

The Big Story

I want to welcome all of you here today. This is party central. This is one of many churches in Whangarei where we recognise and celebrate that Jesus rose from the grave and that this one great historical event changes everything.

This weekend we have 50 or so of our youth and intermediates away on camps with a fair number of their leaders. So we are praying for them and expecting God to move and we are also praying that here this morning are a few people who don't usually come to church. We are hoping to get to know you after the service on the bouncy castle or around some party food in the café.

But if you are checking out church for the first time we want you to know why Jesus raising from the dead 2000 years ago is such a big deal to us.

And so I want to tell you "The Big Story" this morning.

In the beginning of time God created the whole universe. He created the animals, the plants, the mountains, snapper and most valuable of all he created people. The first people were called Adam and Eve and they saw God every day and were super, super close to Him. God didn't want people to be robots. He didn't want them to have to love Him and so in the middle of the most beautiful garden ever seen he put one toxic fruit tree. And he said eat anything, have fun, but don't eat from that tree. If you want people to love you and God wants us all to love Him, you have to give them a choice and He did. Thousands of beautiful fruit trees, one bad one that they were not to touch but they did. Sadly they disobeyed God and because of that action pollution came into their lives. In the Bible that pollution is called sin. And sin stinks to God. He loves people but pollution must be cleaned out of people's lives so that they can know God.

As soon as Adam and Eve did the wrong thing God said, I am going to come to planet earth, be born a human and make a way for people to be my friends again.

God kept reminding people over many, many years that He was good and that He was sending someone to put things right, a saviour, the Messiah. Lots of God's servants, the prophets, spoke about Jesus hundreds of years before he was born as a baby at Christmas. One prophet, a man called Isaiah, wrote 700 years before Jesus was born lots of detail about where Jesus would be born, what he would do and even how he would die the most horrible of deaths.

2018 years ago Jesus was born, lived a perfect life with no pollution in Him, He did lots of miracles, healed people, forgave people their sins and completely obeyed God the Father in all things. Jesus fulfilled every one of the things that the old Prophets said He would do. He even told the people that He was God who had come to earth to save them all and get the pollution out of their lives.

But some people believed Him and some people didn't, in fact, lots of people in those days did not want someone kind and forgiving and serving, they wanted a king that would smash the Romans and make Israel the greatest nation in the world.

One night, Jesus got all his disciples together for one last meal. He was just about to let Himself be killed so that God could take the pollution out of our lives and we could be His friends again. He told them exactly what would happen to Him, that He would let the soldiers kill him so that His innocent death would be the way we could be forgiven of our bad behaviours. He told them that in three days He would come back to life again.

That night as Jesus went away to pray one of his friends had him arrested by the bad guys.

Reader 1

John 18:2-5 (CEV)

² *Jesus had often met there with his disciples, and Judas knew where the place was.*

^{three-5} **Judas had promised to betray Jesus. So he went to the garden with some Roman soldiers and temple police, who had been sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees. They carried torches, lanterns, and weapons. Jesus already knew everything that was going to happen, but he asked, "Who are you looking for?"**

They answered, "We are looking for Jesus from Nazareth!"

Jesus told them, "I am Jesus!"

Jesus was then arrested and treated terribly. He was taken to trial before several officials and everyone of them declared Him innocent. But the crowd turned against Him and kept shouting out for Him to be crucified – definitely the most cruel and horrible deaths imaginable.

Reader 2

John 19:4-6 (CEV)

⁴ Once again Pilate went out. This time he said, "I will have Jesus brought out to you again. Then you can see for yourselves that I have not found him guilty."

⁵ Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, "Here is the man!"^[a]

⁶ When the chief priests and the temple police saw him, they yelled, "Nail him to a cross! Nail him to a cross!"

Pilate told them, "You take him and nail him to a cross! I don't find him guilty of anything."

Even though Jesus could have called in a million super angels to defend Him; even though He could have spoken a word and killed all the people who were shaming Him and ripping at His body, He chose not to. He knew that if He died an innocent man His perfect record could be exchanged for our imperfect record and we could be forgiven. Jesus knew that it was God's plan from the beginning of the Big story to make a way for us all to know Him again and to love Him.

So He let them kill Him so we could be forgiven and pollution free in our hearts. He died a terrible death on a cross and was buried in a tomb. But then just as He had said, three days later He rose again.

Reader 3 John 20:11-18

¹¹ Mary Magdalene stood crying outside the tomb. She was still weeping, when she stooped down ¹² and saw two angels inside. They were dressed in white and were sitting where Jesus' body had been. One was at the head and the other was at the foot. ^{1three} The angels asked Mary, "Why are you crying?"

She answered, "They have taken away my Lord's body! I don't know where they have put him."

¹⁴ As soon as Mary said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not know who he was. ¹⁵ Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him."

¹⁶ Then Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to him, "Rabboni." The Aramaic word "Rabboni" means "Teacher."

¹⁷ Jesus told her, “Don’t hold on to me! I have not yet gone to the Father. But tell my disciples that I am going to the one who is my Father and my God, as well as your Father and your God.” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene then went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She also told them what he had said to her.

And so that is why we party at Easter. It’s the Sunday we remember that Jesus rose again, and if anyone believes in Him, says sorry for their sins, is baptized in water and the Holy Spirit – then they can be His friends forever.

Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life. If anyone wants to connect with God the only way is through knowing Him.

I would love to talk to anyone who wants to know how to become a friend of God’s and really know Him personally. If you would be willing to answer someone’s questions about God and help them get right with God would you show your willingness to help by raising your hand?

If you want to connect with Jesus, speak to one of these people or me after the service.