

AM Gathering

Easter Sunday - All-age

31 March 2024

10:30am **2:00 Mini Welcome**

Hello and welcome to Hope City Church Edinburgh. My name is Laura and I'm part of the team here at Hope City.

A very warm welcome to everyone who's joined us on this special Sunday morning in-person and live online: we're going to remember and celebrate the story of the very first Easter!

The programme is going to be different from usual this week and our children will stay with us throughout but we'll still offer a creche later. We'll explain everything as we go, and we'll be done in an hour. And the big theme to watch out for is this: "unexpected"

So let's start the Easter story together.

10:32am **0:10 bring room to darkness**

curtains shut, lights off, screens black, just red down-glow

10:32am **2:00 Story: John 20:1-9**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb.

He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

10:34am **3:45 Christ The Lord Is Risen Today** in [Bb] - v1, v2, v3, v4

10:37am **1:30 Responsive prayer**

Repetitive refrain "hallelujah, Christ is risen!"

10:39am **2:00 Thought 1: Unexpected Contents**

no body! John 20:1, 5-7

This morning we're going to talk about five unexpected things in the easter story. And the first one is **unexpected contents**.

Children, what do you think is in this box? [ice-cream box with lettuce]

What do you think is in here? [tissue box with bank notes]

Unexpected contents, right? But is it good news or bad news? Depends on what's inside, right?

Imagine the scene we read about from the bible. Jesus' good friends saw him die on Friday. They knew where he had been buried. Saturday has been very quiet and sad.

And now it's Sunday. It was so early that it was still dark. Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' friends, was going to the tomb where Jesus' dead body had been laid.

What do you think Mary expected to find there? [interaction] You've got it: Jesus' dead body.

Some things are easy to lose: the remote control. Your phone. But you don't just lose a dead body. When you put it somewhere, it stays there. Quite big and hard to miss. So it's absolutely what Mary's expecting to find.

But when she gets there, the stone tomb door has been opened. So she rushes off to tell her friends - they come running and get a huge surprise when they look inside:

unexpected contents. No body - just the stuff it was wrapped up in, all tidy and left behind. Unexpected contents: No body! Let's sing together about that.

10:41am **4:00 O Praise The Name (Anástasis) in [A]** - V1, V2, C, Tag, V3, C, Tag, V4, C

10:45am **1:00 Creche Out**

<Hope City Kids slide>

Time now for our helpers and babies to head out to creche - they'll all be joining us later for communion.

Baby creche is over here on your left and toddler creche is the last room down this hall on your right.

It's unusual for us to not run a special kids' programme - but we have plenty in store for the kids in here this week as we celebrate Easter together.

Why don't you say hello to someone nearby while we get our babies and toddlers to creche - perhaps ask the person near you how their week has

been? And our team will be handing out something for all the children staying with us, too.

If things do get too much in here for your children, parents you can take them out and use some of the other spaces in our building to let them run off steam for a bit - there's a live relay in the Kitchen.

10:46am **1:30 Easter gift bags -> HCKids**

10:47am **2:30 Thought 2: Unexpected Confusion**

Jesus' resurrection was foretold yet not understood. John 20:9

So we're talking about five unexpected things this morning. First, unexpected [wait for congregation] contents - a stone rolled away, grave clothes inside - but no body. Second, **unexpected confusion**. Unexpected confusion.

One of the things that really surprises me in this story is how clueless and confused the disciples are about what's going on.

Say I tell you my plan for next week [slide]: I'm going to be working in the church office on Tuesday, from home Wednesday, in the office Thursday, and from home on Friday.

Now imagine you walk into the church office on Thursday, and there's my laptop on the desk and my coat on a chair. What are you thinking? Matt's working from the office today, of course. Must be getting coffee. Because that's true, I do get a lot of coffee.

So when Jesus tells his disciples he is going to be killed and after three days rise again - [slide] Mark 8:31 - speaking so plainly about it that his disciples tell him to stop talking about dying, how come they are so confused about what's going on here? duh!

But they are confused: [slide] John 20 verse 9: "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." Even after he'd told them he was going to be betrayed and then die - and that had happened, just like he'd said - and then on the third day that he'd rise from the dead.

Take a moment and ask yourself: why do *you* think they are so confused?

Here's what I think: They're confused because dead people stay dead. Everyone knows that. So even though Jesus did wonderful, extraordinary things while he was alive, it's really hard for them to believe a *dead* Jesus is going to do anything - apart from staying dead. And it's hard for us to believe that too.

But let's pick up the story in the bible again. Leona's going to read for us.

10:50am **1:30 Story: John 20:11-16**

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

10:51am **2:30 Thought 3: Unexpected comfort**

Jesus died and yet lives John 20:13, 15-16

Five unexpecteds. One, **unexpected** [wait for congregation] **contents** - no body; Two, **unexpected** [wait] **confusion** - disbelieving disciples; Three?

unexpected comfort

Mary is crying 'cause she thinks Jesus is still dead – *and worse than that*, she thinks his body has been stolen, the last connection she has to the one who'd changed her life. She's so sad, she sees two angels and doesn't even raise an eyebrow. She's so confused, when she sees Jesus, she thinks he's the gardener!

The thing that finally gets through to her? **Her name on Jesus' lips.** I guess he must have called her name many times before – but never did it mean so much. Can you imagine the moment it dawned on her she'd found the Jesus she was looking for – not just his dead body, but Jesus, alive again!

Think about this: Jesus has just risen from the dead and he has a LOT to do – starting the church, changing the world, ruling the universe. But here he is, hanging around in a garden, comforting a confused Mary. He cares about her, about one ordinary, insignificant-seeming person, about her sadness.

And **Jesus cares about us, too** – about the things in our lives that make us weep, about the things that make it hard for us to see him and to believe him. He's not too busy off ruling the universe to pay attention to us. Jesus cares - and if we come to him, if we go looking for him, even if we're confused and doubting, he'll meet us and comfort us, too, just like he does for Mary.

When Jesus calls her name, I imagine it like a **door opening** inside her heart: Mary, it's not all over. Mary, everything Jesus said is true – true after all!

Well imagine this: if you're trusting Jesus, one day, you will hear him say *your* name and *you* will be overjoyed, *you* will smile and *you* will know exactly who he is - and that everything he said is true after all.

And if you're not trusting Jesus yet, but you want to go looking for him, we have a great course coming up called **Uncover** - why not book in for that?

Let's sing together about this Unexpected comfort.

10:54am **3:45 *What A Friend We Have In Jesus* in [F] - v1, v2, C1, v3, C1, v4, C2**

10:58am **0:30 Link to prayer**

Unexpected comfort: He cares - Jesus cares - so we take things to Jesus in prayer. And that's what Pat is going to help us do together as a church now. Pat?

10:58am **3:00 Prayers of the People**

11:01am **3:00 Prayer requests**

<prayer slide>

Thanks Pat. It's great to bring things to Jesus in prayer - because he cares. We can bring other people's needs and concerns to Jesus too, not just our own. We have a special way of doing that here at Hope City: through our prayer tool.

Please take a minute just now and think if there's anything you could share that we can pray for together, whether you're young or old.

If you've never done this before, it's really easy to post a prayer request - give it a try or ask someone around you to help - and let us pray together to our Jesus who cares.

I'm going to give us two minutes to do that just now. Parents, why not help your children share something?

[slide + 2min]

We lift all these things to you, our Lord Jesus who cares. Amen.

Well, we're not done with our Easter story yet. Let's pick it up again...

11:04am **1:30 Story: John 20:14-18**

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

11:06am 2:30 Thought 4: Unexpected Closeness

Jesus leaves yet brings us closer Jn 20:17 my brothers ... my father and your father

Five unexpecteds. One, **unexpected** [wait for congregation] **contents** - no body; Two, **unexpected** [wait] **confusion** - disbelieving disciples; Three, **unexpected** [wait] **comfort** - Jesus cares. Four:

unexpected closeness.

Mary discovered Jesus is alive, not dead and she's so excited she's giving her friend a great big hug. But then he tells her to stop: **"do not hold on to me."** Why? Because, after comforting her, Jesus has more to do - he will ascend, that is, go up, to the Father, to God in Heaven, to reign with him.

Awesome though it is to think of the Jesus she knows taking his rightful place of authority at the Father's right hand, I can't help but imagine Mary feeling a bit sad. I mean, she thought she'd lost him, found him again, and now he's going to leave after all?! I can only imagine a sad face - like **our dog** watching us walk back out the door just minutes after we're home from a long day.

But before we start thinking Jesus is distancing himself from Mary, from us, listen carefully to where he tells Mary he's going - something she's to pass on to the other disciples. Jesus doesn't say, "look, it's been nice to catch up with you but sorry, I need to get back to *my* family now" - like he might to a friend or acquaintance. Instead, he tells her [**slide**] "I am ascending to My Father and your Father."

This is big because Jesus tells Mary - and all his disciples - they can call God Father, just like he does. That they're part of God's family - just as much as Jesus is. That Jesus counts his disciples as brothers and sisters. That's **unexpected closeness.**

And the only way this could happen – that we could become part of God’s family after humankind turned our backs on him and walked away – is through what Jesus did on the cross: [Rom 5:10] “while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son” the bible tells us. Jesus’ death opens the way for our broken relationship with God to be put back together, making us family.

unexpected closeness. Let's stand and sing together about this.

11:08am **4:00 The Love Of The Father** in [A] - Intro, V1, V2, C, V3, C, B, Cx2

11:12am **1:00 Story: John 20:18-22**

Let's pick up our story once more and hear one final section for today:

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

11:13am **3:30 Thought 5: Unexpected Calling**

disciples fear yet are sent with power - Jn 20:19, 21-22

Five unexpecteds. One, **unexpected** [wait for congregation] **contents** - no body; Two, **unexpected** [wait] **confusion** - disbelieving disciples; Three, **unexpected** [wait] **comfort** – Jesus cares. Four: **unexpected** [wait] **closeness**. Five?

unexpected calling.

Did you notice where that last reading started? Jesus' followers are hiding in a room with the door blocked because they are *terrified*. And that’s pretty reasonable: Jesus' powerful enemies just had Jesus killed in a horrible way. They might well come after these followers next.

It’s pretty reasonable – but let’s be honest: it’s not impressive. They’re not protesting in the streets or planning how to fight back. They’re not boldly lining up to “go down with the ship” and die like Jesus did. They’re hiding, scared and confused even after Mary’s news.

So when Jesus suddenly shows up, we have to imagine they were more

than a little embarrassed. "Hey Jesus - we.. uh we were just about to go and start sharing your message, Jesus..." "yeah, yeah, just deciding who would go to which street"

But Jesus isn't cross with them for being afraid and confused: "peace be with you," he says, showing his pierced hands, his wounded side – it's really the same Jesus that died. He says it again: "peace be with you."

Jesus had no illusions about his disciples or how they'd respond to the terrible events of those past few days – he knew, and told them in advance, that they'd all desert him; that his closest friend would claim he never knew Jesus. But still, "peace," he says.

Peace - and then something really surprising: "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He has a job for them to do. And it's a big job, an important job – the most important job in the world, in fact.

Imagine a really, really important job: Shutting down an overheating nuclear reactor; Responding to a new pandemic. Imagine there's a job like that - and the boss chooses people who've done nothing but fail. Who are truly unimpressive. That's what this is like – it's an **unexpected calling**.

Is there any hope for the mission with *these* disciples? Yes – because Jesus doesn't send them alone – he sends someone with them: **God the Holy Spirit**. That is why the Church is still here in our world today, still advancing.

What's this got to do with us? Jesus has no illusions about us either: how unimpressive we're going to be, all the stuff we're going to get wrong, our fears that will hold us back.

But just like those first disciples, when we get this same unexpected calling, he sends us with the same Spirit. That is why the Church is still here in our world today, still advancing. Not because of us – because of Him.

unexpected calling.

11:17am **3:00 Breathe On Me Breath Of God** in [F] - V1, V2, Tag, V3, Tag

11:20am **2:00 Communion introduction**

In a moment, we'll bring our creche babies and the team serving them back, and then share bread and wine together. We're following a pattern Jesus began with his disciples at the last meal before his death, a pattern which the church has continued ever since.

Matt talked about the unexpected closeness that Jesus offers us: Remember Jesus calling God "my father and your father"? When Jesus speaks to his disciples about sharing bread and wine [gesture] at the Last

Supper, he points to his death on the cross, the only way that reconciliation is possible.

But why share bread and wine today, Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday? Our focus has been on Jesus rising, not dying.

Because Jesus' resurrection is the proof that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice in our place. He wasn't just some guy making big claims - we really can have this **unexpected closeness**.

And because Jesus goes to be with the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit to us, empowering us in this **unexpected calling** Matt was talking about. "It is for your good that I am going away." Jesus says: "Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Jesus told us the bread represents his body, given for us, and the wine represents his blood, poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. We share bread and wine this morning celebrating the unexpected closeness that secured for us, and celebrating the Holy Spirit's empowering for our unexpected calling.

Maybe this is all very new to you? You don't need to join in - just sit and watch. If this isn't your faith, or you're not quite there yet, we're so glad you're here but we'd ask you not to take bread or wine.

But if Jesus is your only hope, and you believe these things for yourself, you're invited to join in - whether you're a regular here at Hope City or not, whether you're here in person or with us digitally.

11:22am **3:00 Creche return**

So, as we prepare for communion, Parents with children in creche, please could you go fetch your children and bring them to join us here?

Our musicians will play gently while we do this.

11:25am **2:30 Transition + Instructions**

We're going to share bread and wine in a moment to remember Jesus' death for us - so if you can, kids, please try and keep quiet. It'll make space for others around you to think about what's going on - and it will help you think about it too. Parents, see if you can help your children with that.

Here's how we're going to do this:

<communion map>

Our musicians will begin to play quietly. We'll invite you to come forward row by row. You don't have to come - but if you'd like to, make your way into this central isle – form two queues, take bread and wine, then use the side aisles to make your way back to your seats. Once you're seated, remember Jesus, then eat and drink.

If you're on the sides, please wait until the centre has been served before coming up so we don't end up with a traffic jam. If you're at home, take your own bread and wine whenever you're ready, knowing we're together in Christ.

Parents, if you come forward with your children, our communion servers would love to pray a blessing over them if they've not yet made their faith their own.

Each server has a gluten free option if you need that, and on the tables there's grape juice as an alternative to wine too.

11:27am **1:30 Communion Institution**

Listen to Jesus the night before he died on that very first Easter:

<slide>

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

<slide>

I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

11:29am **2:00 Communion Prayer**

Let's pray together now:

Lord God

We praise you for this unexpected comfort: you love us, you care for each one of us. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

We praise you for this unexpected closeness: through your great mercy, through Jesus' death in our place, we are reconciled to you and can call

you our Father, Jesus declaring us his brothers and sisters.

We praise you for this unexpected calling: taking weak and broken people like us, and bringing us into your life-giving mission to transform this world. Empowering us through Your Spirit which the risen and ascended Jesus sends.

You tell us that if we confess the wrong things we've done to you, you will forgive us. So as we prepare to eat and drink these symbols of grace we confess and turn from the ways we have gone against you in our thoughts, words and deeds. We bring these before you now in our own hearts....

[count to 10 slowly]

Please give assurance to each one who trusts in you that we are truly and fully forgiven on account of Christ. Through your Spirit, alive within us, help us to live for you from now on.

We praise you, Jesus our Lord, Spirit our Empowerer, God our Father.

Amen.

11:31am **6:30 Take Communion**

11:37am **4:00 Grace So Marvellous** in [A] - Intro, V1, C, Tag, V2, C, Tag, V3, Cx2, E

11:41am **2:00 Livestream Close**

Thank you once again for joining us this Easter morning.

We close with these words from Jesus to his disciples before that first Easter:

You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Thank you so much for joining us. If you are with us in the building, please stick around, grab a coffee, and meet someone new. If you're online, say a goodbye in the chat before heading off.

It's been great to be together this morning. See you next week: same time, same place.
