

Easter Day 2017 Jesus is risen: let's celebrate!
Matthew 28:1-10 Julian Templeton
St John's United Reformed Church, New Barnet

*Jesus is risen; **let's celebrate!***

The composer, James Macmillan (whose setting of the *Sanctus* we sing), said that he is drawn to set the Passion story to music is because: 'Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day are the three days that changed the world.'

The reason we celebrate is because the risen Jesus is the *New Creation*. The old creation died with Jesus on Good Friday. In Matthew's account of Jesus's death there are signs of the old creation passing away: the curtain hanging in the temple in Jerusalem, dividing the Holy of Holies from the inner sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth shook, the rocks split apart, the graves broke open, and many of God's people who had died were raised to life (Matt. 27:50-53).

The old creation rested on the Saturday, the Sabbath, and then on the first day of the week, Sunday, God raises Jesus from the dead as the first fruit of the New Creation.

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This is what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary discover when they come to visit Jesus's tomb early on Sunday morning. There was a violent earthquake, and an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men (Matt. 28:1-4).

The angel says to the women, "I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised,

just as he said. Come and see the tomb where he was placed, it is empty. Go quickly, now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death!'" (Matt. 28:5-10).

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Jesus is the New Creation. And by New Creation, what I mean is that the resurrection of Jesus is a new history-making event of the same order as the original divine act of creation that brought space-time and matter into being.

The resurrection happens at a particular point and place in space-time, Jerusalem in Palestine; and yet it is also a universal event. It is an event when the very fabric of space-time is temporarily torn open to reveal a glimpse of what the New Creation looks and feels like.

It is clear that the risen Jesus is not just the old person resuscitated; in John's account of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene, one of his most intimate friends, did not recognise him at first (Jn. 20:10-16). But neither is Jesus a ghost or a figment of over-active wishing or believing; in Luke's account of the resurrection Jesus eats and is able to be touched (Lk. 24:36-43). It is clear that the risen Jesus is of a new order, the order of the New Creation, the order of glory; the order completely open to God and completely open to other people. The risen Jesus is a person who is able to be local in place and, by the Spirit, a presence able to be universal in significance.

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One of the things that the risen Jesus does, in John's account, is forgive and accept and commission Peter, who denied him three times (Jn. 21:15-17).

Jesus, now gloriously revealed in his risen form, is God's grace of forgiveness-and-new-beginning in person. Jesus is himself the atonement or at-one-ment between humans and God. Out of a dead impasse of resentment, forgiveness creates a new situation. And this is what Jesus gives to his followers and to the people who then become his earthly body, the Body of Christ, the Church. We are people who are able to say 'sorry' to God and 'sorry' to one another, and when we do so, when we forgive and are forgiven, broken relationships are restored and people are made whole again. This is now possible for those who realise that they are 'in Christ', As the Apostle Paul writes: "If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, the old has gone, behold the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

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The reason I believe that Jesus is risen is because of the continual renewal that he gives us from day to day. We have had a number of people die in St John's Church recently, and this has made us sad and upset, and we miss those who have died. And yet because of the renewal of life that Jesus gives us, we are able to grieve as those who have *hope*. Our hope is that this earthly life is not the end, but that because Jesus has risen from the dead, and because God's love is eternal, we too will be raised after we die. Death is, for us, therefore *not tragedy*. Death is the doorway into the new existence that God will give after death; and Jesus has already entered through that door, through the small hole that was opened up in the fabric of space-time when he was raised from the dead as the forerunner of the New Creation.

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Feasts or Festivals regularly punctuate the Church's year. With the exception of Christmas, I think the Church has mostly forgotten how to celebrate its feasts and festivals. People need and want to celebrate. People—young people especially—will make great efforts and expend a great deal of money to attend festivals celebrating music and arts and literature and any number of other things. It is an utter indictment when you consider that one of the *last* places in which young people will think about celebrating a festival is in the Church! Easter Day is the Church's most important festival and feast because on this day we celebrate that central truth of our faith: that Jesus is risen and as a result we and the world are *changed!* Let's bring celebration back to its central place in Christian faith and life, not limiting it to singing some hymns and going home again as if nothing has changed. *Everything has changed because Jesus has risen from the dead!* And if everything has changed for us, what is to stop us from dancing and feasting in celebration? I'll tell you what is to stop us: only our lack of imagination and inhibitions.

Remember that in John's Gospel the very first sign or miracle was at a wedding feast when Jesus turned water into wine, and the steward's amazed exclamation was: "you have saved the best wine for last!" (John 2:10). And you can be sure that that wedding feast almost certainly including dancing! This is why today we are having an Easter Egg Hunt, a hot lunch, dancing and entertainment. Everything has changed because God has raised Jesus, an appearance of the New Creation in our space-time old creation. Through Jesus's spiritual energy of renewal, God is changing us and changing our world by enabling us to forgive, to hope, and to seek daily renewal. So let's celebrate this feast of feasts, this festival of festivals!

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