

## Sermon Archive 581

Sunday 5 April, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Easter Day

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



### **A Reflection:** On the third day . . .

On the third day, I can't tell you that we're in a hugely different place. He's gone, and that cold fact hasn't. How long will it take to be in a different place? I don't know, but much longer than three days.

But the third day **does** allow us to attend to what we needed to defer. You can't be doing the work of washing and anointing a body on the Sabbath. They always said that he was slack about the Sabbath - HE WASN'T! He only ever wanted to honour what Sabbath was really about, but . . . you know. We buried him when we needed to, and now that Sabbath is over, we turn back to finishing the job of burial - giving him some dignity in our love. So, back to the tomb we go.

Deep in our heart, a sorrow. Front of our mind, though, an issue. His tomb is sealed by a stone too large for us to move. Don't you be demeaning our sex. Women are powerful people, our love is strong. Our determination to do the right thing is huge. But Mary and I (the other Mary) had seen the size of the stone rolled across the tomb - and we know that no amount of feminine determination is going to get us past it.

Maybe the guards posted to the tomb will help. They hadn't helped so far; they were only there to obstruct and kill rumours. But maybe some element of decency was within them - so that we could "move" **them** to "move" the stone.

We approach the tomb of Jesus, wondering what we will do. A reading from the gospel according to Matthew.

**The Easter Narrative:** Matthew 28: 1-7

**The Easter Reading:** Romans 8: 35-39

## **The Easter Sermon:** Nothing in call creation

Remember that birth that happened in Bethlehem? It was a birth into a world where kingdom-crumbling kings declared all babies should die. From the start there was opposition. From the start also, though . . . this sense (through angel song in the skies) that closeness to God was being given - heaven entering earth. Early on in the ministry, Nicodemus was to say "we know that you are from God, for without God, no one could be doing the things you do". When they asked him to teach them how to pray, he told them to call their God "Abba, Father" - the most remarkable (some said scandalous) expression of closeness. Not "the almighty". Not the One whose name cannot be uttered - but "Abba, Father". Late in his time, to those who asked him "just show us the Father", he'd say "How can you ask me that? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? He had unity too with those whom he believed his God had given him. "All mine are yours, and yours are mine", he'd said. This Son of God and Son of Man was the **connected** life. It was a ministry of connection.

Do you remember the kingdom-crumbling kings? Herod declaring that all babies should die? It was a prefiguring of sorts - a crazy royal decree hell-bent on breaking up the unity he came to build. It would pursue him as the lion ate the lamb, as the leopard killed the kid, as the child was bitten by the snake. The most remarkable campaign was waged against him, as he sought to say "the kingdom is within you / among you". Eventually, a people in a far-away place and century would mark a Lenten season by counting the stones placed before him to stop him. On a Friday they would wonder at the immense weight of the image of a great stone blocking the Christ of Life from the world. The stone, the seal, the watch . . .

But . . . Paul, an apostle, spoke of how the powers of separation have surely failed.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will affliction and distress? They blamed him for many things, though he was innocent. They offered him something that looked like a trial, but gave no justice. They wearied him with their lack of capacity to understand. They brought him to the point of saying "My God, why have you forsaken

me?" They rolled a stone across the door of the tomb, and said "separation is complete". Today that stone is rolled away.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will famine or nakedness or peril or sword? They took him to the point of having to say "I thirst". They gambled for his clothes - so what was he left to wear as the world looked on upon his nakedness? What is peril, if not dying before the handful of those who care and the derision of all the rest who don't? They used a sword to pierce him, to make sure that he had died. They rolled a stone across the door of the tomb, and said "separation is complete". Today, that stone is rolled away.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will death? It was wisdom, until Easter that death separates us. And we, on this side of the death of those whom we've loved have attested to it. The ache, the hurt, the silence, the missing. It is a stone. Today, that stone is rolled away.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will life? Such a strange question, until we live a life that leaves us defeated. The confusing life. The life so long, the spirit kind of finds itself wanting to fly from the weight. The life of Job, when nothing makes sense. The life in which someone says "the lights went out". It is a stone. Today, that stone is rolled away.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will angels or rulers - those who confront us with our small power in a great tussle of greater power - the scattering of the meek, the exalting of the mighty, the sending away empty of the hungry, the rich filled with good things, the strength of the universe's arm given to those in mighty seats. If not the angels, then certainly the rulers have rolled **these** stones in the way of our hope. Putin. Netanyahu. Countless others . . . whose names we'd rather not utter. Rulers? We see a stone - which today is rolled away.

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will height or depth? In the depth - that deep sense that no matter what we do, no matter how we call on our better angels, that great machine is grinding along with a heavy stone to keep us in the earth, in the tomb - far from the heights. Shall we lean into our cynicism? Or our black humour? Or

our toughening up in "we don't care"? We flick our finger at life (if not at the One who gifts us with life) . . . We see a stone. Well, today that stone is rolled away.

**And finally, who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Neither things present, nor things to come. Come what may, whatever it is, no matter the weight of the stone with which it presents us, none of it will be equal to the powerful mystery of Easter.

The powerful mystery of Easter is that two women go to the tomb, wanting to do their duty of love, knowing that it won't be possible because of the great, heavy stone. They know that **they** can't move it (too heavy) - and probably can't rely on the strength of the soldiers either, because the soldiers are all caught up with kingdom-crumbling for their king.

They arrive at the tomb, finding that already, through some Easter act of God, the stone has been removed.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;  
Christ has burst the gates of hell.  
Love's redeeming work is done;  
Fought the fight, the battle won; Alleluia!

Nothing - nothing can separate us from the love of God,  
in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.  
The Lord is risen.  
He is risen indeed.  
Amen.

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