

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER 9/4/2025

Hugh here, filling in for Steve while he's at General Assembly of Australia. How are you today?

ENCOURAGEMENT: Jesus is not a life cut short

I'm sure you've heard of Alexander the Great. He was a Macedonian king and general who conquered most of the known world in a bit more than a decade. His empire was 5.2 million km² (half way between the size of modern-day India and Australia). As he rampaged around the world, he spread Greek culture and language to the places he conquered (including Israel, which is why the original New Testaments is written in Greek). Alexander really was great. The problem is he died at age 32, leaving no heir. It's one of the great what-ifs of history. What if Alexander had lived? What would he have achieved if he didn't die in the prime of life?

On Good Friday we'll reflect on the death of another ancient character who died in the prime of life. Jesus was crucified when he was about 37 years old, after just three years of ministry. In those three years, Jesus made a huge impact. Amongst other miracles, he healed hundreds, if not thousands of people. His teaching was radical and provocative. He clashed with the religious authorities. He delighted the crowds. And then he died. Like Alexander the Great, we're tempted to ask: what else might he have achieved if he lived?

But this is the wrong question to ask of Jesus. The gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel – it's just 16 chapters long. It opens with the words: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It doesn't mention the first thirty years of Jesus' life, but starts with his baptism. It then describes the next three years of Jesus' public ministry in ten chapters, slowing down to describe the last week of his ministry in six chapters, with the last day of that taking up two. The other gospels follow a similar pattern. This is revealing. The gospels show us that Jesus' arrest is not an unfortunate interruption to his mission. His suffering is not an unexpected change of course. His death is not a tragic shortening of a promising career. Yes, Jesus died in the prime of life, but his death was predicted:

“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” (Mark 10:33-34).

Yes, Jesus died in the prime of life, but his death was embraced:

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36).

Yes, Jesus died in the prime of life, but his death was necessary:

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45).

Yes, Jesus died in the prime of life, but his death was glorious: ‘Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”

“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62).

Yes, Jesus died in the prime of life, but his death was temporary:

“As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said.

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.” (Mark 16:5-6).

Jesus’ death is unlike any other. It is not the cutting short of a promising life, but the culmination of one. It isn’t the end, but the beginning. It isn’t a defeat, but a victory. That is what we celebrate at Easter.

EASTER SERVICES:

Good Friday Service: 9am Friday 18th April

Easter Services: 9am, 10.30am and 5pm Sunday 20th April

A REQUEST FOR PRAYER FROM COLIN AND ALISON MORROW (PIM MISSIONARIES)

A poetic message from Alison's Facebook:

Well, the last couple of weeks have been not great. And how do I deal with difficult days? I grab all the words in my vocabulary, rearrange them into stanzas and make up a poem. It helps me process things. Words are such a gift. I’m not sure I can really say that I hope you enjoy this one, however, it’s been very helpful for me to jot it down.

*Just last week, I received some news,
The horrible type that nobody would choose.
I looked to the end with my thoughts in a haze
And started to plan my final days.*

*I was scared and afraid, it was all quite traumatic,
The words from the doctor seemed very dramatic.
I prayed for some time and some space and some calm
And I prayed that the Lord would hold me in His arms.*

*I had MRI's, pet scans and needles galore
Until I thought I couldn't take any more.
I ate hospital food, which was all wishy-washy,
And they always forgot to bring me my coffee.*

*As I lay there with thoughts going round in my head,
I remembered some things that once I had read.
Our days are determined, they're set by the Lord,
It's in black and white, right there in God's Word.*

*So, the Lord knows my time and in Him I can rest.
He'll carry me through this difficult test.
His strength and bright hope will fulfil all my needs
Whilst I pause to see where this journey leads.*

*But still, I have asked God to give me more time,
I'm just not quite ready to hang up my rhymes.
I can't go just yet, not today, not tonight,
You see, I've still got some more poems to write!!*

Alison Morrow April 2025

Please pray for Alison and Colin at this time to be comforted in our great hope in Christ, to continue finding their refuge in his love, and to know and see the power of our God.

FINAL COMMENTS

*For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again;
death no longer has mastery over him.*

Romans 6:9

Love in Christ,
Hugh.