

Resurrection is the key

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Easter Day

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Acts 10.34-43

1 Corinthians 15.19-26

Luke 24.1-12

Easter

Easter Day is at the heart of the Christian faith. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ and in this find the key that unlocks our lives, now and for eternity. The word Easter is the old English word for spring and so it brings together new life after winter and Christ's resurrection after his crucifixion.

There are many symbols for Easter such as eggs which are the source of new life, flowers that burst forth after the hibernation of winter, rabbits that are famously productive.

Resurrection has at its heart the life of Christ, his ministry, his fulfilment of the Jewish hope, the gift of the Holy Spirit and his presence among his disciples who are transformed and empowered to bring new life to the world. Easter is full of good news with joy, hope and love.

The moon

One of the signs of Easter that I particularly like is the moon in the night sky so in the days as Easter approaches it becomes more and more full. The full moon always looks splendid but it is about Easter.

It is no coincidence that there is a full moon at Easter. The key to understand this is that Easter is related to the Jewish Passover which is when Jesus died and rose again. The time of the Passover is set by the ancient Jewish calendar which was governed by the moon. Ancient societies did not have good communications or clever devices like clocks so they used the natural world. There was the sun to determine day and night and the moon to divide the year into manageable periods. The moon doesn't fit very well with a year and so the dates of Passover and Easter drift over about a month in different years.

The key to understanding the date of Easter being related to the moon is that the celebration has its roots in the Jewish lunar calendar.

Musical keys

Many parts of life can be unlocked by understanding what is key. I have an ordained friend who in his church wished to put together a

music group. He found the musicians, organised a time to practise and handed them all the music. When they began to play it was horrendous. What he hadn't realised is how different musical instrument instruments can be. Yes there are strings and woodwind and brass. But there are also what are called transposing instruments such as a clarinet or trumpet. The music you provide for them must be in different musical keys from the other non transposing instruments.

Once my friend understood this he could prepare the music so that everybody could play in harmony. You could say in music the key, is key.

Science

We live in an age of scientific exploration and the aim has been to unlock the secrets of the universe. For many people in the 19th century their science seemed to be settled. But the smallest parts of the world seemed truly mysterious. The structure of the atom and the behaviour of light did not seem to be revealed by conventional methods.

Once people began to think that at very small very small scale matter was strangely different they began to make progress. Waves and particles were paradoxically the same thing. Their behaviour was governed by probability not cut and dried laws. The new science was called quantum physics.

Quantum physics unlocked new capacities, small computers could be made along with mobile phones. The Internet was possible and we now live in a society where communications and information have enriched our lives but also turned them upside down. The key has been quantum physics.

Resurrection

The resurrection Jesus Christ is a key as well but so much more than what I have described so far.

We heard from Luke's Gospel of an empty tomb. The women who visited it heard an angel say 'why look for the living among the dead?' A key is used to turn a lock and open up what is denied to us. Jesus resurrection opens to us a whole new understanding of what life is about. We are shown that God has the power to defeat death and so much more.

We heard from the Acts of the Apostles how Jesus appeared to his followers and how they ate and drank with him. Jesus resurrection is showing us

that eternal life is not something vague and removed but is real, vibrant and personal.

We heard Saint Paul chiding the church at Corinth saying 'If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.' Paul knew the people of his time would find it hard to believe in a person being raised to life. But he knew that Christ's resurrection was the key to God's purposes. Like the church at Corinth we are to pay serious attention to what God give to us and find the true life that Jesus Christ brings.

Keys in the Bible

Jesus talks a couple of times in his ministry about keys in his ministry. He complains about the religious people of his time

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.'
Luke 11.52

Knowledge and understanding are important for our lives to flourish and religion sadly can miss the point. Jesus was described as teaching with authority We need Jesus' keys of wisdom to know the truth of life.

Jesus said to Peter:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Matthew 16.19

In our reading from Acts Peter says he is commanded to preach so the world can enter this kingdom. It is the church's task not just to celebrate God's goodness but to share it so others can benefit too.

Peter do you love me?

The resurrection is about how the life of Christ enters into our lives. One of my favourite resurrection appearances is when Jesus makes a point of talking with Peter.

After Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem which we celebrate on Palm Sunday there was great opposition to Jesus. Peter declared that he would be loyal to Jesus. But in reply Jesus said Peter would deny him three times and this duly happened.

After the resurrection Jesus makes a point of asking Peter three times 'do you love me?' In this Jesus is addressing Peter's denials and enabling Peter to know he is forgiven. It is such a touching

and personal encounter and almost echoes the parable of the prodigal son who the father goes to and welcomes.

Resurrection is the key

In so many ways the resurrection is the key for our lives to be transformed and flourish.

Key means crucial and as Saint Paul said pay attention to this and make it foundational for your life.

A key turns and is a point of pivot. And so Jesus takes us – from sin to righteousness, from being separated to being welcomed, from despair to hope, from being empty to being filled, from being ignored to being people of substance.

A key unlocks what has been bound up. The life of Christ is about freedom, salvation and chains being removed. I like the passage where Paul says: *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*
Galatians 3.28

The ways of the world that divide people up and remove their humanity are gone. All barriers are to be challenge and overthrown.

Authority

These various aspects of key can be drawn together with the understanding of authority. Authority is the ability to get things done. The original idea of a key was of a peg that would be inserted to hold an issue fast.

So Isaiah can say of the expected one:

I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. Isaiah 22.22

In this is the expectation of the true ruler, to be in the line of King David. This gives deeper meaning to Jesus being called the Son of David when he enters Jerusalem in triumph.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible picks this up: *'And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.*
Revelation 3.7

It was this sense of authority that we find in the disciples in the book of Acts. They stand firm for Jesus against a wide range of persecutions. They bring many people to know Jesus Christ and the eternal life he gives.

The years pass the centuries pass and one milestone in the progress of the Christian faith is that the Roman Empire accepts it despite all of the persecutions it has meted out in the past.

What is it that enables an initially very small company of people who are poor, peaceful and persecuted to grow in great numbers, withstand great difficulties and keep a strong sense of unity? There must be a very particular type of power to do this. That power is the resurrection of Jesus Christ and when we make him the key to our lives and our communities, we will know the good news of eternal life that has always been at the heart of the Christian faith.