

4th April 2021 6 pm Easter Day Evening Service

Led by Andrew Attwood. Talk by Andrew Attwood, Reflection by Andrew Mayfield on the Resurrection, Readings by Andrew Mayfield and Karen Archer, Prayers by Ann Fisher
This transcript is only of the reflection, the readings and the talk.

What Does the Resurrection Mean to You?

[Andrew Attwood:]

I'm now going to hand over to Andrew, who's going to share some of his own thoughts and his own perspectives on the Resurrection. So over to you, Andrew.

[Andrew Mayfield:]

Thank you, Andrew. So what does the Resurrection mean to me? Well, I initially attended an Alpha course because I wanted to explore the extent to which Christianity had a factual base as opposed to being pure or perhaps even "blind" faith.

Alpha provided that factual base and triggered the start of my journey in faith, focusing on the resurrection as the catalyst for being 'born again' with the promise of eternal life.

The Christian faith started because of the linking of both the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus beyond the grave. Without these, Christianity would not have had its growth trajectory and Jesus would have 'just' been the greatest moral philosophy teacher of all time... and not the Son of God, with the power to redeem sins.

Over 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared 11 times to a mix of individuals and groups including Saul, the Christian persecutor, and this led to his conversion.

The empty tomb and Jesus' appearances convinced the disciples, beyond any doubt, that Jesus had risen from the dead and incidentally this also brought over 50 Old Testament prophecies to fruition.

The wider Apostles group, including the Twelve, then went on to preach the Good News message. Approximately 58 of those 70 wider Apostles were killed for their belief in the Christian faith and, starkly, 11 out of the 12 disciples suffered this fate.

Today, the Resurrection message can be drowned out by 'busyness' and secular perspectives on life. This makes it difficult for people to carve out the quiet time to think Christianity through on a personal level and to let Jesus into their lives.

And so to close, I came to faith because of the sacrifice of Jesus ... but also critically the fact that 58 initial martyrs had experienced Jesus' ministry, witnessed His Resurrection and were prepared to give up their lives in spreading the Gospel.

1st Reading: John 20:1-9

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **2** So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. **4** Both were running, but the other disciple

outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped round Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

2nd Reading: John 20:11-18

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' 14 At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

17 Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Talk

[Karen:] And now we go to Andrew for his talk.

[Andrew:] Thank you very much. Thank you so much guys for the reading, I don't know about you, but John's Gospel is so dear to my heart, this is probably the gospel that meant the most to me when I first became a Christian. And this particular episode is so moving. Once again, let's pray before I speak.

Father God, as we look into the extraordinary mystery, the extraordinary reality of Jesus' resurrection, would You touch us with Your Holy Spirit, so that we don't just hear with our ears, but that we discern with our spirit what it is You want to show us today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So I wanted to talk about these two different sections that we have in this account, John 20 from 1 to 10 and then the remainder all the way through to verse 18. Now I wanted to emphasise the nature of these eyewitness details. John's Gospel in particular spends a huge amount of time on Jesus' last week. And so we have lots of details around the Resurrection too. John tells us that it was dark when the women arrived, and that the stone had moved. And then we hear about disciples running back and forth. It's interesting that the other gospels mentioned three others who were with Mary, and we get a kind of a glimpse of it when she's telling the disciples about the news: she says, "We don't know where they've laid His body." All of the different gospel accounts do fit together, even though they're told from slightly different perspectives.

Why had Mary and the other women gone to the tomb? The inference is that they'd gone there to complete the anointing of Jesus' body. Presumably, the people who had done it in the first instance had only done a partial anointing, because it was near Passover and so they did a basic job and then closed the tomb up. So you get these kinds of details: they're coming back to complete it, fully expecting to be dealing with a dead body: that's the natural inference. And then we have this dramatic experience that the tomb is no longer occupied. We have a tomb empty and we have Mary running back and telling the disciples. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they've put Him." And so that is sufficient to make Peter set off running.

It's intriguing, this little detail again from John personally, where it talks about the disciple whom Jesus loved, which is probably John, and Peter both heading off. And Peter goes first, but this younger John, probably younger maybe by 10 years or so, outruns Peter and get there first. And so he bends over and looks in, but he doesn't go in. He doesn't go in. Why, why is that? They both have to see for themselves, but he sees the cloths, he peeks through the door and he sees the cloths. Perhaps John is nervous of going in because he thinks the body is still there. But what happens when Peter arrives? Straight into the tomb. Typical Peter. It also talks about them bending down to go in: these little phrases do give another smack of eyewitness accounts, giving the strong indication of Jewish doorways or openings into tombs, there were only about, say, four feet high. So inevitably they'd have to bend down to get in. And the other disciple didn't go in at first, only Peter went in. I think Peter's kind-of categorised all the way through the Gospels as being the one who speaks without hesitating, perhaps sometimes a bit headstrong.

And then from John you get this extraordinary focus on the linen cloths. It is extremely fascinating why John would labour the point of the cloths lying there. He said, "Peter saw the strips lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head: a cloth folded up by itself, separate from the linen. And then only, finally, would the other disciple go in. Let's just kind of think again for a moment about these linen cloths. Why would that be significant? Consider the circumstances of Jesus' death. Jesus had been lacerated and flogged within an inch of His life, so He would have been bloodied and cut all over His body because of the flogging. Not only that, He would have had blood all over Him from head wounds, hand and feet wounds, as well as a wound from His side. So this is a fairly remarkable amount of wounding on a corpse that is then wound by linen cloths. And it's two days later, it's kind of, you know, several hours later, laid in a cold stone tomb. Okay. These cloths now here, orderly and the headwrap is kind of separate. It begs questions, it begs all kinds of questions. How on earth did these cloths get removed from the body? Think about it. One of the common queries that people have raised about the empty tomb is that somebody else had taken the body: that's the most logical, common-sense presumption, but if that was true, if the body had been taken by somebody else, why would there be cloths left behind, and particularly difficult-to-remove cloths, cloths that would be kind of glued to the corpse through spices and blood. This would have been a real mess, it's a real tangle. And yet, according to the text, they're left in an orderly manner. That's very, very difficult to do. John also emphasises the idea of this headwrap thing separate, but it was in the same place where the head of Jesus has been, and you get this very poignant phrase that John finally goes in and looks at the cloths. And it says, "He saw, and he believed."

What was it about the cloths, this particular view, that caused John to believe? From his sight, he could see the body of Jesus had somehow been removed from the cloths without them moving. He didn't understand it from Scripture yet, but from just looking at it, it was clear that miraculously the body was no longer bound, but the cloths were left exactly where they had been wrapped around Him. John believed. What about you today? What about you? Are you at a place of

scepticism? Are you at a place of questioning? Are you at a place where you're beginning to look and see and believe?

Inevitably, the first witnesses to the Resurrection were shocked and disturbed and confused, and it was only later that they were coming to conclusions about the Resurrection of Jesus. Fortunately, like Andrew said earlier, Jesus Himself explained the meaning of the Resurrection when He appeared to them and spoke with them. But we find in Romans and in Thessalonians clear descriptions from the apostolic writings as to what the Resurrection means. Romans 1 verse 4¹ says this,

[He] was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In other words, His life from death proved who He was, it proved His identity as being the Son of God. It also says in Thessalonians that the Resurrection has meaning for ourselves. It means that this resurrection of Jesus is a foretaste of something that we don't experience. 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 14² onwards says,

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

So, this has to do with us, as well as Him. The resurrection of Jesus is a first fruit, a foretaste.

Now let me move on to this second section that Karen read to us from verses 11 through to 18. In this particular section, John draws us into the high emotion of the scene, and the high emotion of both loss, confusion, and then exhilaration. Mary weeps. John doesn't pull any punches here, he talks about the strong feeling that wracks through Mary Magdalene. We know from other references in other gospels that Mary was someone who had been set free from things that bound her in the past. So Jesus was a very tangible saviour to her. Someone who had given her a complete new lease of life, a complete fresh start. And so to have Him so rudely and dramatically dragged away and taken from her was completely destroying, soul-destroying. Hence her tears. But Mary hasn't faded at all in her devotion to Him, even though He's been crucified and buried. She needs to know for herself. She wants to go, she's there to anoint the body, and inevitably when she sees that the stone has been rolled away, she needs to go and find out for herself. And so Mary looks in, she bends down through the narrow door. And she sees something different. This time, instead of it being the cloths that's the main focus, it says that she saw two angels. And it says they were seated, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus had been previously. What on earth is John referring to here when he makes this picture for us? An angel at the head, and an angel at the feet. The most obvious reference from Old Testament language is that picture we have in the Tabernacle of what was called the Mercy Seat. This is one of the sacred parts of the Holy of Holies; and carved over the top of the Mercy Seat were two cherubim: one here and one here, bent over the Mercy Seat. And we have a similar scene here, that Mary is looking at, she looks at two angels at the head and the feet over the place of mercy.

They're almost pointing probably to the cloths, and they're begging the question saying, "Well, why are you crying? Why are you upset?" They ask the woman, "Why are you crying?" and she speaks to them: "They have taken my Lord away," she says, "I do not know where they've put Him." Now it's intriguing to know what she would be making of who she's speaking to, but her emotion is so strong, her feelings are so deep, that she can't even think straight about who these people are. You can almost imagine the angels pointing at the cloths, and then perhaps even beginning to focus on Jesus, who is just outside.

1 [NRSV], [KJV], [NKJV] ...

2 [NKJV]

Have a think for a moment about what Mary couldn't focus on. She was so distraught, she was so upset, her vision was blurred, her sense of focus was distracted. What is it at this time that you are focused on? What is it that takes your attention away? What is it that pulls you away from looking in the right place? I do wonder in these verses that the angels turn their heads as a way of kind-of nudging Mary to turn round. And finally, she hears a voice. She hears a voice and the voice is this: "Woman," He says, "Why are you crying?" He's echoing the same kind of question from the angels, asking, "Who is it you are looking for?" He said that she thought He was the gardener. Maybe it's because of her tears, maybe she can't recognise Him. Maybe there is something slightly different because He's now raised. But Jesus is gradually, gradually breaking through the grief of Mary. She still can't quite see Him yet, but she's beginning to see something that she hadn't seen before.

I remember when I first became a Christian, I remember the first words I ever discerned Jesus speaking to me. He said my name, "Andrew, you've finally come home." It's crystal clear in my memory. Even though this is over 30 years ago, I can still remember, a sense of Jesus being with me, which was a tremendous shock at first, but He said my name. This is profound. Verse 16, Jesus said to her, "Mary." He said her name. And this changes everything. Jesus didn't really reveal Himself to Mary by telling her who *He* was, but by telling her who *she* was to Him. "You're my Mary. You are my Mary." "Mary!" He can speak to her like this because He knows her. I could hear Jesus' voice, because He knew me, so He could say my name, "Andrew."

There's some tremendous poetry about this encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus at the tomb. You may remember all the way back to the beginning of the Old Testament, in the Garden of Eden, you have a different story. There's a man and a woman there, you have Adam and Eve there. And they were sent out into exile in sorrow because of their betrayal, because of their neglect of God's commands. And yet now in *this* garden there is the second Adam speaking to another woman, speaking her name. And finally, humanity is finally comforted and restored. Mary blurts out, "Rabboni!" which means 'teacher'. You can just see her welling up, her eyes finally clear, her heart open. She knows it's Him, and you have this intriguing verse, verse 17³:

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father."

Can you picture it? Can you picture Mary clinging to the one that she thought she had lost, a loving embrace, it's like back from the dead, literally! How might you have felt to have Him returned to you?

And yet Jesus is not constrained by Mary's affections, He loves her dearly, but He has things to do. He needs to be elsewhere, and He will see her again later. So that will be fine. He commissions her. This is beautiful. I sometimes find myself so moved by the countercultural brilliance of Jesus. She's instructed to tell the brothers⁴:

"Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

In the other accounts of the gospels, Jesus encourages her to arrange a meet-up with the apostles so that they can see Him like she has seen Him. What does that mean? It means that Mary Magdalene is an apostle to the apostles. This is the most prestigious role anyone could possibly have. She is the first clear eyewitness of the risen Jesus Christ. And she, a woman, whose testimony would have been disregarded by Jewish culture, is the first that Jesus chooses to go and inform the ones who would also tell the story. This is a classic telltale

3 [NIVUK 1984]; the Greek has ἀναβέβηκα – I have [not] ascended – instead of 'returned'

4 Continuing John 20:17 [NIVUK 1984] – same verb.

sign of historic accuracy: no-one would ever dream of making up a female witness in this kind of crucial story.

So even though all the others have fled, Jesus calls them His brothers. He says, "Go and tell my brothers." Even though they had neglected Him, Jesus still calls them His brothers. And you got a little glimpse, as well, of the Ascension. "I've got to ascend, I've got to go to my Father." This is a small indication that we are now in an entirely different kind of relationship with matter. This is a new body that Jesus was raised in, and it was made out of His old body, but it's a new body, that is imperishable. Go read 1 Corinthians 15 if you want to find out some more detail about the nature of resurrection body, but it's to do with separation from decay: death no longer has any kind of power over it. All of us know, we kind-of get old, we get wrinkly, our joints hurt, we get sick, we eventually die. And yet the resurrection of Jesus, none of this now applies to Him, none of this applies to His body, so the only future He has is ascension into the heavenly dimension, never to die again.

I don't know how this makes you feel. Do you approach the Resurrection in a clinical way, just looking for evidences, just looking for details, so you can put it into the right box and say "I now understand," or is there an element of this that touches you at a heart level? We have the details of the first part of this reading, but then we have the emotion of the second part. And I'll be honest with you, I find this section kind-of breaking my own heart. I find that every year, every time I come across the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is a tearing that happens inside of me, because I know that His death is to do with how I am. He died because of what I'm like. But I also know, and this is the sweetness in the pain, His Resurrection is to do with how He is, regardless of what I'm like. There is no one, there is no one like Jesus, He is more. He is beyond, He's over and above, higher than anything we could ever imagine, more loving, more gracious, than we can dare to believe.

And I would say this to you today, on this Easter Sunday, just like Mary, He knows your name, He knows your name, He knows your story, and He wants to speak with you.

Prayerful Response / Application

So as I draw to a close, I just want to have a moment to respond to this amazing Easter message. Can we just be quiet for a moment. Let's just be quiet.

When John looked in at the tomb, he saw the cloths and he believed. Just be honest, before God, where are you in believing?

Perhaps at this time your vision is a little blurred, like Mary's was when she was distraught. Is your vision foggy, confused at this time? Again, let's be honest with God, where are you in what you can see or not see at this time?

Is it perhaps that you do believe, but you just don't understand. It may be that you're a long-in-the-tooth Christian, or you've just come to hear this for the first time. Are you carrying questions that still have no answers? I want to pray for all of us, wherever we are, that Jesus would meet us now. So let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your appearance at the tomb. Thank You, Lord, for the great privilege You gave Mary. But I pray now, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that You would reveal Yourself again, by the Spirit, to all who are open, all who are soft-hearted. Do reveal Yourself, Jesus, to us.

Lord Jesus, if there are any people who are watching and listening today, who are carrying pain or brokenness, because of loss, would You say their name, and would You place a hand on their shoulder.

Jesus, bring Your healing resurrection power.

And Lord Jesus, we pray that we would all be given the opportunity to begin again. Lord, at this time of Easter, I want to pray for an opportunity for every person watching, whether we've just become Christian, or whether we've been Christian for decades, let us hear Your voice, saying to us, "Begin again, begin again."

And so Lord, I ask all these things in Your precious and holy name. Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

[NIVUK unless otherwise stated] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790

[NIVUK 1984] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Please note: inclusive language was not introduced into the NIV until the 2011 edition.

[NRSV] New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved.

[KJV] Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press

[NKJV] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved.