

Ripple On Resurrection

Matthew 28: 1 - 10

Purpose: To portray the resurrection of Jesus as an event of cosmic significance with a ripple effect that passes throughout human history.

Although its main shock actually happened at 5:36 p.m. on Thursday 26th March 1964, one of the largest earthquakes of all time has been dubbed the Good Friday earthquake. Measuring 8.4 on the now superseded Richter Scale, it was the third largest earthquake ever recorded. In the first twenty four hours after the earthquake there were eleven (11) aftershocks. Each one recording a magnitude of more than eight on the Richter Scale. In the next three weeks there were a further nine (9) major aftershocks. Altogether there were more than 10,000 aftershocks and it took almost eighteen months before the aftershocks were to be considered no longer dangerous.

The tsunami that resulted swept down the west coast of North America leaving a trail of immense destruction in its wake. In Louisiana on the other side of the continent, several fishing boats were sunk. In South Africa it was reported that the water the wells swirled and bubbled. In fact, the entire earth vibrated as a result of this major earthquake which was recorded on seismographs worldwide.

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Earthquakes figure prominently too in Matthew's story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. I'm not sure how they would have ranked on the Richter Scale, but in Matthew's passion narrative when Jesus breathes his last, the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shakes, rocks are split apart, tombs are opened and the bodies of old saints who had died are raised to life. It's an earthquake and it terrifies the centurion and the guards watching over the tomb of Jesus to the point where they say: "Truly, this man was the son of God!"

And, then when Jesus is raised from death, Matthew tells about a second earthquake: This one apparently the work of the angel of the Lord who rolls the stone away from the tomb and sits on it, scaring the living daylights out of the centurion and the guards again. They are rendered numb and speechless, oblivious witnesses to the risen Lord Jesus as the women who have come to the tomb hear for the first time the awesome good news of the resurrection.

Like, I say: I have no idea what Matthew's earthquakes would have measured on the Richter Scale, but I do know about the ripple effects of the resurrection. Like the 1964 Good Friday earthquake, the ripple effects of the resurrection move far and wide. They have moved across the centuries and traversed every nook and cranny of all the nations and territories. There is immense power and significance in the reality of resurrection. But, unlike the Good Friday earthquake, the ripples of resurrection are not the creators of immense devastation - except

for the power of evil. The ripples of resurrection are a force for good as new life and hope break into the experience of humankind. Abundant life has come and keeps on coming with the ripples of resurrection.

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Joey was six years old and wanted to meet with God. He thought that it would be a long trip to where god lived, so he packed his school bag with food for the journey. He made sure he had plenty of his favourite chocolate chip cookies and a couple of containers of orange juice. He hadn't gone very far from home when he met an old man sitting in a park watching some birds playing in the fountain.

Joey sat down next to him and opened his school bag. He was about to take a drink of orange juice when he noticed that the man looked a little hungry, so Joey offered him one of his chocolate chip cookies. The man accepted appreciatively and smiled at the young boy. His smile was so pleasant that Joey wanted to see it again, so he offered him the other orange juice. Again the old man smiled. Joey was delighted. They sat there for much of the afternoon eating and smiling, but never saying a word.

As darkness fell, Joey realised that it was time to go home, and began to leave. He had taken just a few short steps, when he suddenly swung around and gave the old man a hug which of course earned him the biggest smile ever. "What have you been doing?" his mother asked as he came through the door. "I had lunch with God," he replied. "You know what? He's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile in another part of the city, when the old man walked through the door of the family home, the family asked him, "Where have you been? Why are you so happy?" "I ate cookies in the park with God," the old man replied. And before the family had time to respond, he added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

I'm not sure that you could measure the power of an old man's smile on the Richter Scale, but I believe that it's a ripple of resurrection. And I'm not sure that you can measure lunch in the park eating chocolate chip cookies, but I'm sure that such things are a ripple effects of resurrection.

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The ripple effects of resurrection move in all directions. They move forward in time and backwards in time. They ripple on transcending space and time in ways which even the most sophisticated philosophical categories fail to fully embrace. They ripple out as the wildflowers bloom in the forest. They are present in small acts of human kindness. The ripples of resurrection are everywhere!

The ripple effects of resurrection can be momentous events; transformative events when a Nelson Mandela and a Desmond Tutu help a nation break free from the tyranny of apartheid.

Resurrection rippled through the parliament and the people of the nation when the Prime Minister of Australia, in the spirit of reconciliation, finally said “sorry” to the stolen generations.

On Good Friday afternoon, I watched Compass on ABC TV celebrate with the Anungu people the restoration of their Church at Ernabella. Right from the start Ernabella, now known as the Pukatja Community was different from other missions of its day. The missionaries respected and learnt the local language and culture. In the traditional Anungu stories they heard powerful parallels and resonances with the Christian scriptures. In 1974, three years before the formation of the Uniting Church, its Presbyterian founders handed control of the community to the local community. The Pukatja Community continues to thrive today. Another resurrection ripple.

The ripple effects of resurrection can be sacred moments experienced in the baptism of a child or as we share in the sacrament of Holy Communion. A well-listened to sermon, a well-placed prayer, the celebration of singing a well-loved hymn – all ripples of resurrection.

And simple acts of loving kindness! Intimate moments with a good friend or with the family! Each in their own way a ripple of resurrection! Each an expression of the abundant life born that day when, in Matthew’s story, the earth quakes and Jesus, who died on the cross, walks free from the tomb.

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Eternal life, abundant life, have their epicentre in that day which we especially celebrate on Easter Sunday, when the shackles of death are broken and God rises triumphant in Christ who in both life and death cannot be contained by the grave. I don’t know how to measure the scale of the earthquake that Matthew writes about on the Richter Scale, and, to be honest, I actually don’t think it really matters! What really matters is that the effects of resurrection ripple on beyond this day.

That’s what matters most! It matters that we are resurrection people living out the spirit of resurrection in the world. The true measure of resurrection is the way it shapes and changes the lives of those who feel it ripple effects.

Pope John Paul II said: “Do not abandon yourselves to despair, we are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song.” I’m not sure when he said it or why he said it. It’s one of those quotes that are all over the place on the internet, but no one ever seems to reference it to a particular context.

Perhaps that shouldn’t matter. In matters of human spirituality we can spend so much time worrying about the historical details that we lose the core conviction.

And, as Christians our core convictions are this: Jesus is alive. Jesus lives on in us. Resurrection ripples on! Bringing hope! Transforming human history and experience!

Changing lives! A life lived in the spirit of resurrection knows the reality of that transformation. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song!