

Easter Sunday Sermon

“Challenging Expectations” Matthew 28:1-20

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Full text and audio available at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

III – Several years ago I remember receiving a phone message one afternoon from “Erin” (not her real name). She said that her husband, “Michael” (not his real name), was not doing so well in the hospital – and could I come to see him. “Michael” was 43 years old. He had two young children. And he was diagnosed with cancer only 6 months earlier. That day as I headed into the hospital, I expected to pray for him, sit with him, and help the family through a difficult day. But when I arrived, he had already passed away just moments before I arrived. That’s when my expectations changed.

Because once **death** arrives, everything changes. At that moment, everything changed for Erin, and for their children. Because death is final.

When Mary and Mary walk to the tomb of Jesus, what are their expectations? They go to the tomb, expecting to see a dead Jesus. They expect to have to find someone to move the stone so they can go in and clean up the body of Jesus - to wipe the dried blood from his face, his hands, his legs and arms. They expect to anoint his body with spices and oils.

But when they arrive, all of their expectations are thrown out! What they face is a violent earthquake! They see the stone rolled away, the appearance of a bright angel, and two soldiers guarding the tomb shaking in fear and practically dying of fright. What confronts them is a reversal of their expectations because what they encounter is a reversal of death.

And what confronts us this Easter morning is that same empty tomb.

Did you notice the stone that blocked the entrance of the tomb? The stone is rolled back before their eyes, and Jesus is already gone! The stone is rolled away not so Jesus can get out, but so we can see in!

And today, that may be enough for you. It may be enough just to have that expectation changed. It may be enough for you today just to investigate the empty tomb. Just to allow yourself today to have your expectation of death challenged and ask the question: “What if death **can** be reversed?”

But perhaps you’re prepared to have more expectations challenged today... so let’s continue with the story.

Verse 8: *“The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.”*

III – I love chocolate at Easter with chocolate! I especially love dark chocolate. Lindt 85% cocoa is my favourite. And I have to admit, I do get excited when I see it on sale in the shops. But I get even more excited when I hold it in my hands! And if I’m at home and I find, on the kitchen bench, an empty wrapper of chocolate, **I go looking for it!** If there’s an empty wrapper, the contents have to be somewhere! That’s my expectation!

And of course, that is the expectation of Mary and Mary. They were a little afraid of course when someone who they saw killed 2 days ago suddenly pops out of nowhere and says “Hi there!” “Surprise!” “Guess who!”

But what an amazing response we see from Mary and Mary. They see the empty tomb. They hear the angel say that Jesus is risen. And they run off in joy, expecting that he is alive. Then they see Jesus, **and they grab his feet and worship him.**

And that is expectation number 2. Where there is an empty tomb, there is a risen Jesus to worship! That's the expectation of the women. Is it your expectation? Today, Easter day, are you ready to meet the risen Jesus and more importantly, when you meet him, are you ready to worship him?

For the Christian, every day is Easter day – every day is the time to fall at the feet of Jesus and worship him as Lord. And perhaps that's your challenge today. To simply worship him every day.

But sometimes I wonder if we just don't expect enough out of Easter. I wonder if we expect nothing more at Easter than to talk about the empty tomb and be challenged to worship the risen Jesus. Do we expect the journey to end here? Perhaps we expect that the Easter story ends at the resurrection. We expect the empty tomb. We expect to worship Jesus. But Jesus challenges us with one final expectation of his own in verse 18-20, when he says:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus gives us **his** expectation that those who follow him will GO and make disciples of all nations.

And perhaps this is the one challenge left for those of us who believe. Perhaps we accept the empty tomb. Perhaps we worship the risen Jesus. But do we GO? We need to hear Jesus' expectation today. Maybe we're afraid. Not scared to death like the guards, but scared like Mary and Mary. Or maybe there's even a little doubt like the disciples in verse 17. But are we hearing the challenge to GO?

Two things Jesus says about this challenge to GO:

1. First, Jesus says: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The risen King Jesus is calling you to GO. He has authority over all things, and he calls us to go out IN HIS NAME.

III – I remember many years ago being a Census collector. Every 4 years we have a census in Australia, and people come and knock on your door to give you a census pack. Then they come back and collect it. I had to deliver the census paper to about 600 homes and then go back and pick them up. They gave me a bag, the census forms and a badge. And that badge had the authority of the federal government. That badge gave me the power to annoy people in 600 different homes!

Jesus was killed on a cross. The earth shook and was in darkness for 3 hours. Then he came back to life. Again, the earth shook and angels appeared. And he comes and stands before his disciples and says: I HAVE ALL AUTHORITY. And then he says: GO and make disciples. Go, in my name. GO, with my authority.

And if that's not enough, the second thing Jesus says is:

2. "I am with you always to the very end of the age."

He will not leave us. Here is Jesus, with all authority in heaven and earth, he's overcome death, he's paid the penalty for all our sins, and he says to us: "GO, with my authority, in my name, and make disciples.

Now, what are your expectations when you hear that? Do you imagine something difficult? Scary? Lonely? Time consuming? What would it look like to see yourself out there in the world actively making disciples? We need to put aside all of **our** expectations and simply hear what Jesus says.

Jesus says: “GO” – and I’ll go with you! I’ll go door knocking with you, I’ll go to the mission field with you. I’ll be there when you invite your friend along. I’ll be there when you talk about me at work. I’ll be there when you’re persecuted. Jesus says: **I will be there.**

The Easter story is not the end, but the beginning. Easter is not just about “the death and resurrection of Jesus”. It’s about the death, resurrection **and mission** of Jesus. Perhaps the greatest challenge to our expectations is that the story isn’t over – that Jesus actually calls us, now, today, to go on his mission.

And that mission is the mission of the cross.

The cross is the centre of our faith. We are “lead to the cross” to find forgiveness and salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are lead to the cross. But where does the cross lead us?

The church reformer John Calvin once said: *“At first I carried the cross, but later the cross carried me”*

My question is: Where does the cross carry **you**? You see, the cross doesn’t just carry us through our struggles and our pain in life. The cross carries us out into the world.

Let me ask you – as God’s church, **who are we** if we believe in Jesus but just sit here? Too “busy” to go. Too “shy” to speak. Not well enough “trained”. Or any other number of reasons. Who are we if we just sit here and do **not** go?

For the church, Easter morning means that one word – “GO!”

If we have been challenged to worship the risen Jesus, we must be challenged to go. Today. Tomorrow. At work. At home. Each day, we are called OUT of the world to go INTO the world, to go and make disciples.

We come **to** Jesus, and we must go out **with** Jesus.

We come TO the cross for salvation, and we go out WITH the cross to bring salvation to others – to see lives transformed by the work of Jesus on the cross.

We must COME **and** GO.

COME to Jesus. GO OUT with Jesus.

COME to the cross. GO OUT with the cross.

- So be challenged by the empty tomb and the reversal of death.
- Be challenged to come to Jesus and worship him as King.
- But most of all, if you know him, if you follow him, if you are saved by him, be challenged to GO and make disciples.

(Let’s Pray)