

Friday, 31 March 2023

from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2023 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

'He is Risen'

Who has the final word? It is a powerful position to be in, to have the final say. It indicates that there is someone whose authority or view trumps all others and can close the conversation.

In life it often seems like the final word is disappointment, suffering and disillusionment. We live with the realities of disaster, racial and gender violence, war mongering, disempowerment through the actions of others and personal disappointment.

International powerplays threaten peace and security while creating more and more refugees. At the same time the global economic complexity creates further anxiety and pressure at home. What can we say in the face of all these overwhelming realities?

We can say none of these have the final word. The Christian message at Easter is the final word; 'life'. Jesus, God fully present, dies with no justice, torture, and cruelty. There is no compassion. Jesus is abandoned by the men who flee and attended to by the women who remain.

Three days later, the borrowed grave is empty, and the testimony of the women and men is a simple and wonderful statement, **'He is Risen'**.

Resurrection is the final word in Christian faith; Jesus lives. Two words and behind them a life transforming affirmation. The final word is life and resurrection. Bringing this perspective to our present realities may not alter them, however, it can change how we see and engage with them.

It is possible to ask, 'what is the Resurrection perspective here?' For example, in the clamour of opinions on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, as we make our referendum decision, we can ask how a Resurrection perspective guides us. Do we wait until the moment when every question is resolved – or do we look forward in gracious trust and with fervent hope?

Christians are Resurrection people – this is the final word, and it is one of life.

*Rev John Gilmore, President
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(Note: This year the Western Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 9 April and the Orthodox and Oriental Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 17 April.)

The 15 messages follow.

For more information, contact the **NCCA Secretariat on 02 9299 2215** or secretariat@ncca.org.au

Anglican Church of Australia

Easter is a great gift! Four days off in a row. An opportunity to get away. Spend time with family and friends. Get jobs done around the house before winter.

Easter is also a great gift because what happened at Easter nearly 2000 years ago changed the world for ever.

On the day known as Good Friday a man called Jesus was executed just outside Jerusalem in the way typical of the Roman empire of the time - he was crucified. But this Jesus was different. He had done nothing wrong. He went to the cross willingly.

Sometime between sunset on 'Good Friday' and dawn on the day we know as Easter Day, Jesus broke the hold of death and came to new life. He left the cave in which his dead body had been laid and over the next few weeks was seen alive by more than 500 people. Those are the facts of Easter.

And the gift? Jesus' death was not a waste or a tragedy but meant something, did something, caused a change. Jesus' death on that cross brought reconciliation and peace between God and humanity. Jesus died because he loved. He died for us. Because of Jesus' death we can be reconciled with God.

The fact that Jesus broke through death means that the power of death is broken. The power of death is defeated not just for Jesus but for all people and all creation. We look forward to a time when that victory is universally seen but the decisive action has taken place. The battle has been won.

Our opportunity is to live in the light of that hope, to offer that hope to others and to do things which make the future part of the present. To offer life, peace, justice, care, inclusion and love so that many, many people will 'cotton on' to what God has done in Jesus and live its hope in their lives.

The gift of Easter is peace with God and hope for now and the future. Enjoy the weekend!

*The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith, Archbishop of Adelaide
Primate, Anglican Church of Australia*

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Christian faith is established and based on Resurrection. The suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross was the pathway to Resurrection. Suffering was the way to destroy every stain we had because of the sin. With His suffering He restored the human nature, and He brought it back to its pristine beauty. The fullness was with His Resurrection “trembling down death by (His) death.” Passing through His crucifixion, we preach the resurrected Lord.

What our Lord Jesus Christ did, is for our sake, and He is still offering us His salvation. He comforted our hearts by saying: **“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”** says the Lord (John 16: 33). It is the aim of His Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

God became man to **“wipe away every tear from their (our) eyes; there shall be no more death, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed”** (Revelation 21: 4).

May the Resurrected Lord grant you all a healthy and peaceful life crowned with faith and peace of mind and soul. Amen.

His Eminence, Metropolitan Basilios, Archbishop

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Assyrian Church of the East

"May Your right hand oh Mighty God be upon us during these joyous times as we celebrate the triumphant resurrection of Your beloved Son Jesus Christ.

Grant us where there is hatred, may we show His love; where there is war, may we be peacemakers; where there is corruption, may we show His truthfulness and where there is pride, may we show the humility He showed during His passion.

May He bring us out of the tomb of oppression to His glory and ever lasting peace of His kingdom.

He is Risen."

Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia, Metropolitan

Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East

Catholic Church in Australia

According to the gospel of John, Jesus spoke the following words to his disciples on the night before he died:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me
(John 14:1).

It is not always easy to follow this advice given to us by Jesus. The many challenges we all face in our personal, family and community lives, often overwhelm us. As is the case in so much of what we say about our Christian faith, our lived experience differs from the high ideals we profess. The reality for many of us, at least some of the time, is that we are afraid and we are uncertain. We can often feel as if God is not there or does not care.

This, in fact, is not the case. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. The faith we seek and the peace which Jesus promises to give us are precious gifts, always on offer to us – but they are never forced upon us. It is good to remember that, in the context of telling his disciples not to have troubled hearts, Jesus goes on to remind them that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). In saying this, Jesus is suggesting that if we were to follow some other way rather than his we might well get lost – and, as most of us know from experience, when we get lost we easily become disoriented. We lose our bearings, wander around aimlessly and sometimes even begin to panic and despair. Keeping to his way, and returning to that way once we realise we have strayed, is our sure method for stilling our troubled hearts and receiving the Lord's gift of peace. Similarly, if we commit ourselves to some other truth rather than the truth which Jesus makes known to us about who he is, about who God is, and about who we are in relation to God, then we run the very real risk of building our lives on a mirage or, as Jesus would put it in the gospel, on shifting sands rather than on solid rock (Matt 7:24-27). If we have to spend our lives struggling to maintain our balance because our foundations are so shaky, then we will not have untroubled hearts or that deep peace which is the Lord's gift. And again, if we fail to unite ourselves with the Lord in such a way that our life is enriched and deepened by the presence of his life within us, the serenity and trust which enabled him to endure the opposition, the cruelty, and the violence of those who were determined to destroy him, will evade us. Our hearts will remain troubled, and they will not be at peace.

When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples his first words to them were, "Peace be with you" (John 20:20). Because of their love for him and because of the time they had spent with him the disciples were able to receive his gift of peace and their lives were transformed. May this be our experience, too, as we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus this year.

*Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth,
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC)*

Do not be afraid the angel tells the women who have come to the empty tomb. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen as he said he would!

Come and see the place where he lay, then go quickly and tell his disciples, ***“He has risen from the dead and now he is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him.”***

Life is calling them, calling us away from dead things. Love is calling them and us out of the tomb of our fears and despair. Will we go and see where he is coming to meet us?

Each Easter, we repeat the familiar rites. We come together and take simple things - fire and light - water and oil - bread and wine. We tell the great story again. We sing, we pray, we move together. We stand at the doorway of a mystery where past and present and future come together.

This mystery is our relationship with God. We don't understand it fully now, but we can touch it and we can enter it.

This mystery is Jesus Christ, son of God and son of Mary. Two thousand years ago, his friends saw him die and then they met him after he rose from the dead, the same man but transformed. Their story has been handed on to us. It can become our story too, because Jesus is alive and we can meet him too, wherever Galilee may be for you or me.

The story has been handed on, not in words alone, but in the community of the Church and her sacraments. In Baptism we celebrate not just an outward ceremony: we receive faith and eternal life from God. For those who are baptized, the new creation has already begun.

Each Christian's story of receiving forgiveness and a new beginning is their own. And, as each person's story opens out to the life of God's Kingdom, we discover, in the communion of saints, in the life of the Church, that it is one great story, and it is ours.

Bishop Michael McKenna, Bishop of Bathurst
Chair of the ACBC's Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Relations

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

From Doubt to Belief

The resurrection of Jesus Christ took His followers on a journey from doubt to total belief.

We know from the Gospels that Mary Magdalene met the risen Lord on the third morning of the Lord's crucifixion, which was the day of the resurrection. She went back to tell the disciples, but the disciples were not convinced. There were two disciples who met the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus that afternoon. Although they heard the women testifying about how they met the risen Lord, they were still depressed and did not believe - not until they recognized it was the risen Jesus during dinner. Then they got up and hurried back to Jerusalem to inform the other disciples that the Lord is risen.

And how could the disciples who were locked in the room believe the news of the resurrection from the women in the morning and, subsequently, from the two disciples who hurried back?

It was not until the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to them in person, the disciples saw and touched the risen Lord with their own hands, that they firmly believed that their Jesus had indeed resurrected. They testified to Thomas who was absent that night, that Jesus had risen. Thomas refused to believe what they said until a week later when the risen Lord appeared again to the disciples, including Thomas, that Thomas, upon seeing the risen Lord Jesus, proclaimed Jesus to be his Lord and his God.

For us today, we don't need to doubt whether Jesus' resurrection is true. This is because many of the disciples who initially did not believe in Jesus' resurrection had gone through the journey from doubt to total belief for us, and they had been witnessing to people throughout history that Jesus is truly risen. Therefore, Resurrection Sunday is the day when our faith in the risen Lord is once again strengthened. May the risen Lord Jesus be with you. Amen.

Bishop Milton Nee

Chinese Methodist Church in Australia

Churches of Christ

The Gospel has taken a pounding in recent years from those rightly indignant at the excesses and abuses of some Christian leaders over past decades.

Nevertheless, we can remind ourselves this Easter that flawed messengers don't invalidate the message.

Faith is attested by archaeological proof of the Bible, by prophecies fulfilled in Christ hundreds of years after being written and circulated, by the positive observations of hostile witnesses in the first century, by the willing deaths of early Christians, and by the transformed lives of many today. Christianity cannot be proved beyond all doubt, but it can be proved beyond reasonable doubt.

This Easter, Christians Australia-wide have an opportunity to live out their faith with pride. Maybe fewer people are Christians today than ever before, but a great many are Christians still.

This Winter, the number of monthly churchgoers will still well exceed the attendances at AFL, NRL, A League, and Super Rugby games combined. This reminds us we can still confidently honour Jesus.

People are still coming to faith, worshipping weekly, and proving themselves inquisitive. Recent research shows that four in ten are open to spiritual conversations, a number rising to 50% for younger Australians, and 38% of Aussies are open to being invited to church, 73% by a close contact!

When society rejects religion in the workplace, Christians still connect outside of hours and continue to pray for their colleagues more fervently. When sceptics laugh at the notion of a miraculous Creator, Christians offer a living God more plausible than a causeless universe. When people intimidate with caustic questions or disparaging remarks, Christians respond with dignity and love.

This Easter, we once again proclaim Jesus who is alive. He died to repair our broken relationship with God by taking the punishment for sin (no matter how small) upon himself. His resurrection broke sin's hold and triumphed over death. Through this, we come back to God, and he grants us access to eternal life. That brings hope, healing, restoration, and grace.

Surely, this is Good News worth celebrating this Easter, but it is also worth proclaiming with conviction and passion at the very time when people need its power more than ever.

*Dr. Rob Nyhuis – National Chair,
Churches of Christ Council in Australia*

Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

Christ is Risen, Truly He is Risen!!

The Feast of the Resurrection is the feast of victory, because when our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead, He was victorious over death, sin, Satan, and the world. Indeed, ***“...He went out conquering and to conquer” (Rev 6:2).***

1. Victory over death:

Death entered into the world as a result of sin. God warned Adam ***that “...in the day that you eat of it (the tree) you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17)***, but the first man disobeyed the commandment and ate of the tree.

Consequently, Adam fell, lost his state of grace, and plucked for himself and for the entire human race the sentence of death.

Additionally, the human race became under bondage to death, as St. Paul explained, ***“We were dead in trespasses” (Eph 2:1).*** As a result, ***“death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).***

However, Christ overturned the death sentence by conquering death through His Resurrection, and we say in the Paschal hymn, ***“By His death, He trampled death and to***

those in the tombs, He bestowed eternal life.” Moreover, death lost its dominion over mankind,

St. Paul wrote, ***“Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”*** (1 Cor 15:54-55).

2. Victory over sin:

Without light in his life, man stumbled in the darkness and descended from one evil to another. Moreover, man was incapable of justifying himself, neither by his works nor by the works of the Law.

Through the sacrifice on the Cross, Christ, the Most Holy, completely reversed man’s condition, because ***“He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”*** (Heb 9:26).

Consequently, Christ’s glorious Resurrection delivered man from the law of sin and saved the human race from the death sentence, as St. Paul wrote, ***“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death”*** (Rom 8:2). However, sin continues to separate man from God and leads to death, but repentance brings man back to God and leads to life.

3. Victory over the devil:

The Fall of the first man was through the envy and deceit of the devil. But the fall was not limited only to Adam, because all mankind fell. However, the Father, in His love, sent His Only Begotten Son to the world to deliver mankind from the servitude to the conquer Satan and grant us victory.

“He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Php 2:8). Christ’s Glorious Resurrection and victory over the devil fulfilled the prophecy that ***“He shall bruise your head”*** (Gen 3:15).

4. Victory over the world:

“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jn 5:19). The devil is the prince of this world, and the world has its own principles, ideas, and lusts. However, victory over the world came through Christ’s Resurrection, and we are called to trust in His victory and have confidence in His words, ***“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”*** (Jn 16:33). Therefore, although we live in the world, yet ***“we know that we are of God”*** (1 Jn 5:19).

Let us rejoice in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and that we are raised with Him.

Let us rejoice, because our Lord Jesus Christ conquered death, sin, the devil, and the world, and bestowed upon us a new life.

May the light of the risen Christ bless Australia fill our country with grace goodness and peace.

With the Grace of God

Bishop Daniel

Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia & New Zealand

“Wake up, sleeper, and rise from the death, and Christ will shine on you”.

(Ephesians 5:14b).

The whole world today is in turmoil, wars, strife, famine, pandemics, earthquakes, global warming, all of these are mostly because of human error, man misjudging his role in the universe. God entrusted the world to man to take care of it not to destroy it. Most people today have distanced themselves from God, from the ethical teachings of our Lord. Once the fear of God is forgotten jealousy, greed, power takes control. Money and wealth are regarded as the sole purpose of the individual, where one's own unlimited freedom takes priority. The responsibility towards family, society is neglected. In this manner humanity is rushing to bring upon itself self-destruction.

Jesus came to this world to save humanity, to heal the souls of people, to teach love, to give life and hope.

Jesus not only preached and lived His teachings but also gave His very life to show His utmost love to humanity; He died on the cross, but He also rose to herald life's victory over death and a new beginning for humanity. God has done and continues to do His salvific act through Christ, it is up to mankind to keep his part of the New Covenant, through his faith in the risen Lord in word and in deed.

The second coming of the Lord can be glorious or it can bring judgement and destroy the whole world. Jesus said, ***“When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth”*** (Luke 18:8). We know what happened during the deluge and to Sodom and Gomorrah however because of just Noah and Lot, through them the remnant humanity was saved.

It is up to us as Christians to save the world from utter destruction so let us ***“Stand firm, put on our loins with truth and the breastplate of righteousness, equipment of the gospel of peace; taking the shield of faith, with which we will quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”***. (Ephesians 6:14)

Let us once again proclaim the Good News with the angels and say, ***“Christ is risen from the dead”***.

With fraternal love

Archbishop Haigazoun Najarian, Primate

Diocese of the Armenian Church in Australia & New Zealand

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins"

(1 Cor. 15:17)

“Χριστός Ανέστη. Ἀληθῶς Ανέστη! Christ is Risen; Truly He is Risen”

Our Lord and God Jesus Christ exclaims: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*** (John 11:25-26).

We live in an increasingly secularized and religiously indifferent world. The notions of 'faith' and 'religion' no longer possess importance or centrality in the fabric of society, but rather have been relegated to personal subjective belief. Indeed, rational reasoning has always been the stronger intellectual trait of the human person, and doubt, springing forth from the inability to transcend the limitations of rationalism, has served as an obstacle for the human person to perceive and acknowledge the eternal truth of God.

The resurrection of Christ, precisely as both reality and mystery, emphatically and unequivocally, defies the limitations of human logic, transcends what is earthly, temporal, and corruptible, and existentially and spiritually raises us up to what is heavenly, eternal, and incorruptible. In and through the entire divine-human dispensation, the passion and death on the cross, and the resurrection from the dead, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ recreates, refashions, and renews the human person according to the measure of His fullness (Eph. 4:13) It is to this ***"newness of life"*** (Rom. 6:4) that we are called to embrace with all our heart in faith and love, because this leads to the fullness of true life, which was established ***"before the foundation of the world"*** (Eph. 1:4).

Today, the Church proclaims with joy "Christ is risen!" for a new reality has been inaugurated - ***"the kingdom of God is at hand"*** (Mark 1:15)- indeed, the kingdom of God is 'within us' (Luke 17:21). Christ has ***"overcome the world"*** (John 16:33) and gathers ***"all things together in heaven and on earth"*** (Eph. 1:10) and calls each one of us to embrace and to be embraced by His absolute and boundless love. Let us therefore strive for true faith and genuine love for Christ, fulfilling His life-giving commandments, that we may be made worthy to receive the abundance of divine blessings and become partakers of the fullness of true life and joy, which are in Christ. In response to the question posed by Christ to each of us ***"Do you believe this?"***, may we exclaim with all our heart, soul, mind and strength: ***"Lord, I believe"*** (John 9:38).

Wishing all a blessed and joyous Easter, I remain,

*His Eminence, Archbishop Makarios, Primate,
Greek Orthodox Church of Australia*

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Easter is a time of contrasts. The extreme suffering, cruelty and sadness of the crucifixion is transformed in a few days to the joy and renewal associated with the Resurrection.

How often is this the case? Easter is a reminder that in the grimmest of times we can be hopeful that the ocean of Light will overtake the ocean of darkness, that our love will cast out fear and that we are free, like Jesus, to do what we can to build a better world.

Bruce Henry, Presiding Clerk

Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

The Salvation Army, Australia

Watching the news one morning, the reader said, "Freedom isn't free, it costs", and how true that statement is.

Think of Wilberforce, Rosa Parkes, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jnr, Dorothy Height, Malala Yousafzai...and the list could go on.

Freedom is not free....it costs.

It cost everything for Jesus....a painful death on a cross, in order to secure our freedom.

Freedom from anything that might bind us up.

Freedom through the cross. A most beautiful exchange.

Freedom to live, for Him and like Him.

In these days, He continues to call us to....

1. Get free.... free from the sin that so easily enslaves. Free from anything that holds us back. Free from the thoughts that hold us. Freedom from anything that is not of Him.
2. Keep free. There was a warning for the Galatians. **"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified"**. Live in this big Gospel. Do not believe the lies of the evil one. Keep free.
3. Get someone else free. So many people need Jesus. The world needs Jesus. And that freedom could be salvation, it could mean that God has called you to make a stand on human trafficking, or for women who are oppressed, for children, for civil rights, for those abused. People need freedom. People need Jesus.

We do not need to be concerned about our reputation. We live like and for Jesus. And the great news is that He rose again. His Spirit is in us, with us, for us.

Freedom is not free. It costs.

Thank you, Jesus, for the price you paid. Thank you for the freedom you secured. May we live free in these days and see the salvation and transformation of your world.

Commissioner Miriam Gluyas, Territorial Leader

The Salvation Army, Australia

Uniting Church in Australia

In the death and resurrection of Jesus is a call from God to life in Christ. It is a call from despair to hope, from evil to goodness, from shame to freedom, from sorrow to joy. We see this call as Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds it empty. Weeping for what has been lost, she sees a gardener who calls her name, "Mary". Immediately, she recognises Jesus and is called out of her sorrow and back to life.

Recently, I gathered with other women leaders in the Uniting Church. We reflected together on what it means to have life in Christ. Rev Juliette Maua'i recalled a Samoan saying, "O Uo i aso uma, ae Uso i aso vale", which means "there will be friends for each day, but it will be siblings (or kinsfolk) in days of adversity". For Juliette this saying is a reminder of the assurance that Christ is with us always, in times of hope and joy, and in times of grief and hardship.

Across our communities right now, there are many who encounter sorrow, despair, and adversity. People are struggling with rising costs of living, without the means to simply get by. As a nation, we are consumed by the threat of war, choosing armament rather than seeking ways to peace. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community, including LGBTQIA+ Christians, have been confronted by ideologies of hate and acts of intimidation. These fail to recognise God's grace present in each of us. We see racism and a system which denies First Nations people of this land the right to self-determination and equality. Many people continue to experience violence and fear in intimate relationships, in spaces where they should know trust and safety.

The Easter story is a reminder, that in all of this, Christ is with us. Christ is our sibling in our days of adversity. We are not alone.

The Easter story also calls us to become participants in the work of Christ in the world. Christ calls us to be bearers of hope and justice. We see this call in Peter, who in sharing a meal made by the risen Jesus, is called from the shame of betrayal to a life of loving service. Jesus calls us to seek a new way of living which makes space for all people, so that all might know they are loved. We are called to transform racism into justice, to seek relationships of understanding and trust as a way to peace, to replace fear with safety and love.

The gift of resurrection life is the hope that we have in the transforming power of Christ and the assurance of new life in our own lives and in our world.

This Easter may you know life in Christ and may it bring the blessings of joy, peace and hope!

*Rev Sharon Hollis, Assembly President
Uniting Church in Australia*

Australian Baptist Ministries

Is your name in the credits?

An entertaining movie usually wraps up all the loose ends and leaves us feeling good before the credits roll. But in the second book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Mark, the credits roll while we are left wondering what is going to happen next!

The story so far: We pick up the action when Jesus was about 30 years old and follow him through his travels, parables and more than an occasional miracle. Then the story gets darker. Jesus is betrayed by one of his disciples. The authorities stage a sham trial and send him off for a brutal execution. It seems weird, but his death is what we celebrate as Good Friday.

This is where Mark's retelling of events ends so abruptly in the oldest manuscripts. Very early on Sunday, some of the women who were followers of Jesus arrived at his tomb to look after the ritual anointing of the body, but found Jesus gone. Then an angel told them he had risen from the dead, but they would see him later just as he'd promised. Not surprisingly, this really rattled them, and they didn't want to tell anyone.

But hold on. These were devoted followers of Jesus. How could these three women possibly keep the resurrection quiet? How could they possibly be afraid, after all they had seen Jesus do? It seems ludicrous to think that they wouldn't shout this news from the mountain tops. This is not how it should end. This is not how you write a script!

But just as we get worked up about this crazy ending, we realise that the story has caught us off guard. An unwritten question starts to take shape. "What are you doing with the news of the Son of God who died on your behalf?"

The good news of Jesus conquering death does not need a chocolate bunny with a big bow, a long ending, and a neat conclusion.

As you celebrate Easter Sunday consider your part in this story. The real ending is still being written ... and is your name in the credits?

*Rev Mark Wilson, National Ministries Director
Australian Baptist Ministries*

Australian Christian Churches

'THE THIRD DAY'

A lot can change in the space of three days. If we stop and reflect on the events of the first Easter, so many incredible things unfolded over those three significant days.

FRIDAY - Today we call it 'Good Friday' but it was a dark day, filled with pain and sorrow. For the followers of Jesus at that time, the Cross meant great loss. Their master and teacher died a brutal death as a public spectacle. It was a shocking end that no one had anticipated.

SATURDAY - If you read the Gospel narrative, you find a number of Jesus' followers behind closed doors asking, 'What now?' They were numb with confusion and despair, with no hope or certainty for the future.

SUNDAY - This was the game-changer. Today we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, when Jesus defied the odds and defeated death, giving us eternal hope. Sunday is the day of transformation. His resurrection took a frightened bunch of Jesus followers, and turned them into a powerful force, that would rather die than deny Him.

We all have to face our Fridays – those sombre days when we receive devastating news that strikes us to the core; followed by the Saturdays, where we find ourselves in a state of chaos, gripped with overwhelming fear and confusion.

The dark Fridays and Saturdays are guaranteed to happen to us all, but the big question is, will we embrace the hope that comes on the third day?

The big story of Easter is so succinctly summarised by the angel at the tomb on Resurrection Sunday who declared, ***'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*** (Luke 24:7 (NIV))

Our faith is built on that third day, when everything radically changed through Jesus. Death turns to Life. Despair turns to Hope. The apparent end becomes a new beginning. It's time to leave the sorrow of Friday and the confusion of Saturday, and enter the hope of Sunday– the third day!

*Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President
Australian Christian Churches*

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