

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

This is the gospel story that we all know. We hear the story of the resurrection of Jesus every single year. It has four different versions – one from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - each gospel writer had slightly different memories of what happened. It's Matthew's version we read today. Matthew the tax collector, writing for a predominately Jewish audience, and who emphasises that Jesus is the promised Messiah who fulfills the Old Testament prophecies.

The resurrection is the central event of the Bible – the whole Bible, not simply the New Testament. But the idea of resurrection has its roots in the Old Testament, in a psalm and in the prophets (Job 19:25-26; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 37). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith. The resurrection shows Jesus Christ's justification by God, who restores him in heaven. It validates the teachings of Jesus, his ministry, as well as our faith. It's something we cannot prove, but only see through the eyes of faith.

The Easter story can be summed up in one short phrase, said by the angel at the tomb, “He is not here; for he has been raised.”

I could just stop here. But let's hear the story again. A year has passed since we heard it before, and our lives have changed, the world has changed, and we need to hear the good news again, and have hope for the future.

It happened “as the first day of the week was dawning.” Light was pushing back the darkness. Warmth was returning. A new day was beginning. If you've ever needed light and warmth to return to your life, if you've ever needed a second chance and the possibilities a new day offers, this story is for you. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

“Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” It was unchanged from when they were there when Jesus died, and was laid in the tomb. If you've ever had your heart broken by loss and laid someone or something you loved in the tomb, this story is for you. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

“Suddenly there was a great earthquake” and “an angel of the Lord rolled back the stone” from the tomb and said, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.” If you've ever needed some earthshaking good news, if you've ever needed hope, if you've ever lived as if death had the final word, this story is for you. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

“He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him,” is the angel's message for the women. Galilee is where Jesus and the disciples are from. It's their home. If you've ever struggled to find Jesus, if you've wondered where he is, if you've ever thought that Easter is an egg hunt or hot cross buns, and has nothing to do with your ordinary everyday life, this story is for you. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

So let me ask you a question. Why did the angel roll back the stone from the tomb? I know that sort of sounds like a “Why did the chicken cross the road?” kind of question. So let me give you a hint. It was not so that Jesus could get out. Why would he need to? We find out later that he can walk through walls to visit the disciples.

In the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, the stone has already been removed when the women arrive. But in Matthew the stone is not rolled back until after the women arrive. What’s that about? What’s Matthew telling us?

The women saw Jesus die, they saw him placed in the tomb, and they saw “a great stone” rolled to the door of the tomb. In today’s gospel (Matthew 28:1-10) they find the tomb exactly as they saw it on Good Friday. Nothing has changed. Nothing has happened. If that’s sometimes how life looks to you, if you feel stuck, if you’ve ever wondered whether God is doing anything in your life, this story is for you. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The reason the angel rolled back the stone isn’t so Jesus could get out, but so the women could see in, so they could see he had been raised and is not there. And that means resurrection was already happening behind the “great stone” of their life.

It means new life is always and already taking place, even when we don’t see it, don’t expect it, or don’t think it can. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

And that’s why today we fill the church with alleluias, lilies, hymns, shiny brass, candles, white vestments, flowers, and unreserved beauty. They do not set this place and day apart from all other places and days. Instead, they point to and reveal that resurrection is always and already happening in all other places and days. This is not *the* day of resurrection. It is *another* day of resurrection. Alleluia. Christ is risen.

That’s our story. And it’s worth repeating. So let me tell it to you one, or a few more times again.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

Alleluia. You and I are risen.

Alleluia. We are risen to a new life.

*Credit parts of this reflection to Michael Marsh*