

# Rising Interest Rates

Readings: Acts 10: 34-43; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

When I was younger I could never understand why adults always wanted to watch the news, there were far more interesting things to watch like *The Goodies* and *Dr. Who*. But then as time went past I too found myself watching the news, wanting to catch up with what was happening in the world, to be informed. But there was one part during which I would always vague out, the financial report: lots of numbers and figures that I couldn't understand and frankly didn't want to. I had no stake in stocks, I was not bound by bonds, I had no interest in interest. But again as time went on these became of far greater importance, they are of interest. For these numbers were about my security and my future.

But the past few years have caused many to have doubts about such an idea of security, what will happen to interest rates, share prices, and is GFC2 just around the corner? Perhaps materialism was not such a good investment after all.

Then other parts of the news impact on our thinking with drought, flood, earthquake, tsunami and radiation, social unrest and immigration. It is no surprise that at such times people wonder what the future holds and where can true security be found? Rates of interest in bigger questions rise.<sup>1</sup>

Today I certainly want to raise your interest, because Easter, of course is all about rising and it is about our security and our future, but we will have to consider whether rising interest is enough.

## THE BASIC FACTS: RISING RATES INTEREST

The very basic facts of Easter should raise our interest. When the News starts they will give tasters of stories they are covering which will make you want to keep watching. Well a story about resurrection from the dead should certainly catch our attention and we would want to know more about that.

The Gospel of Matthew from which our reading came today could not really be clearer about what it is claiming. As Chapter 28 starts Jesus is quite literally dead and buried. Roman soldiers, as well as female friends of Jesus have all watched Jesus die. Joseph of Arimathea has taken his body, wrapped it and placed it in his own new tomb. Jesus and all the hopes that surrounded him are finished (27:54-61).

But then there is the discovery of the stone rolled away, the angelic announcement that the crucified one (that is the one who was dead) is now raised (back to life). Just in case there was any doubt that that this is the intended meaning he adds in the next sentence, raised from the dead. Matthew is underlining what is being claimed. Then finally of course there is the meeting with the risen Jesus himself who at the end of the chapter says that he has all authority in heaven and earth and everyone needs to know and respond. (28:16-20)

Financial reports love to have graphs, it is really impossible to see how you could graph this change. As the chapter starts Jesus' stocks have gone as low as they can go and lower, they are truly subterranean. But with the resurrection they have not only off the ground and gone through the roof but reach to heaven itself. This dramatic reversal is not due to off-shore buying but heavenly buying, for God has not forgotten his stake in Jesus, but rather has redeemed it, which is good news for Jesus and all others who have a share in him, if you will excuse the ongoing financial metaphor.

Such a remarkable change, a rising, a resurrection surely rates rising interest.

<sup>1</sup> It is was interesting to see an article in The Mercury on Easter Monday saying that attendance at Church Services was higher this year than in the past years and speculated that it was due to exactly these issues leading people to come back to the Church.

## THE DECEPTION: INTEREST RATES SLASHED

Matthew also writes his narrative in such a way that we want to take an interest in it, he tells of a cover up by which those who were opposed to Jesus sought to slash interest rates in him.

The guards who were at the tomb were there to keep Jesus disciples from stealing the body and starting rumours of a resurrection. But after the resurrection these same guards are paid off so that they will now claim that the very thing that the Jewish leaders had feared did in fact taken place, even if it is not fact. Those who were worried about deception now become the deceivers. They can't handle the truth.

Let face it, the idea is pretty preposterous. Jesus' disciples do not come across as criminal masterminds or masterminds of any kind really. These 11 are no Oceans 11. The idea of them both organising and having the guts to pull off such a daring raid is laughable. And as for the idea of the Roman guards being asleep and not waking during such a raid, this is hardly likely.

Why, then, does Matthew tell us all this? He is asking us to think about what we think happened. In trying to show how dreadful this deception is he is asking us, are perhaps we deceived? He is asking us to take an interest in working out what happened.

Matthew gives us all sorts of things to think about. He makes sure that we understand the women knew where Jesus was buried, so they went to the right tomb. He reports the angelic figure inviting the women to come and investigate the tomb which is now empty. The angel doesn't say "Look just take it on faith, you don't need to see the empty tomb" rather they are to check things out for themselves. The words "look" and "see" are prominent in the passage, we the readers are encouraged to do the same, to do some investigating.

But there is more than the empty tomb, there are the accounts of meeting with the risen Jesus himself. Both the women and the disciples meet with Jesus. In both accounts we have joy but there is also fear and doubt as you would expect in such an extraordinary circumstance. Matthew also tells us the little detail that the women clasped his feet. Why would he tell us that?

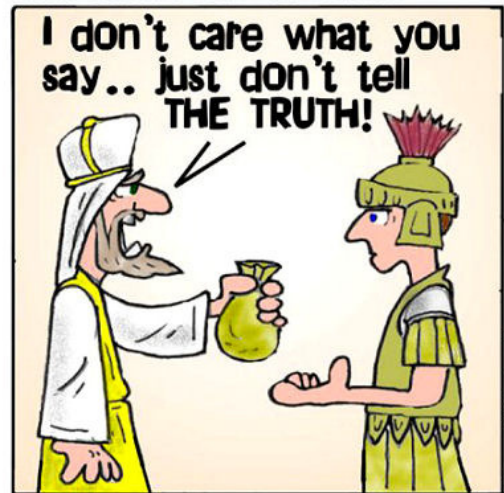
I love the *The Lord of the Rings* films and in *The Return of the King* there is a moment when Aragon takes control of the army of the dead and they fight against the powers of evil. We know they are dead, that they are ghosts because they are sort of transparent, they appear to be slightly decomposed, but importantly for our purposes, they float, they don't have feet. When we think of ghosts we generally imagine them as floating beings, not really attached to the earth, they don't have feet.

There is evidence that people of the time thought of ghosts in much the same way as our culture does. Ghosts don't walk, they float, and they float because whilst they be a soul they don't have feet. For them both to hold on to Jesus and especially to hold on to his feet tells us this ain't no ghost, this is some body so to speak.

I hope I have said enough to have raised your interest. Here is potentially the most extraordinary story of all time, the one who was crucified truly raised by God from the dead, and there are clear lines of evidence to investigate, to think through what we think happened.

Matthew certainly wants us to come to understand that Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.

THE BACK PEW - JEFF LARSON



Mt. 28:11-15 The coverup

## THE BIG FIGURE AND THE SMALL PRINT

But that brings us to the issue of whether interest is enough. In one sense I am speaking to the converted, you have shown that you are interested by coming along this day as we remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

But at a deeper level it is worth thinking through why you are here today. Are you just interested or something more?

I think it is worth us exploring this a bit further. Let us go back to the beginning of our reading. We are told that the women, the two Marys, are going to the tomb to look at it, they are visiting the grave. Why do people go to a grave, there may be all sorts of reasons. It may be out of respect for the dead, it may be out of love, it may be a way of dealing with grief, it may be out of a sense of duty, or showing honour to the one who died. All of these are reasonable reasons for going to go and look at a tomb. People will have their own reasons for going. But the one thing that they would not be expecting was to have to deal with the one who has died, they would have no expectations of them at all. They did not expect to be doing business with Jesus. Yet there he was saying "Greetings" or more simply just "Hello".

What about you? Why have you come to Church today? Is it out of honour of Jesus, is it out of duty, is it out of love for Jesus. All these are fine reasons for coming. You may have your own reasons for coming. But have you come with any expectation of meeting with Jesus, of doing business with him. Have you come as if to a grave? Yet he is here, and he wants to say "Hello".

There was a song in the mid eighties by Lionel Richie, called "Hello". Now Lionel was never my favourite artist but I have a particular dislike for this song. This is because a friend of mine happened to fall deeply in love, unrequited love, at the same time that this song was released and he made a tape which consisted entirely of this song. Over and over again, "Hello, is it me you're looking for." It is amazing how much you can come to hate a song.

But how much more annoying must it be to be the one saying "Hello" over and over again and yet being ignored. As we meet today do we sing, say words, go through motions about Jesus not realising that Jesus is here saying "Hello is it me you're looking for."

You see as we meet remembering the resurrection, we meet remembering the risen one, the one who is still risen, he is not absent by the Spirit he is with us. We do not meet in memory of a glorious past event but in the wondrous light of a present reality and promise of an eternal heavenly future.

I can act like the angel, the messenger, I can tell you of what has happened but what I really want is for you to meet with Jesus, to do business with him. He has promised to be with his people when they meet, which means he is here with us now. Do not leave today without saying "Hello" and truly meet the risen Christ.

### **What would it mean?**

What would the consequences of this mean? What is the fine print?

#### Worship

Firstly it would mean worship. This is the reaction of both the women and the disciples as they meet their risen Lord. We too need to recognise that there is someone greater than ourselves who deserves our worship, who deserves our thanks and praise. For remember this triumph was for us, a life offered in ransom for the forgiveness of sins. This is hinted at here as Jesus calls his disciples who had so recently betrayed him, his brothers.

#### Listen

Second we should listen There is also a strong emphasis in this chapter on the reliability of Jesus' word. The angel says to the women that he is risen just as he said (28:6). We then are to listen. We will hear words of comfort like "Do not be afraid", and in troubled times such as these we especially need to hear that. We will hear wonderful promises, promises of his presence with us always, of eternal life and joy. But we will

also hear commands and in obeying and learning we become his disciples, his followers.

Ready to do business

You see then that if you meet Jesus it means to change for it will take us out of ourselves and our self centredness into a life of gratitude, with him in every part of our life. Meeting with Jesus is life changing which is perhaps why so many never get beyond interest. But the deal is well worth it.

You may have come for all sorts of reasons today but are you now ready to do business with Jesus to come to him, to worship him, to trust him and to follow him, to be his disciple. It is not an easy path but it is the path of truth, it is the path of meaning, it is the path of security, it is the path of the risen Jesus, and he has promised that he will always be with us.

Interested? Do you feel your interest rising?

Then come let us do business with Jesus.

For Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.

*Richard Humphrey  
Dean of Hobart*