

Easter Sunday – ‘Son-rise at Sunrise’ Mark 16:1-8

Who was up to see the sunrise this morning? It’s a common tradition at Easter – but truthfully not one I’ve partaken in for a while. In fact now that the mornings are lengthening, and sunrise is now about 6am, I imagine many of us are still dead to the world at sunrise each morning. Though equally some of you will often see sunrise, either because you have young children, or because you have to be up early for work, or perhaps you’re just a light sleeper.

But there’s nothing like a good sunrise, is there? When Jeremiah thinks about God and describes His mercies as ‘new every morning’ there’s something that rings true about that when we see the sun rise. Whatever our circumstances, our spirits lift, as light floods into the world once again.

In fact I think sunrise could easily be described in 3 words:

GLORIOUS – what’s your favourite creation moment? Is it on the shores of the sea? At the top of a mountain? As you face a mighty storm cloud gathering? Of all the sights of creation, perhaps sunrise is the most inspiring. The birds certainly think so at this time of year. If you do happen to wake early, you’ll enjoy the dawn chorus at its best. On the rare occasions it happens for me, I like to imagine that what the birds are singing is: ‘the sun’s up! It’s glorious’ (REPEAT)

And best of all, it happens every day. For most people, the other sights are occasional treats – but we can, if we wish, enjoy dawn every day.

But the fact that it happens every day also means something else – it’s **UNNOTICED**. We kind of take it for granted. The most glorious sight of all creation happens every 24 hours without fail – and yet we hardly ever notice. It’s so regular, so much part of the fabric of existence, it’s largely ignored.

But we need sunrise don’t we? It might be both glorious & unnoticed, but it’s also a third thing: **LIFEGIVING**. The earth can’t function without sunlight. We need the sunlight to make things grow, to provide warmth and light to all things, and therefore heat (at least sometimes in the UK). If you like to watch wildlife programmes, one thing you’ll notice about parts of the world that have long periods of darkness is that very few people, animals and plants live in them. Creation needs the sun. The sun is constantly bringing us new life. Sunrise every morning is lifegiving, a sign of new life.

Today is Easter Sunday, and we celebrate another kind of sunrise – with a change of just one letter, **we celebrate SON-RISE**. And Mark’s gospel tells us that on that first Easter day, the two coincide: just after sunrise, it says, the two Marys and Salome go to the tomb. The world-changing event happens at dawn. Son-rise at sunrise. And as we gaze on that empty tomb this morning, we can note that this son-rise can also be described with those same 3 words:

It’s GLORIOUS. Look at the details: not just the angel, Matthew also tells us about the earthquake, the brilliant light. Just think about what it would be like to witness someone rise from the dead... When Jesus rises from the dead it’s extraordinary. Hard-bitten Roman soldiers fall to the ground in awe. The angel has to say to the women: ‘Don’t be alarmed.’ Son-rise is glorious. It still is, by the way. As we gather today along with millions of others around the world, may God capture our hearts again with a vision of his glory, as his Son rises gloriously from the dead.

It's UNNOTICED. At least, it is by most of our culture. Over Easter weekend you'll get more news about travel on a bank holiday weekend than about the resurrection. There's a full programme of league football on Good Friday, and FA Cup and Premier League games on Easter Day itself. Most shops will be open every day this weekend. Life for many goes on as normal.

Jesus once described the kingdom of God as being like treasure hidden in a field – and more than ever I think that image is true. We are the few in our society looking for that treasure – but let's not forget the punchline in that story. When the chap finds it, he sells everything he has to buy that field. The hidden treasure of finding Jesus is still the best thing in the world. The good news of the Christian story is still the best news I ever heard. Like the sunrise, our culture might have got so used to it that it largely ignores it – but may we encounter it again today like that treasure in the field, the glorious, beautiful secret of God's life and love meeting with humanity and changing our lives forever.

And that is ultimately what the son-rise is about, isn't it? **It's LIFE GIVING.** Jesus rises to new life, but it's not just for him. He promises that all those who follow him will receive that life too. From now on, Jesus gets to decide who receives the life of God eternally – and he's told us who that is. All those who follow him! That's why we celebrate! That's why when we declare Jesus is alive we are declaring the most profound, life-changing statement in all history. The women who met Jesus couldn't help but worship him. Millions of people around the world who gather to share in this good news can't help but worship him. Will we worship him today?

For many of us here, that's exactly what we've come to do. But perhaps for some, you're not sure why you're here, or what you think. I want to suggest that that deciding what you think about all this is the most important question you will ever answer. There is no more important story in the world. After all, if it's true, we're talking about the judge of the living and the dead. I'd want to be on the right side of that one! So if you have Christian friends or family, ask them. Or get in touch with me in the next few weeks, I'm likely to be running something after Easter to explain the meaning of all this in more detail.

So as I close, the son-rise might be unnoticed by many today – but it is glorious and lifegiving. It's changed my life. Will it change yours this Easter?

And may God grant us all grace to cry with joy: Alleluia, Christ is risen!