

Easter Sunday 2023

Don't know about you but spring is my favourite time of year, holding a promise that change is coming for the better. The river will "flow again after it was frozen," Ernest Hemingway wrote.

Spring signifies coming out of the darkness. By putting the clocks forward we've tipped the balance from longer nights to longer days. Equinox means "equal night" of light and dark.

There's even some science to the joy of spring. Research suggests that for many people, the extended daylight boosts mood, well-being and energy. Dopamine associated with attention, motivation, pleasure and mood — seems to increase with more exposure to sunlight.

But for Christians nothing can improve our mood more than to dwell on what this day - 'Resurrection Sunday' means and the hope that it brings.

I love the resurrection story from the book of Mark. Mark is also the shortest of all the gospels it only has 15 chapters and 50 or so pages - you can read it from start to finish in a couple of hours. And if you have never read the bible it's a great place to start.

And its action packed – Short and snappy - you don't find long drawn out stories in the gospel of Mark – it's about miracles not parables – action not words.

Let me read to you the Easter story that has brought the greatest hope to our times.

Mark 16:1-16

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away 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. But go; tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.

She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

*Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; **but they did not believe them either.***

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned".

One thing about that convinces me the gospel is true is, it never covers up failures or people's faults Here we see a classic example of lack of faith - the disciples did not believe he was risen.

Yet Jesus had clearly said to his disciples earlier this would happen: here for the third time in Luke 18:31-33;

*"Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. **On the third day he will rise again.**" But after the resurrection they didn't believe it could be true.*

I read a lovely story in the week about some elderly folk in a care home who had Alzheimer's - I think it was during covid.

The nurse in charge brought the residents of the home together on Good Friday afternoon to view a film - in keeping with the season - Franco Zeffirelli's film, Jesus of Nazareth was shown.

The carers wondered whether these elderly Alzheimer's patients would even know what was going on, but they thought it might be worth the effort. When they finally succeeded in getting everyone into position, they started the video.

The carers were pleasantly surprised at the quiet attention being paid to the screen. At last came the scene where Mary Magdalene comes upon the empty tomb and sees that Jesus' body is not there.

An unknown man, (in reality the Risen Christ), asks Mary 'why she is looking for the living among the dead'. Mary runs as fast as she can back to the disciples and tells Peter and the rest with breathless excitement, "He's alive! I saw Him, I tell you! He's alive."

The doubt in their eyes causes Mary to pull back. "You don't believe me . . . You don't believe me!" From somewhere in the crowd of Alzheimer's patients came the clear, resolute voice of one of the female patients. "**WE BELIEVE YOU,**" she said, "**WE BELIEVE YOU!**"

Of course we would shout out in agreement at the top **of our voice** 'We believe you He is alive'! I love the scripture when Paul was on trial for his faith that casually says;

*"When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about **a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.** (Acts 25:18-19)*

That's what this season is all about a dead man, Jesus who came back to life.

But it's the most important truth in all of history, so this morning I want to look at **3 words** that express the importance of the resurrection and the hope that Easter brings.

They are 1) Incomparable 2) indispensable 3) inescapable

Firstly the resurrection is Incomparable It is unequalled – matchless – unrivalled.

I love the song 'what a wonderful name is the name of Jesus' it contains these lyrics "You have **no rival ,You have no equal**, Now and forever God You reign, Yours is the kingdom, Yours is the glory Yours is the Name above all Names"

The resurrection is **unequalled** firstly because the Man who was raised was and is **incomparable** - there is no one in history like Jesus, he has no rival - why is that? We could think of many reasons but 3 come to mind;

Firstly Jesus Christ is incomparable in that He is sinless. He never committed a sin and, although fully human, has no sin nature. He is the Holy One of God.

1 Peter 2:22 *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth".*

And may I add; that is why the grave could not hold Him! – 'the wages of sin is death' but 'He committed no sin' other than He took on our sin - so He couldn't remain a corpse.

Secondly Jesus Christ is incomparable in that He is eternal. He existed from eternity past, He exists in the present, and He will exist for all eternity in the future. Jesus said "before Abraham was I am" (John 8:58)

Thirdly Jesus Christ is incomparable and unequalled because 'He is the only Way to the Father' (John 14:6;) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me"**

There is no other way to salvation. **He is the only righteous One** and He exchanged His perfect righteousness for our sin.

So Jesus is **incomparable** and so too is the resurrection.

There are events in history that change forever the way we do things and how we think beyond our recognition - extraordinary things. I suppose in my lifetime I can think of events like the Berlin wall coming down or 9/11, these rightly could be considered 'cataclysmic moments' where the world was never going to be the same again - everything changed from that point onwards - Covid in 2020 was another one.

However there has been **nothing comparable** to the resurrection - the world had been waiting for 4000 years, groaning in bondage to sin, Man was waiting for a way out from his predicament, caught in an endless round of wrongdoing and failure, everything was pointing towards this one great event - **the resurrection**.

What's more, it was planned before the creation of the world! Eph 1:4 "*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight*" **we are only Holy and blameless because of the resurrection**.

A complete reset took place in our world - I like what watchman Nee said;

"Our **old history** ends with the cross; our **new history** begins with the resurrection. Folks for 2000 years we have been living in the days of the resurrection and the hope that it brings.

You could say there have been other resurrections, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, others as well, if you have ever read the life of Smith Wigglesworth you will know raised numerous people from the dead - but these were different, **incomparable**, these people were to die later on - they had to taste death again.

However **with Jesus He rose and is alive now**. It is the same with every other religious or political leader, Mohamed, Buddha, Gandhi, Cesar, Kings or Queen, not one of them could cheat the grave.

It is interesting if you go to Israel there is a Shrine of the Holy resting place in Jerusalem, the burial site of Jesus, pilgrims from all over the world visit the tomb there, which is empty - it has a note at its entrance which says, "**He is not here.**" Jesus only made a weekend stay in the cave!

So firstly the **resurrection** was **incomparable**, unrivalled, but secondly it was **indispensable** - it was absolutely necessary.

It was fundamental to the gospel - the resurrection is not an 'add on' or an appendix - **it is Christianity.**

The truth of the resurrection gives life to every area of the gospel; it would be incomplete and pointless without it. Like a story without a conclusion, utterly frustrating and disappointing.

I challenge you to read any passage of scripture in the New Testament after Jesus had ascended into heaven and try and make any sense of it without the resurrection.

Every doctrine from new birth to end times - **only find their purpose in the resurrection**, summed up here; from 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

*"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died for our sins** according to the scriptures; **And that he was buried**, and that **he rose again** the third day according to the scriptures":*

The gospel in one verse; Christ died, was buried and raised to life. The one follows the other.

As we said last week **the cross was indispensable absolutely essential** there was no other way for man to reconcile to God. Since man's fall in the **Garden of Eden** there was no **alternative**, no other way out '*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*' (Heb 9:22)

It goes further, the resurrection is so **indispensable - our faith is completely futile without it!** - We might as well pack up shop go home and take to our beds, and finish our days in sorrow, without any hope or purpose for our lives.

The Apostle Paul works out the consequences of this appalling position in 1 Corinthians 15.

"But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

*For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, **your faith is futile**; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ is lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in we are of all people most to be pitied".*

But he goes onto say in verse 20;

"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep".

So secondly the resurrection is **indispensable** it is - absolutely necessary but finally it is **Inescapable** its consequences unavoidable for every one of us.

You can't ignore the resurrection and hope it goes away - CS Lewis said this "Jesus Christ was either a liar, a lunatic, or He was who He said He was" you make your choice? But you better be certain of the choice you make!

I was reading this quote by Woody Allen the comedian. 'Its not that I am scared of dying I just don't want to be around when it happens'

There is no escaping it. They say there are 'two things certain in life - death and taxes.' Some people with a good accountant (or a bent one) can avoid **taxes but no one can escape death.**

Scripture says "*inasmuch as it is appointed unto men to die once, and after this judgment*" (Heb 12:9)

Edwin was telling me about the will he made, which is a right and proper thing to do, plan for your death that is – you will find that people plan extensively for their funeral **but they make no plans at all for the afterlife!** They think that they can just breeze into some sort of sleepy transition from death to life.

The bible says **Psalm 55:4-5**

*My heart is in anguish within me,
and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror has overwhelmed me*

If you're not 'in Christ' **there is a terror in death!** – You have every reason to fear it - it is sheer folly to think otherwise. Death is not natural, it was never meant to be.

God has put eternity inside of man – **we will all live forever** our spirit never dies, it's where you end up, your destination, after this life that counts - that is the whole purpose of this life.

Now the resurrection has happened - it has **inescapable** consequences for each one of us.

"Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from" (Acts 17:30-31)

I like what John Wesley said – he said 'Christians die well' and why is that? It's because we, as Christians, have 'hope'.

Because the one we love has gone before us and conquered death - we are here today because a 'dead man is alive' **He is risen hallelujah**

Jesus is alive, and we can say with the old hymn 'you ask me how I know He lives He lives within my Heart' perhaps that is greatest proof of all of the resurrection is; **He is living in our hearts.**

So folks as we celebrate resurrection Sunday let's remember what the resurrection is;

1) Incomparable 2) indispensable 3) inescapable

Lets us put our trust in Him and be able to say

As the old hymn says:-

'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives'

Amen

Tony Troy

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