

Fr Kevin's homily for Easter, 4-5 April 2026

What happened once upon a time now happens all the time.

Let me begin this reflection by exploring what it means to say that something happened “once upon a time”. I know that this is the introduction to many fairy stories: “Once upon a time, there were three bears...”; “Once upon a time, there were three little pigs...”. Even so, that’s not what “once upon a time” means here. Here, “once upon a time” means two things. First of all, it means that something really happened, and also that it happened a long time ago. It happened “once”. It happened at a certain time. And that time was long ago. But secondly, “once upon a time” tells us that this event has had lasting significance – that it continues to influence how we see things and how we understand them. Let me give an example. The book of Genesis records that once upon a time a long time ago, three strangers – perhaps three angels – visited Abraham and Sarah. Abraham welcomed them, and prepared a meal for them. The strangers ate. And then they spoke a word of blessing for Abraham and Sarah. This elderly couple were childless, and the word of blessing which the strangers spoke was that Abraham and Sarah would have a son. (Gen 18:1-15) And indeed, about a year later, Sarah did give birth: she gave birth to Isaac, Sarah and Abraham’s precious son. (Gen 21:1-7) This happened “once upon a time” long ago, but this ancient story still influences how many people think. The story reminds us that welcoming the stranger may be a blessing not just for Abraham and Sarah but for us too. Abraham and Sarah lived about two thousand years before the time of Christ. But over two thousand years later, the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament referenced this story by advising, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Heb 13:2) Nowadays, a politician might try to tell white Australians that we’re in danger of being swamped by Asians, or that she’s fed up to the back teeth that Indigenous people receive special benefits, or that we’re also in danger of being swamped by Muslims. But even now, the story of Abraham and Sarah might remind us that when we welcome people who are different from us, those people can be a great blessing for us. The story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming the strangers happened “once upon a time” long ago, but it continues to influence how we see things and understand things even today.

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The Resurrection of Jesus also happened “once upon a time” long ago. But it too continues to influence how we see things now and how we choose to live our lives. Part of the reason for this is that we remember the Resurrection, and we believe in the Resurrection, and what the Resurrection reveals gives meaning and direction and purpose to our lives. But with the Resurrection, it’s even more than that. The Resurrection means that Jesus is alive, and that the risen Christ is with us and with the Church. The Resurrection means that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to us, and the Holy Spirit now dwells in the depths of our hearts. The Resurrection means that we belong to a community of believers, and that this community cares for us and supports us in our lives and our journeys of faith. And the Resurrection means that we know that the meaning and purpose of life is to serve one another, and indeed to give ourselves away in generous service.

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How does the Resurrection now happen all the time? Let me give you three examples: First of all, there’s a woman who’s left a relationship which involved intimate partner or domestic violence. Someone told her that she deserved better than the relationship that she was in. Someone told her that “God doesn’t make junk”, and that she deserved better than a man who treated her as if she

was rubbish. And when she made the decision to leave, there was a team of people and agencies who made it possible for her, and supported her on the way, and continued to support her so she could heal. This is one woman's Resurrection, and we rejoice with her that she who was in so much distress is now alive again.

Or again, there's groups of people – teams of people – who've committed themselves to serve the poor through the St Vincent de Paul Society, or who've committed themselves to serve refugees and asylum seekers, or who simply put themselves out serving anyone they know who is in any kind of need. And they tell us: they tell us that their own lives are so much better and so much more rewarding because they've learnt that the purpose of life is to give ourselves away in generous service. Service is their Resurrection. Their service of those in need is bringing into their own lives the fullness of life.

Or again, there's an old man who died a little while ago. He'd endured a long illness, and he was worn out. But when his body began to fail, and when he began to die, he moved through the process of dying believing all the time in Jesus and in eternal life. His family sat with him and supported him; the Last Rites of the Church supported him; and his own faith supported him. And his death was his Resurrection. Do you have the faith to believe this?

What happened once upon a time long ago now happens all the time. It happens now in so many ways. How have you seen people rise to new life? And how have *you* risen to new life?
