

## **Easter Day sermon, St James Shirley, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2026**

Well done, we've made it to Easter Day!

Journeying through the events of Lent and Holy Week, engages all of our senses in the course of re-telling the greatest love story ever written.

The sense of Smell—Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet at Bethany, with perfumed nard

The sense of Touch—the physical, humbling act of Jesus washing the disciples' feet

Taste buds fully engaged in Passover meals and The Last Supper.

The sense of Hearing—in the garden of Gethsemane – Jesus crying out, "*my God my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

And then the terrible sight for those who witnessed it, of Jesus' death.

From the moment we're born, we're seeking love. A child that doesn't find love has a struggle to be human. An adult that hasn't found love is like a person given a special task in life but lacks the essential instrument to perform it with. Like a violinist without a bow, or a flautist without breath.

But one of the great mysteries of life, is that whilst we arrived seeking love, what we inevitably meet sooner or later is suffering. It may only be a single experience, or it may be a life-long hurt – but searching for the love that would make us most human, invariably leads to the discovery of pain.

And yet the advertising voices of our culture seem to suggest that life is meant to be pain-free – a holiday in the sun. And in a world that talks and

sings about little else, we're encouraged into thinking that love ought to be a pain-free experience.

But during Holy Week, in all sorts of ways, we have been prompted to reflect on the very opposite. In Jesus, the hero of the Christian gospels, we see a young man betrayed and crucified. And yet the young life goes on loving - through it all to the very end and beyond.

What many of the voices of our culture tell us should be kept apart – love and suffering – come together in the events of holy week.

Reflecting on the events of holy week can help us to realise that there is nothing so awful that we could have gone through or be going through in our own lives, that Jesus's own story of betrayal, rejection, torture, death and resurrection cannot speak into.

Easter teaches us to put our trust in the power of love – the statement of the cross is that love is in the end stronger than death. We are saved by and through love.

*“Do not be afraid,”* the angel tells the women that first Easter morning, *“For Jesus has been raised, just as he said.”* The angel's message to those women that first Easter is God's message to us today: Do not be afraid. For Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Easter makes it possible for us to live our lives unafraid. Not by getting *rid* of our fears, but by *transforming* them. Let's think more about those women who bravely went to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had every reason to be afraid. A man they respected and loved, was dead. And he had died in the most horrible way imaginable; What did his death mean for them? What would come next for them? The apostles were so afraid that they had locked themselves away in the Upper Room. But not these women. They approached the tomb that first Easter morning, no doubt with fear, but also with courage.

Imagine what it would have been like when they arrived at the tomb, only to find themselves in the midst of an earthquake, an angel of the Lord descending from heaven, and the guards shaking and becoming like dead men. No **wonder** the angel began by telling the women not to be afraid!

Then when they left the area of the tomb, they were filled with “*fear and great joy.*” Their fears, were not vanquished, but they were transformed. Their fear has become a fearful joy.

And maybe that is what God wants for us today: A transformed fear. Not a Good Friday fear, but an Easter fear. Not a crucifixion fear, but a resurrection fear. Not a fear rooted in despair, but a fear rooted in faith. A fear, that might have resulted from the very worst that life can throw at us, but is now a fear mixed with a joy that nothing in life can take away from us.

This Easter gift of joyful fear rolls away the stone from whatever tomb we find ourselves in. Whatever your tomb might be – whatever it is that is keeping you from living the life for which God created you, and to which

God calls you, the fearful joy of Easter can roll away that stone, and offer you a brand new life.

An empty tomb can't do that, but a risen Lord can. When the women left the tomb that first Easter morning, they were met by Jesus himself. And Jesus said to them, "*Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*"

Why did Jesus tell them to go to Galilee? Why not stay in Jerusalem, where they are? Why not the Upper Room? Or the Temple? Why Galilee, sixty miles away?

I think the answer is that Galilee was their home. Jesus is telling them to go back to their families; back to their jobs, back to their daily lives, and there they are promised they will see their risen Lord. The fearful joy of Easter, in other words, is not found by escaping our lives. It is found by experiencing Jesus' presence in the midst of our lives.

The meaning of Easter isn't just that Christ is risen, but that he is with us, now and always, wherever we find ourselves. Easter means that we can expect to be met by Jesus in places where we least expect to find him. For Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, that place was his tomb. For us? Where do you least expect to find Jesus? It might be in a hospital room or a funeral home. It might be at work or school. It might even be in your home.

Easter, in other words, is about much more than an empty tomb. Easter is about Jesus coming to us in the midst of our fears & anxieties, to give us renewed courage and hope and joy.

It is such a joy that we have three adults being baptised in this Easter Service. Saying yes publicly to being a member of the Christian family is a totally awesome thing to do. The practice of being baptised at Easter goes right back to Jesus' first followers in the early church. And taking part in the baptism ritual of rebirth on the day that Jesus came back from the dead, makes a lot of sense.

Jesus is with us, so what do we need to fear? There is no place we can go where Jesus has not already gone. He has literally gone to Hell and back for us. He is with us now.

Much of what we hear in our current world can make us afraid. Fear causes us to stay tuned to that news channel. Fear causes us to vote for that candidate. Fear causes us to buy that new security system. Fear sells. And all of this fear can cause us to stay locked up in our own Upper Rooms. Fear can prevent us from living with joy, and with love, and with peace. Which is why it is so important, to remember the great miracle of Easter. That the Son of God lives, and is with us.

Today we celebrate much more than an empty tomb and the resurrection of our Lord. We celebrate and give thanks for his living presence among us, and his promise to be with us always. Wherever our journey takes us, our risen Lord goes before us.

An Easter poem by Connie Bott ...

It's not like the joy  
of the Christ child's birth.  
It's deeper than that.  
It's knowing that the sorrow  
of his death was turned into joy.

And that one miracle,  
greater than all the others,  
turned the man into a religion  
and a way of life for people  
all over the world.

Go back to the stable.  
Go back to the cross.  
Go back to the empty tomb  
and you will find love and wisdom  
and the astonishment that is Easter.