesus ministering through him. That man brought Jesus’ love and compassion to the young woman.

Jesus is alive! You will have seen him – in unexpected ways and in unexpected places too.

So how do people today view Jesus? What do they think of him?² Recent research in the US says

- 92% of the population say that Jesus was a real person. They believe he lived and died.
- 56% believe he was God.

Amazingly more than 60% of those surveyed, said they have made some kind of commitment to Jesus. I doubt it would be that high in NZ!

Guess who is less likely to commit to Jesus?

- Younger adults
- and rich people.

The money thing was fascinating. Commitment to Jesus lessened as the income figures increased. Perhaps rich people think they have everything they need and don’t see Jesus anywhere?

² The following statistics come from the Barna research. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/714-what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs#.VRxa5PmUdIn>

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared in all kinds of unexpected places to his followers:

He met Mary Magdalene³, then some of the women as they were running to tell Jesus' friends he was alive.⁴

He met another couple of followers as they were walking along a road.⁵ Then he appeared to the remaining eleven disciples.⁶ Especially moving is his appearance to Thomas⁷ – the one who doubted. That would've been me I'm sure.

Later the Apostle Paul saw Jesus in an amazing encounter. Paul was the equivalent of an ISIS terrorist today. He was going about killing Christians because they had deviated from the truth. After seeing Jesus he became a Christ follower of great influence. Check it out for yourselves.⁸

Throughout history Jesus has appeared to countless people, usually in circumstances that completely surprised them.

The challenge for us to day is that we have little faith in anything that cannot be scientifically proven. We're not prepared to take a risk. This is a great pity. Jesus comes because he wants to be our Saviour and friend. He invites human beings to hang out with him, to love him, to follow him.

But we delay. "As long as we first insist that everything about God's ways and plans be made completely intelligible to us, before we act on his invitation, we will never act."⁹

The passage from Isaiah is an invitation. One which was too often turned down by God's own people and continues to be turned down today. David Kinnamon, commented on the research I quoted from before:

...Jesus is a friend of sinners, but many Millennials are 'unfriending' him ..."¹⁰

God's invitation is to all of us, not just those who have never had a relationship with him. Life-long Jesus followers know that there is always more to explore in that life of faith; more of Jesus to see and know.

The Lord continues to invite the Christian and the explorer to see Jesus.

³ Mark 16:9, John 20:11 - 18

⁴ Matthew 28:8 – 10

⁵ Mark 16:12 – 13, Luke 24:13 – 35, John 20:19 - 22

⁶ Mark 16:14 – 18, Luke 24:35 - 53

⁷ John 20:24 - 28

⁸ Paul makes his claims in I Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8. The encounter is related in Acts chapters 9, 22 and 26

⁹ The Isaiah NIV Application Commentary, John Oswalt 603

¹⁰ David Kinnamon, Barna Group researcher, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/714-what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs#.VRxa5PmUdIn>

Another unexpected place I saw Jesus recently was on Facebook. A young lady posted that her house was haunted; stuff was moving about and coming off the walls. She needed help TODAY!

Interesting posts followed:

- Get some holly (sic) water from the catholics (sic)
- Go to the marae
- Whoever you get to help needs to know their authority in Christ

That last one was nudged me to get involved. So I posted that I was an Anglican Minister at Church on the Hill and offered my help. The young lady private messaged me. I found out she lived in Wakefield so I asked Allan Wasley to go round and clean out the place. I assured the young lady I would pray. Allan went. Later he said there was definitely something in her house but through prayer Jesus kicked it out.

Later still the young lady messaged me again:

“Hey Susan! Would just like to thank you again for your help. He came out and blessed the house and now we have a happy home. 😊 “

I got another message from someone else the same day with similar problems. They live in central Nelson so All Saints are sorting out that one.

Is Jesus alive today? You bet! Is he working in unexpected places? Definitely! We all need to be on the lookout for Jesus.

Those of us who are regular church members, perhaps need to be even more alert. We expect to meet him in worship and we do meet him here.

But let's expect to meet him in the unexpected places too!