

Friday, 12 April 2019

from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2019 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

May your Holy Week and Easter be a time of beautiful renewal

A musical friend told me last week of a conversation with his 7 year old daughter.

They were having breakfast. Out of nowhere, she said: “My life is going to be more difficult than yours, isn’t it”? He knew that, in his momentary pause before answering, she saw that he thought this was probably true. So he didn’t try to evade or obfuscate. “Yes, probably”, he heard himself saying. Then he added some words about all doing our best that her life not be too difficult...

In the Taize prayer below, we have a beautiful affirmation of our Easter hope, “well spring of a new beginning”. A new beginning is what we need, for the whole human family, away from fear and hate, towards love and trust.

My musical friend and I had been talking about the arts and advocacy, as we try to lift people’s spirits and change the nature of contemporary politics. So, seeking divine communion with all that is; seen and unseen, with our Easter faith, practicing our spiritual disciplines and striving to live in the Holy Spirit.

Easter tells us - thus we can draw on the energy of the Risen One who is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, “in whom all things hold together”
(Colossians1.)

Drawing on the divine energy, we can renew our focus on making things better for all God’s little people, including my musical friend’s insightful 7 year old daughter.

We want to give them real hope, yes?

May your Holy Week and Easter be a time of beautiful renewal and clarity for our shared future as hope- bearers, in these troubled times.

*Bishop Philip Huggins. Bishop Philip Huggins, President
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(Note: This year the Western Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 21 April and the Orthodox Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 28 April.)

The 12 messages follow.

For more information, contact the NCCA Secretariat on 8259 0800.

Taize prayer:

If you were not risen
Lord Christ, to whom would we go
to discover a radiance of the face of God?
If you were not risen,
we could not be together
to seek your communion.
We would not find in your presence forgiveness,
wellspring of a new beginning.
If you were not risen,
where would we draw the energy
for following you
right to the end of our existence,
for choosing you again and anew?

Anglican Church of Australia

In the compressed events of the three days of Easter, from Good Friday to Easter Day, we have rich themes for reflection and contemplation. As our society becomes increasingly secularised the deeper story of Christianity is known by fewer people.

Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead are foundational events for Christians, in fact world-defining events that have continuing significance today. All humans, if they are honest with themselves, know what it is to fail, to let themselves and others down. When these failures become collective, they can be catastrophic – and the evidence is all around us, today and through the ages.

War, famine, pestilence, persecution, exploitation, abuse and much more can often be laid at the feet of human ambition and selfishness. Humankind wants to construct the world according to a vision of utopia, but our weaknesses and lack of understanding often lead to failure. Communism is an obvious example of such a theory. It was intended to combat injustice and to improve the plight of the impoverished and marginalised but ended up instead perpetrating more injustice and rendering people more miserable.

But the greatest calamity that fell humanity is found in Genesis, with the account of our alienation from and rejection of God. Logically, the story should end there, with God a distant, transcendent figure. But God, in the infinite mercy and compassion shown through Jesus, does not allow human failure the last word. God's word – present, we are told, from the time of Creation – is incarnate in the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is God's means of rescue and salvation, fully present as a person like us.

And that is what we celebrate at Easter. The events of the first Good Friday seemed to Jesus' followers like failure, desolation and despair. But by Easter Day the opposite was true, with the good news of hope and salvation. Jesus' resurrection would define the religion that developed in his name. In the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam acted as the head of humankind. In the same way what Jesus did on the cross he also did as the head of all who believe. As the Bible teaches, we were crucified together with Christ, we were buried with Christ, and we are risen together with him.

For Christians, no calamity, however unbearable, is the end of the story. This is what Christians celebrate at Easter.

*Archbishop Philip Freier, Primate
Anglican Church of Australia*

Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand

“God shows His love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us... we know that Christ, been raised from the dead...likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 5:8; 6: 9-11)

Beloved Faithful,

On behalf of our Diocesan Clergy, Council and all Diocesan establishments we congratulate you on the feast of Holy Easter, the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection of our Lord is the anchor of our faith, it was so for the Apostles and thus for all the Christians from generation to generation.

Resurrection declares life's victory over death, the light radiating from the tomb of Christ, heralds the annihilation of darkness, Our Lord proclaimed the greatest teaching of love with His self-offering on the cross, through His blood shed on the cross He wiped the sin, Satan's seal from the forehead of humanity, to find the paradise lost and the way to our Heavenly Father.

This year's theme in our church is the Family. If the Love of the Risen Lord does not dwell in our dwelling the rest is in vain. The true love, respect and commitment makes the family's life span longer and meaningful. Child's religious and traditional education starts at home, it is here that the child will receive the first instructions on the Christian faith and your way of life as parents will be copied and followed. You will be the ones to direct the first footstep of the child to the church; and it is here that the child will be nourished spiritually, grow and mature with his spiritual inheritance, armoured with the light of Resurrection and with the hope of victory to confront all the challenges of this life.

It is our prayers that the Risen Lord might dwell in your hearts, and strengthen you with the victory of life, where is despair give you hope, where weakness courage, where fear strength and where hate love. Having nurtured ourselves with teachings of our Lord and with the vision of the victorious resurrection we can persevere as an individual, as a family, as a community and bring our input for the preservation of this land and for the final victory of the good.

“O Christ, we are all enlightened through your light and to your holy cross we believers have entrusted” (Sunrise Service)

Christ is risen from the dead, blessed is the Resurrection of Christ

Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, Primate

Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand

Catholic Church in Australia

In many ways the world and the church are passing through dark times, and the question is how to make sense of the darkness. We aren't the first to face that question. It lies at the heart of the Bible which is a grand and complex answer to the question, What does the darkness mean?

The Hebrew Bible came forth from the darkness of the Babylonian Exile when the religious world of ancient Israel seemed to have collapsed. The People of God sifted through the embers of hopelessness and found a spark of hope which eventually became the great flame of Judaism.

The New Testament emerged from the darkness of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the persecution in Rome under Nero. To make sense of the darkness the early Christians turned to the death of Jesus. Calvary looked like the collapse of hope: as the disciples on the road to Emmaus say, “Our hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free” (Luke 24:21).

Facing into the darkness of the world and the church, we too turn to the Cross. Evil is powerful and the darkness is real. But the greater power which raised Jesus from the dead – we call it the love of God – will bring good from evil, light from darkness. So when we kindle the new fire at Easter we go to the very heart of biblical religion, finding fresh hope in the midst of what seems to be hopelessness. That's why even now we will sing the songs of joy. The victory belongs to love.

*Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane,
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Forgiveness is the door through which healing peace enters our world this Easter.

One of the last statements of Jesus on the Calvary Cross was: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23/24). Forgiveness of every person who harms us is one of the great saving lessons of Good Friday.

Then, the first words of the Risen Lord Jesus at the Resurrection Victory of Easter is: "Peace be with you." (Luke 24/36). Easter peace is the first gift to us from our healing God.

This Easter let us receive these gifts of forgiveness and healing peace like never before! Let us begin in our hearts, so easily torn apart by bitterness and selfishness.

Let forgiveness and healing peace flow into our families and friends. May these gifts give us courage to develop real neighbourliness to those in our streets and communities. Let the homeless and lonely this Easter receive not more pious sentiments but real practical charity and care.

Let the forgiveness and healing peace of the Risen Lord Jesus reign this Easter! May we be filled with joy and hope.

Happy Easter to all!

*Archbishop Christopher Prowse, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
Apostolic Administrator Of Wagga Wagga*

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

May the joy and peace of the resurrection of Jesus Christ be with you all! The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. Paul said, "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17 NLT)

Romans 4:25, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." Here we see two important facts about Jesus: First, Jesus was handed over to man because of our sins. God's purpose in giving up his Son is to provide forgiveness for the transgressions we had committed. Second, the resurrection of Jesus is to justify us. Jesus was raised for the sake of our justification. These are two basic teachings for Christianity: first, Jesus died to pay for our sinful debts; second, Jesus was resurrected to make us righteous so that we have a right relationship with God, our creator.

Let's continuously acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and rely on his grace, help and strengthen to face our daily challenges in this world.

*Bishop Dr Albert Wong
Chinese Methodist Church in Australia*

Churches of Christ in Australia

Easter is a journey, one that Jesus takes, and one that we are invited to take as well. The experiences in this journey are contrasting. Contrast Jesus' prophetic entry into Jerusalem and the intimacy of the Last Supper with the betrayal, unfair trial, desertion of friends and public death without compassion or justice. This is a journey that seems to end in violence and emptiness.

After the silence of the tomb comes a cry of amazement. He is Risen! This joyous discovery is confirmed by several friends of Jesus who have intimate and personal encounters with the Risen Jesus. After these precious moments they share the news with others and so the Christian witness to the Risen Christ begins.

These contrasts of the Easter journey reflect human experience. The rising hope, shattered dreams, betrayal, desertion and the silence of hopelessness. People in many settings know this to be true. Whether they be victims of abuse or violence, crippled with regret and disappointment, people waiting in camps for a secure place to live or others seeking meaning amidst hopelessness and despair.

The Joy of Easter is that these experiences do not have the final word. The Risen Christ brings forgiveness, healing, grace and new life. We are invited to embrace this with wonder and deep confidence, and as we do so we find the promised new life for ourselves and see the potential for others as well. This is the Easter journey towards new life.

Rev John Gilmore

Churches of Christ in Australia

Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

"NO MORE OF THIS!"

Luke's Gospel tells us about Jesus' arrest at Easter:

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

It was Peter who struck at the servant. Impetuous Peter. Act first, think later Peter.

Jesus' response has echoed down through time. "No more of this!" No more, ever. The use of violence has to stop. The endless cycle of repaying hurt with hurt, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, is at an end no matter what you think your motivations are.

Peter was willing to fight and injure people in defence of Jesus. Like Peter, many of us justify using violence in defence of a worthy cause. We are good people who would never strike out either physically or in words, unless it was needed. And how often we find it is needed! To protect ourselves, our loved ones, our property, our reputations, our points of view, or to correct other people who lack our insight into the errors of their ways. The sad fact is that violence is within us and so often we are looking for an excuse to unleash it.

If violence is within us it lies within ourselves to stop it: "No more of this!"

This Easter, may we honour the sacrifice that Christ made for us by saying with him to ourselves, "No more of this!"

Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator

The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Christ is Risen, Truly He is Risen!!

It is my pleasure to wish you all the blessings of the Glorious Feast of the Resurrection of Christ our Saviour. St. Paul says, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection." (Philippians 3:10).

The resurrection has power. This power is stronger than anything. The resurrection is not a historical event but a functional status for man to live by, experience and enjoy. The resurrection confirms that death is not the end of the road. It was the resurrection that raised Mary Magdalene when she was in doubt. While in her sadness, she thought that Christ was the gardener. When He called her by name, she joyfully greeted Him.

The resurrection alleviated the disciples from their fear. They had been terrified and kept all doors shut. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them, the Bible says: "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20). Resurrection raises man from sin. Man cannot rise from the impurity of sin except by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that pleased all mankind when He was crucified and died on the cross for the sake of all.

May the light of the risen Christ fill your families and homes with abundant spiritual strength and joy. Christ bless Australia, its Government and its people.

With the Grace of God

Bishop Daniel, Bishop

Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

At Easter we remember the crucifixion of Jesus, a particularly horrifying death. Yet, out of that time of torment and despair came a resounding message of hope, forgiveness and compassion.

The message of the carpenter's son of Nazareth is as vital for the troubled world of today as it was 2,000 years ago. In the words of William Penn "Force may subdue but love gains".

In peace,

Jo Jordan, Presiding Clerk

Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

The Salvation Army, Australia

Dear Friends

In the early hours of the third day, his followers went to the tomb. There they found nothing that they expected. His body wasn't there. The stone, rolled away, now revealed an empty tomb. It was this moment of finding 'nothing' expected that changed everything. It changed everything then and still changes everything today.

It was only when they found nothing, that the disciples began to realise everything had truly changed. This empty tomb discovery was the beginning of a journey into a new and deepening understanding of Jesus, his teaching and mission. The life-changing implications of finding nothing they had anticipated in that tomb would take a lifetime to come to understand. But it was the discovery of a resurrected Jesus that changed everything, in that moment and for the rest of their lives.

The stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away, not so Jesus could escape the grave, but so that his disciples would find nothing.

In all of our abundance and ability to find what's needed in the moment, it is not until we find the 'nothing' of the empty tomb that we truly experience the heartfelt longing for deep change. As we gaze into the truth of the empty tomb once again this Easter, may we hear the invitation to embrace the deep change and transformation that finding the tomb empty offers. Know afresh that every promise God has made to us he is faithful to keep – the empty tomb is proof of his faithfulness to his promise (Psalm 119:89-90). Know afresh that the same power that raised Christ from the dead, is the power that is available to us today through his Spirit (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Those that found the tomb empty, even before they could fully understand all that it meant, knew that others needed to know that finding 'nothing' does change everything. Let's not wait until we have fully understood all that the empty tomb means. That will take a lifetime. There are others all around us waiting for the word of hope that change is possible, because the tomb is empty. Nothing' still changes everything!

*Commissioner Floyd Tidd, Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army, Australia*

Uniting Church in Australia

Easter is a time Christians around the world gather to celebrate over meals and through worship, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Encountering people living lives of love and justice in the way of Jesus is a constant inspiration for me and for many young leaders in the Uniting Church.

Earlier this year I attended the Uniting Church's National Young Adult Leaders Conference. The passion, love and acceptance I saw in this diverse group gives me hope for all of us who follow Jesus.

In Jesus we see, that love is the lens through which God sees us and I see that love expressed in these young people.

We see in Jesus, that God understands our sorrow and suffering, and comes alongside us in comfort and healing.

We see in Jesus, that all people are included in God's call for compassion and justice.

We see this as a Church – in the ongoing renewal we live out as a community and the action to which our faith calls us.

In the face of world events, like the horrendous attack in Christchurch, where words and acts of hatred and violence have threatened the harmony and peace of our communities, Christ comes to us, with a call to love our neighbours, to live in peace and work for a reconciled human community. In the Spirit of Christ, our young people reject racism and hate speech and embrace Jesus' message of love and inclusion.

People of all ages and cultures, gather at Easter to celebrate Christ' presence of love and hope today!

I encourage you to join in an Easter celebration. Share in the love and hope that are alive in our communities!

Happy Easter! Christ is risen!

*Dr Deidre Palmer, President
Uniting Church in Australia*

Australian Christian Churches

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is pivotal in the Biblical narrative, and critical to the foundations of faith for all Christians. This wasn't a fictional event, as His life is well documented by believers and non-believers alike. It is hard to deny His life and brutal death on a cruel Roman cross, when historians such as Flavius Josephus affirm this.

That Jesus lived is one thing, but what He did and why He did it is even more profound.

An innocent man died in the place of a guilty human race. The impact of this significant event goes beyond those who lived in those times – it still impacts every one of us today. The simple fact is that we have all sinned and cannot grant ourselves forgiveness. Our pardon came through Christ's sacrifice. It wasn't nails that held Jesus to that cross, it was God's love for us all.

Thankfully His death is not the end of the story. If Friday offers redemption to mankind, then the declaration, "He is risen" that following Sunday morning, is the premise for our victorious hope.

When we look at the daily news, we are bombarded with global events that can easily cause us to despair. This is the wonderful thing about Easter: when we look at the Cross, we find forgiveness for our past. Then turning to the empty tomb on Resurrection Sunday, we discover a fresh hope for our future.

My prayer is that this Easter, the death and resurrection of Jesus reminds us all of the hope we have in Him.

*Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President
Australian Christian Churches*

Australia Baptist Ministries

EASTER HOLIDAYS

It has been hard not to miss the messaging that by taking just 3 days leave over Easter will result in a 10-day break. This accompanied with the advertisements about Easter holiday travel and accommodation specials plus a mixture of eggs, bunnies and decorated hats gives rise to the question is that all that gives these Easter holidays meaning?

We are bombarded, with so much noise so much clatter, that you could be forgiven for not knowing anything about the real meaning of Easter.

Another meaning for Easter holidays?

Yes, there is a deeper meaning. It is about a remarkable man who genuinely cared for people, who healed and fed and comforted. Who reached out to the marginalised, the widow, the orphan and the strangers and confronted the religious and political hierarchies. Who called out hypocrisy and declared God's love for everyone. Who faced injustice and with quiet resolve confronted his tormentors. Who, having predicted his demise, was beaten and scourged and nailed to a cross but spoke words of forgiveness and of hope.

This is the other story that cannot be silenced, the message of Jesus the Son of God and his death and after three days his resurrection. This is the real meaning of Easter that offers the possibility of restoration and renewal and hope for people like you and me.

This a great reason to celebrate, to enjoy these holy days. You can read the record of the first Easter in the Bible in the Gospel of John chapters 19 and 20.

As Will Small says in his prose at www.otherstory.com.au

“The God we crucified is making all things new.
And he extends his palm to you.
So, what are you going to do?”

*Rev Keith Jobberns, National Director
Australian Baptist Ministries*

For further information contact: Liz Stone NCCA Interim General Secretary, secretariat@ncca.org.au