



A HOPE THAT SHINES BRIGHTLY – even in hard times

Easter
SUNDAY

PPT Prayer

Almighty God, who through your Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from death by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

PPT Bible reading

Luke 24:1-12

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words. ⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Message

- *Meaningful hope in times of darkness*
- *The resurrection of Jesus is hard to believe*
- *The resurrection of Jesus had been predicted*
- *The resurrection of Jesus changes everything*
- *Easter Sunday is an opportunity to accept God's grace*

PPT Meaningful hope in times of darkness

It's Easter. A time for chocolate eggs and hot cross buns and hat parades. It's all very exciting! The sentimentality of Easter can be comforting. Cute bunnies and chicks bursting from eggs conjure thoughts about new life and fresh hope.

At the same time, we know the world is not as it should be. We live in a world that has so much beauty and goodness, and yet people face hard times in life – times of darkness. We live in a world decimated by a COVID-19 pandemic, broken relationships, financial stresses, homelessness, family violence and the sickness and death of people we love.

Easter hat parades, chocolate eggs and cute bunnies offer little hope in the face of these sorts of realities.

Yet Jesus and Easter Sunday promises meaningful hope – a real hope that this broken world is not all there is. Hope for a world made new with no sickness or mourning or pain or death. He offers comfort and strength when we feel like there is none. It is a hope that is founded on a person, not just a wish for the future. It is a hope that shines brightly into even the darkest of days.

On Friday, we saw how Jesus faced his own death, providing hope and forgiveness for the soldiers and the criminal crucified by his side.

On this Easter Sunday, we see the light and hope that Jesus brings as people start to understand that he has defeated death and been raised to life.

PPT The resurrection of Jesus is hard to believe

Generally, people came to Jesus in the hope of finding healing and restoration. Here the women come to minister to Jesus. When the women arrived on the Sunday to complete his burial with spices, they find the tomb stone rolled away and they do not find a body. They are left wondering and perplexed. The initial response on Easter Sunday was confusion and disbelief.

When the male disciples are told by the women that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had been raised from the dead, their initial response was disbelief – and that the women were speaking nonsense.

Like people today, the people 2000 years ago do not easily believe that anyone can be raised from the dead. Like us, they knew that death means the end of life – there is no coming back to life after being crucified and buried for three days! Their initial response of confusion and disbelief is exactly as you would predict or expect. The resurrection of someone from death is hard to believe!

PPT The resurrection of Jesus had been predicted

These events require some explanation – some interpretation. The women are helped out of their confusion when they are given some key information and reminded that Jesus had told them that this would happen. The women and the male disciples had received Jesus' teaching about this in Galilee, but had forgotten it. Even at the time, they had struggled to grasp it.

PPT *And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22).*

“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. (Luke 9:44–45)

The death and resurrection of Jesus was not what they were expecting or wanting. Yet this was not a surprise to Jesus. He seemed to know that he was not going to fit their expectations for him. He seemed to know that he would have to enter into death to defeat it. That he would have to die for us in order to bring new life for us too.

PPT The resurrection of Jesus changes everything

If not for the resurrection of Jesus, death has the last word – the final victory over every human life. However, if Jesus has been raised from the dead, Jesus has broken through the wall of death. Everything changes! He has smashed open a hole in the wall of death that others can go through. Death no longer has the last word.

This pandemic is reminding all of us that life is uncertain, fragile, and too short. Along with the rest of creation, Christians cry out with agonising groans, disappointments, fears and brokenness, as we long for the infections, sicknesses, suffering and deaths to cease. We know this is not the way things should be (Romans 8:18).

Yet we do not give up on the joy of the resurrection. Our tears flow from hearts of *hopeful lament*. We eagerly wait for God in Christ to bring about creation’s redemption from its bondage to sin, sickness, death and suffering, as we work toward and long for the flourishing of all people (Romans 8:19–21, Galatians 6:10).

We can still have hope amid a pandemic, and even celebrate as we lament, because we believe in a God who proved sickness and death do not have the final word (1 Corinthians 15).

In the meantime, we live with the hope of the resurrection, and we practice the resurrection life of love for others. We love our neighbours well and wisely – and seek the common good of all people, even when that means we must practice social distancing and stay at home. We dream up new ways to share the message of God’s salvation with others, and how to show the love of Christ to people for whom Easter Sunday is just another day on the calendar. As the suffering around us grows, we pray for the gospel and God’s kingdom to continue to advance. As a Christian community, we live the resurrection life of love, joy and hope.

PPT Opportunity to accept God’s grace

On Easter Sunday, we are invited to come before the living resurrected Jesus.

Do we come with confusion and uncertainty?

Do we come with awe and thankfulness?

The Mercy Seat recognises that God is full of mercy – and that God's grace, death and resurrection life are for us. The joy and power of the resurrection life is shared by Jesus and he invites us to draw near and share in that new life. He invites us to come as we are that we might share in his resurrected life.

In the words of Paul, God wants us to know "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:10–11).

PPT Christ is risen

We watch this Jesus
set deep in the grip of death
but not held
held overnight – but not held
held two nights – but not held
because the power of death could not hold him.

PPT We know ourselves to be held
overnight
for two nights
too long
held by fear and anxiety
held by grudge and resentment
held by doubt and fatigue
held by too much stuff
by all manner of the forces of death.

PPT Held, powerless
but turned toward you.
You are risen
make Sundays for us
 even among us
 even here
 even now
no longer held. Amen.

(But not held – a poem/prayer by Walter Brueggemann)

**A HOPE THAT SHINES BRIGHTLY
– even in hard times**

Easter
SUNDAY

PPT THINK

What gives you hope in hard times?

SHARE

What would you say to someone who was confused about the resurrection of Jesus?

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus from the dead make for you?

PRAY

Thank God that he is the source of light and life and has defeated death.

Pray that you and others would know the power of the resurrection life this week.

Pray that God would bring hope to those who are feeling despair.



Easter SUNDAY

– all age worship
discussion meeting

Read Luke 24:1–12

On Friday, we saw how Jesus faced his own death, providing hope and forgiveness for the soldiers and the criminal crucified by his side.

On this Easter Sunday, we see the hope that Jesus brings as people start to understand that he has defeated death and been raised to life.

Divide the people into three groups and ask them to read the passage together. Ask each group to become one of the following actors/characters in the story and to retell the event from their perspective. Invite them to read the passage again in their small group.

Ask: “What did they see/hear/smell? How did they feel? What did they think?”

OR: Prepare some people beforehand and give them the script below. Ask them to speak to the church/corps as if they were the characters below.

Women

(Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James) e.g. “We’d been following Jesus for some time listening to his teaching and watching him heal. When he was sentenced to death, we followed him to the cross and stayed with him until the end. Then on Sunday, we decided to go to the tomb and honour him by completing the burial with spices. We were so sad. When we arrived at the tomb, we were shocked that the stone had been rolled away and even more shocked when we saw that his body was not there!

“Then we saw two angels, like men who asked, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’ They told us he is not here; he has risen – and they reminded us that Jesus had spoken about this in Galilee. Then we remembered and raced off to tell Peter and the other disciples what had happened.

“Not surprising, but they didn’t believe us. I can’t blame them to be honest! But then Peter jumped up and ran off to the tomb.”

Peter

e.g. “I was sitting with the other disciples feeling terrible because I had let Jesus down and denied even knowing him three times before he died. I’d failed him as a friend in his darkest hour. I felt ashamed and gutted to see him killed on a cross. I didn’t know what to do now. When the women came and told me



– all age worship
discussion meeting

of their visit to the tomb on Sunday morning, I really wasn't sure they could be believed. It all sounded incredible – unbelievable. Yet I also felt hopeful. These women were good people. They were no fools and had stuck by Jesus when I had lost courage. They were reliable and trustworthy. While the others were arguing and sitting there, I got up and ran to the tomb – a mix of emotions. Part of me hoping and another part not believing but wanting to see for myself. Then I entered the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. I went away confused, wondering what had happened. How could I make sense of this? Could the women be right – could he really be alive – risen from the dead?"

Other male disciples

e.g. "We were sitting together wondering what we should do next. The Roman soldiers had killed Jesus on Friday and we felt hopeless. We had such high hopes for what Jesus would do for us – and for Israel. We thought he would get rid of the Romans and make Israel great again but the Romans just crucified him like a common criminal. We were gutted! What were we going to do now – go back to our fishing?"

"Then the women ran into the room and told us they had been to the tomb and angels had told them that Jesus was not dead – but alive. They couldn't find his body but it's impossible for anyone to come back from the dead ... isn't it?"

Opportunity to accept God's grace

On Easter Sunday, we are invited to come before the living resurrected Jesus.

Do we come with confusion and uncertainty?

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The Mercy Seat recognises that God is full of mercy – and that God's grace, death and resurrection life are for us. The joy and power of the resurrection life is shared by Jesus and he invites us to draw near and share in that new life. He invites us to come as we are that we might share in his resurrected life.

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Song suggestions

While the songs have been allocated specifically to Good Friday and Easter Sunday, several fit well with both. To listen to the songs please access the YouTube playlist: youtube.com/playlist?list=PL96CjCUHxMEEvpGZAucHwVT1F2m-PHOGC

Easter Sunday Theme:

Hope in dark times; meaningful hope; surprised by hope and grace; living in resurrected hope.

Song	Artist/Author	Where to find it	Notes
And Can It Be (2 versions)	Charles Wesley; also contemporary tune by Nathan Fellingham	SASB 241; Tune 436 or 445 www.phatfish.net/sheet-music (purchase approx. \$2-3)	Song is listed in CCLI so can still be credited, though sheet music not available through SongSelect. View the song on YouTube (see playlist)
Here I Am To Worship	Tim Hughes	SASB 114; Tune 653 songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3266032	Also relevant for Good Friday
Because He Lives (Amen)	Matt Maher	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7027887	Incorporates some of previous song
Because He Lives	Bill and Gloria Gaither	SASB 219; Tune 570	
Jesus Is Alive	Ron Kenoly	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/550652	
This Is Amazing Grace	Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro and Phil Wickham	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/6333821	
See The Light	Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding (Hillsong)	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7134996	
Hope Has A Name	River Valley Worship	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7084823	
All Hail King Jesus	Upper Room/ Bethel	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7097216	Also relevant for Good Friday
Resurrection Day	Rend Collective	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7101181	

For more ideas see also:

- *Salvation Army Songbook* (esp. songs 159-282); NB Tunes indicated are usually the most common, though it can be helpful to compare other similar tunes that fit the lyrics by using the Metrical Index in the Songbook, Tune Book or at USA West Mobile Songbook
- *Song Select database* (songselect.ccli.com/search/themes)
- *Worship Together* (www.worshiptogether.com/song-search/)
- *We Are Worship* (www.weareworship.com/songs/)

Please note you may need a subscription to access the websites.