

Friday, 22 March 2024

*from the National Council of Churches in Australia*

## Easter 2024 Messages from Australia's National Church Leaders

### 'He is Risen'

Stories of hope do not seem to get the same level of attention as those that focus on what is terrible in the world. Easter is a powerful story of hope.

There is much cause for despair at the moment. There seems no end to the conflict in Gaza and peace with justice seems remote. The war in the Ukraine continues and other conflicts are ongoing, and the language used by some world leaders gives little encouragement and hope.

We see similar patterns of discouragement for Australia's First Peoples in the face of their continuing journey for justice and for an end to the marginalisation of people and communities. Rates of Indigenous incarceration continue to be disproportionately high.

Across Australia the level of domestic violence unacceptable. People on limited income continue to struggle. There is more that can be listed! There is no magic wand available to fix all of this and progress may continue to be slow. Yet there is something more that offers hope.

The darkness and suffering of Good Friday and the lack of compassion and justice in the death of Jesus is addressed in the resurrection. This action of God in raising Jesus to life is a powerful statement. God's final word is life! Death and suffering do not have the final say, and Jesus' continuing living presence is the foundation of our hope.

Maybe we can decide to turn our attention away from the analysis of all that is not right and attend to, and nurture, the signs of new life and hope in our darkness. When we do so we live as people of the Resurrection and be part of a continuing story of hope.

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

**(Note:** This year the Western Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 31 March and the Orthodox and Oriental Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 5 May.)

The 14 messages follow.

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For more information, contact the **NCCA Secretariat on 02 9299 2215** or [secretariat@ncca.org.au](mailto:secretariat@ncca.org.au)

## Anglican Church of Australia



An essential part of Easter is Jesus' resurrection. We know from the scriptures that early in the morning on the third day after his crucifixion Jesus' tomb was discovered to be empty, and his appearances to the disciples, both to the eleven, and according to St Paul, more than 500 at one time, plus his changed appearance and actions were convincing proof that Jesus was not only not dead, nor resuscitated but resurrected. He had come through death into a new life.

While the message of the resurrection is well known, its implications are very important for the whole world. The fact that Jesus beat death, that the power of death has been defeated is a matter of great significance. We still see and experience the forces of death, but the decisive victory has been won and the result is seen and will be seen completely in the fullness of time.

The impacts of Jesus resurrection are individual and personal in that those of us who are joined to Christ through baptism share his death and resurrection. As Jesus has been raised through death so will we. Death has no more hold over us.

But the resurrection has global and cosmic consequences. Right now, the whole creation is waiting for its redemption.

The remnants of the power of death are still being seen and experienced. There continues to be war and violence and injustice. Dictators unleash shocking suffering. There is poverty and famine. Abuse, cruelty and care-lessness. An uneven distribution of the resources of the world means a few have too much and many have too little. Disease is experienced by young and old, and of course people still die.

The forces of death are still evident, and this can lead to a heaviness, a hopelessness, a weariness as we navigate and experience this reality.

But the resurrection means that these manifestations of death will one day know their defeat. The future is not one of death but life and new life.

The impact of resurrection gives us hope in the midst of the death-ness we experience, and the motivation to spread resurrection life as much as we can. The resurrection is seriously cosmos changing and its gospel (gospel means surprisingly wonderful news) is worth embracing and sharing.

What we see now in the world is not what it will be. What we do now to spread resurrection life and push back the many manifestations of death as ambassadors of the risen one will make a difference for many people and in fact the whole creation.

I wish you a happy Easter, and I hope that the more we reflect on its implications the more glad we will be in our own hearts, and the more motivated we will be to help the implications of the resurrection to be experienced wherever we can.

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

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## Catholic Church in Australia



Easter is a time when we are called to recognise once again the seeds of hope which lie in the words we find on the lips of Jesus in John's gospel, as Jesus addresses his disciples on the eve of his passion and death: ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No-one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"*** (Jn 15:12,13. NRSV).

It is true that we can easily be overwhelmed when we see the horrors which continue to unfold in Ukraine, in the Holy Land and in the wider Middle East, in Sudan, in Myanmar and in so many other places around the world. We can shake our heads in desperation as we encounter more and more homeless people living on the streets with no apparent solution in sight. We can fear for the future when we read stories of increasing violence and disruption in our schools, both secondary and primary. In the face of all these tragedies and problems we can feel helpless. The challenges are so many, and solutions seem so hard to find.

Easter reminds us that the triumph of Jesus over the powers of hatred and evil does, in fact, offer a powerful antidote to all this. It is the gift and the promise of a new and better way to live. It is a source of hope and equally a call to action. If we, as members of the Christian community in our society, commit ourselves to taking the gospel of Jesus seriously and set ourselves to walk in his Way, to embrace his Truth, and live his Life, we will be a powerful force, not only for good, but for transformation and renewal in our wider community.

Of course, we cannot do this on our own. We need to be a people of hope, not just individuals with hope; we need to be a community of service, generosity and practical assistance to those in need, not just individuals who do their best to help where they can; we need to be a communion of forgiveness and healing, welcome and hospitality, and not just individuals who try their best without the support of others. While we as Christians may disagree on many things, we can all agree on this: that we are called to love as Jesus did: faithfully, patiently, steadfastly and concretely.

Saint Paul once wrote that ***"there are three things that endure: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love"*** (1Cor 13:13). If we can, with God's grace, create true communities of love - that generous, outward-reaching, self-sacrificing love which marked the life of Jesus - then the hope of Easter, the hope of love's triumph over hate and life's triumph over death, can begin to be realized.

May we all experience the joy and hope of the resurrection as we celebrate Easter this year.

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

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# Chinese Methodist Church in Australia



## Eternal Hope

For 2,000 years, the reality of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has been questioned. One of the purposes of the apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian church around 51 A.D. was to affirm the fact of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, ***“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, ... that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”***

First, there is true faith because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:13-14, ***“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”*** The resurrection of Jesus has enabled us to preach the gospel without being "in vain," and at the same time believing the gospel without being "in vain." "Not in vain" means that it is not empty talk, and that the content of the gospel is trustworthy. This means that Jesus' resurrection is true and credible. Therefore, the apostles were not "false witnesses," but rather, a group of reliable witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

Second, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the Savior of the world. 1 Corinthians 15:17-22, ***“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”*** Jesus was resurrected to be the Saviour of the world, redeeming us for eternal life, from weakness to perfection, and with eternal hope and destiny.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus compelled the disciples to share what they had seen, touched, and experienced.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus answered the question of where people come from and where they are going.

The Lord Jesus rose from the dead, conquered death, and proved that He is the Son of God, the living God.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus shows that He is the only Savior of the world.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus proves that trusting Him is one of the best decisions we can make in life.

*Bishop Milton Nee*

*Chinese Methodist Church in Australia*

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# Churches of Christ in Australia



## Why the Resurrection Matters

Easter remains the Christian Church's most important celebration, but why is Christ's resurrection necessary for human redemption, and why does he assert that he is the only path to God?

Our greatest pitfall is that every one of us is born into sin, a state of separation from God (and not the accumulation of wrongdoing). This inevitably imperils our future beyond death. Our greatest opportunity is to be rescued from this sin for the greatest possible joy in this life and the next.

The Bible speaks of two possible destinations which are both eternal. Entry into either depends on what we do with the gift of Jesus.

This is a challenge in an age of scepticism, yet the harmony of the biblical text, its archaeological support, and its transformation of countless lives still attest to the Bible's truth claims.

A perfectly just God must judge any sin perfectly, so its presence precludes any capacity to earn Heaven. A perfectly loving God has provided the solution to our escape.

By sending his Son who was fully divine, he sent us a Saviour who was free from sin. Therefore, Jesus qualified to bear ours. He was also fully human and capable of taking our place.

Faith in this reality is inclusive of Jesus' resurrection conquering death's power over him and us. This must be believed and confessed individually. Through it, we access God's salvation gift, being deemed a righteous new creation capable of living free from guilt, shame, addiction, worry, or oppression.

Jesus has therefore become the mediator who draws believers back to their maker. He is the source of a life of freedom and breakthrough that we can never have without him.

This makes every day an Easter celebration of life with Christ who, in being our Saviour who frees us from eternal death, therefore also becomes our Lord. That this applies only to those who receive and walk with him reminds us that we are afforded a choice as to how we will live and where we will ultimately reside.

And eternity is such a long time!

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

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## Coptic Orthodox Church – Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions



### Resurrection Message

The resurrection of Christ provided man with many solutions to many problems, including:

### 1 - The resurrection solved the problem of death.

Death was terrifying, and it was the greatest and last enemy of man, because it simply leads to the unknown, that is, it leads to hell. But when the Lord Christ rose from death, he abolished the effect of death and solved the problem of death.

St. Paul summarizes our Christian belief in the resurrection in Paul's chapter on Easter (1 Cor. 15) and says: ***"If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is in vain, you are still in your sins. Therefore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ also perished, if in this life we have only hope in Christ, then we are the most miserable of all people."*** Therefore, death is no longer the end of life, but the beginning of a new happy life. Death is no longer for us after the resurrection of Christ a frightening and sad event.

### 2 - The resurrection solved the problem of despair.

The resurrection of Christ gave us hope in a life after death. The resurrection of Christ gave our life and our struggle a purpose and meaning. St. Paul expresses the tongue of those who do not believe in the resurrection, saying: ***"If the dead do not rise. So, we eat and drink, because tomorrow we die."*** (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Despair is the opposite of faith and faith is the opposite of despair. Belief in Christ and in the resurrection nullifies despair. Because faith is ***"confidence in what is hoped for and conviction in things not seen"*** (Hebrews 11:10).

So, the resurrection of Christ solved the problem of despair and gave us hope.

**Hope** is a confident waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises, no matter how dim the darkness is hope is Absolute trust in God's promises.

**Hope** is Perseverance in the search for the open door, no matter how many closed doors.

**Hope** is an unshakable certainty that God has a thousand keys to a closed door.

**Hope** is Waiting for the arrival of spring no matter how long and intensified the winter cold.

**Hope** is Absolute confidence in all the effects of the cross and the resurrection, no matter what my sin was.

### 3 - The resurrection solved the problem of pain.

The pain before the resurrection of Christ was the problem of problems, this is the problem of Job and his friends. Pain in their eyes was equal to sin, as long as God allowed you to suffer, then you are a sinner and our Lord is mad at you, and this was tearing Job because he knows that God is just, and he testified to the righteousness of Job. The view of the martyrs about pain is completely different from the view of Job and all the men of the Old Testament, and the reason is simply the resurrection of Christ. We find the martyrs endured pain, but rather rejoiced because of the belief in the resurrection of Christ. It is written about them ***"They were tormented, and did not accept deliverance, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection"*** (Heb 11:35). Pain has a goal, a message, an end, and a limit. It will end with the end of our life on earth.

Saint Anthony says:

We must not fear death, but fear the destruction of the soul, which is the lack of knowledge of God. This is the terrifying death.

*Very Rev Dr Fr Abanoub,*

*Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Melbourne & Affiliated Regions*

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## Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)



On Wednesday 14th Feb, I walked a little of the "Gaza Pilgrimage" in Melbourne. This was an opportunity for people of faith to come together by walking a distance roughly equivalent to the distance from Gaza City to Rafah. The idea was to pray for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and to raise awareness about the plight of Palestinians facing relentless attacks from the Israeli Defence Forces. We prayed and sang in a variety of places of worship and shared stories of Palestine.

For me it was refreshing and uplifting to meet people from other denominations, united by concern for the innocent victims of war. We were a diverse group but had a commitment to non-violence and a sense of hope that a just peace might still be possible, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

The Easter story asks us to hold onto that same hope for a better world, even when there's no certainty that change is possible. It asserts that life goes on even after the worst possible things have happened and that love can overcome hatred or fear.

Small miracles of kindness, forgiveness, and reconciliation happen every day. The life of Jesus invites us to notice and support these small miracles. We are called to help build peace in whatever ways we can.

*Bruce Henry, Presiding Clerk  
Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)*

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## The Salvation Army, Australia Territory



### HOPE RISING

The disciples had followed Jesus, learning from Him, experiencing the miracles that He did, listened to Him teach, sometimes let Him down, other times didn't really understand what was happening.

He had tried to reveal to them what was about to happen. But when they saw Him hanging on the cross, they wondered what was going to happen to them, to others.

Hope was low. Faith was low.

Until they realised that He wasn't dead. On the 3rd day, He rose again! He was alive. He appeared to them. Hope was back. And then He ascends to heaven, but with a promise. The Holy Spirit would be given to them, to live in them, and through them. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be comforter, friend, always with them, always for them.

Hope revealed! Hope rising.

It seems that people lack hope right now. Wars, natural disasters, moral dilemmas, grief, pain. Many people wonder what is coming next, how they will get through. Hope lost.

And yet, Jesus, with us, for us. Hope giver. Hope bringer.

May the Hope of the world be just that for each of us at this Easter time.

Bless you friends.

*Commissioner Miriam Gluyas, Territorial Commander  
The Salvation Army Australia Territory*

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## Uniting Church in Australia



The focus in many Christian churches this year is the Gospel of Mark. Of all the Gospel accounts of the resurrection, Mark's is the briefest. There are no walks along roads, breakfasts by the beach, conversations with Jesus, or wounds to plunge our fingers into.

Mark's Easter Day story begins in the early morning. The women disciples who had stayed with Jesus throughout his crucifixion come to the tomb to anoint the dead body of their friend and teacher. They come in love, without hope, not even sure how they will move the stone to get to Jesus' body.

The story is drenched with grief, death and betrayal. It does not turn away from the trauma that follows Jesus' death. It immerses us in the sorrow, despair and speechlessness of the women. In their heartache, they respond in terror and fear.

Nor does Mark avoid the failings of those around Jesus as he dies. Not Peter who denied knowing Jesus almost as soon as he finished boasting he never would, not Judas who betrays Jesus for money, not the empire of Rome who use violence to enforce their rule, nor the religious authorities who deny the new thing God is doing.

This story is for all of us and for our broken world today. It's for those who are grieving, for the boastful, those who enact violence and those who suffer violence. For the broken humanity in each of us, the good news of resurrection life is proclaimed.

Mark's Gospel ends abruptly with the announcement of resurrection and with fear and silence. And yet the story continued to be told and continues with us.

In a world of violence, empire and groaning creation, God raises Jesus from the dead, with the hope of new life, a gift of grace, love and mercy to each of us. A grace that cannot be defeated by empire or violence, not by grief or sorrow, not by our unfaithfulness. God's resurrection grace keeps being offered, over and over again, drawing us into awe-filled silence for all we are given. In a world so desperate for hope, we are offered the same grace, good news and new life as the first disciples.

This resurrection life invites us to respond to God's gift of grace, filled with such joy at what God has done, that it overflows into our worship, witness and service. We live the Easter message each time we answer the call to follow the way of Jesus, when we act with compassion towards each other and creation, when we seek justice for the world and live lives of love.

Dwelling in the heart of love that is God, may we live as Easter people who are being made whole because God raised Jesus from the dead.

Happy Easter.

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

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## Australian Baptist Ministries



***"It is finished,"*** were the last words from the lips of Jesus as He hung on the Cross. On the surface it sounds like, "At last, it's over." But, the true sense of the cry declares, "My purpose is accomplished!"

The two criminals also being crucified at the same time, the bored soldiers loitering around the execution site, and the crowds who swung by to see the spectacle, had no idea that anything of importance had been accomplished.

It looked very much like another dead Jew on a Roman cross. Nothing to write home about. But God was at work preparing for a new era, unlike anything the world had seen before. The resurrection of Jesus Christ began a new era when all people can meet God, one-on-one!

It doesn't matter if this Easter feels spectacular or fairly uninspiring, be assured that every moment you give thought to Jesus Christ, every time you honour Him and seek Him, every day you turn your heart again towards Him, He is accomplishing His purpose in you.

You are the reason He became a man, suffered and died on a cross. He loves you that much, even if it doesn't feel that way to you.

Perhaps the greatest words in history, "It is finished," were spoken by Jesus Christ as He was dying on the cross. What He finished enables you to have the opportunity to know God and His mercy, forgiveness and love. Forever.

This Easter, I invite you to explore what Jesus finished and how it can be the start of something that will change your life forever.

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

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## Australian Christian Churches



### THREE POWERFUL WORDS

Three powerful days in the history of humankind. Three powerful words spoken that impacts every individual. That is what defines the significance of Easter for us all.

Consider the innocent Son of God, hanging on a cruel Roman Cross, who uttered these three words as He took His final breath:

***'It is finished'*** (John 19:30)

Thankfully, He did not say, as some supposed, 'I am finished', but 'it is finished'.

What did Jesus mean by those words? Quite simply, He terminated the requirement that human endeavours enable us to enter into a relationship with God. That was over. All our efforts to be acceptable to God are in vain. The act of Divine love that put Jesus Christ on that cross is enough. All we need to do is accept that, by faith, that Jesus paid the price for our eternal life, once and for all.

Three words on Good Friday gave us eternal life; and on the third day, three more words gave us the reason for our hope in Him. They are, ***'He is risen'*** (Matthew 28:6).

Through His death, He gave us life, and through His resurrection, He gave us hope. At a time when life seems filled with stress, uncertainty and anxiety, we have peace that comes from a confidence that we are accepted, forgiven and loved by God. This brings a rich hope for each and every day – for one reason alone: Jesus.

May these three words bring you closer to our living and loving God this Easter.

*Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President  
Australian Christian Churches (ACC)*

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