

Readings: Acts 10: 34-43, 1 Corinthians 15: 19-26 & John 20: 1-18

Sermon – A Factory of Hope

An end or a beginning?

We have finally arrived at Easter Sunday; the day that has been on our minds for a good while now. Although for many in our society, Christmas Day is a day etched on the minds of people as a sort of end point for planning and build-up, for Christians more important is Easter Day. And here in the parish we have been building towards this day for many weeks. It has been a journey. Our worship started with Ash Wednesday and then working through the Sundays and Thursdays of Lent and then the profundity of Holy Week.

Perhaps we have given something up – and today are preparing to indulge ourselves.

Perhaps we have been part of one of the Lent Conversation groups, and/or have followed the Living Hope booklets; maybe we've listened extra carefully to the sermons(!) – all of this encouraging us to reflect on the meaning, significance and transforming nature of 'Hope'. That has been our theme for Lent and it has taken us on a journey of discovery.

Now we are here on Easter Sunday, the day we have been working towards, the culmination, the end.

Or is it?

Resurrection – new beginning

Easter Sunday should not be thought of as an end but as a beginning. It is the ultimate new beginning. The resurrection of Jesus, although at the end of the Gospel books in the Bible, is not in any way the end of the Gospel – it is the start.

What we call Christianity began with the followers of Jesus experiencing Jesus after his death in an entirely new way. They saw

him in bodily form, albeit a new kind of body, but it was still unmistakably Jesus.

The disciples were themselves transformed by this turning them from fearful followers into bold proclaimers of the Gospel. Before the resurrection, they were uncertain and afraid—Peter denied Jesus three times, and most of them fled when he was arrested. However, after witnessing the risen Christ, their fear was replaced with unwavering conviction.

Peter, once hesitant, became a fearless preacher, delivering powerful sermons that led thousands to faith. The reading we have heard from Acts, is just one of them. Compare this to the Peter we heard about last week denying he even knew Jesus! The resurrection transformed Peter and he went on to do the things Jesus had been teaching him to do for those years they were together.

And all of the disciples, once hiding behind closed doors, openly preached in the streets, despite threats and persecution. Their transformation was so radical that they willingly faced imprisonment and martyrdom, convinced of the truth of Jesus' resurrection. This change was not merely emotional—it was fuelled by their belief that Jesus had conquered death and was now Lord of all. Eventually empowered by the Holy Spirit, they spread his message across the world, laying the foundation for Christianity.

Because the resurrection was the birth of Christianity, but also the beginning of so much more, and we're still today trying to work out what it all means for the whole of creation. But what it did for those first followers of Jesus was to give them a new way of living life. It was not a case of, OK Jesus is alive, and that's the end of the story; it was a case of, Jesus is alive and he is asking us to tell everyone else - and he will help us do it.

Easter Season and beyond

Easter Sunday does mark the end of lent but also the beginning of Easter season, and the future. And this has implications for us, the modern day disciples.

The resurrection of Jesus meant that the members of the early Church began to remember all that Jesus had said and done, and now began to put it into action. Therefore, Easter Sunday for us means that we should not simply pack up what we did and learnt in Lent, and either jettison it, or lock it away in a cupboard but starting today, put it all into action.

For us it means being people of living hope. In his autobiography, called 'Hope', Pope Francis says that "the Christian family is a *factory* of hope" - I love that metaphor. To be a factory, is to be a constant production line, manufacturing hope and then sending it out into the world to be used. Our hope does not have to be manufactured, it is there in the resurrection, firmly based on the assurance of God's forgiveness for us, of God's power, and of God's ultimate triumph. But it does need to be taken out of our factory, and delivered into the homes, workplaces, hospitals, pubs, prisons, and many other places, and it is us who Jesus is asked to deliver it.

Of course we do not do so alone, but with the power of Jesus' risen presence, present with us through the Holy Spirit.

Ultimate Hope

The resurrection is our ultimate hope because it assures us that the worst things that life throws at us can never have the final word. In the resurrection we find the promise of new creation, the certainty that brokenness can be restored, and the confidence that God's love triumphs over all.

Just as the disciples were transformed by the risen Christ, to bring this hope, this confident expectation, we too are called to live as people of hope—boldly proclaiming the good news, lifting others in faith, and trusting that God's power is at work in our lives and the world. Easter is not just a day; it is a declaration that life, joy, and redemption are

always possible. So let us make our Church to be a factory of hope and help supply what this world so desperately needs: the risen power and presence of Jesus. Amen

Rev'd Richard Haynes Easter Sunday 2025