

## SERMON PART 1 – EASTER SUNDAY

### What will you leave in the tomb?

#### Introduction

Resurrection Sunday has a similar celebratory feel about it as Christmas Day does. There's almost a sense of relief – after the intense emotions of the past week –

- from the exultant sounds of Palm Sunday,
- through the shadows that gathered around Jesus as the threat to his life became a reality
- sharing the Passover and Last Supper with his disciples
- washing their feet in a profound example of what it means to serve others
- to the ugliness of betrayal, denial, and a mock trial,
- then the horror of his whipping and the crown of thorns, dragging his cross along the stony streets of Jerusalem, and the sheer suffering and agony of crucifixion
- and finally death – surrendering his life into the hands of God. 'It is finished.'
- His body placed in a tomb.

But why linger on these details today? Isn't today about joy and laughter and new life? Yes – it is. Life after death. Resurrection after crucifixion. Joy after sorrow.

Today as people of the risen King, we worship and praise Him – and we remember. Through our gathering this morning, we hold together the realities of Jesus' life - and our lives which contain what is beautiful and fragile and wonderful, and what is often immensely unfair and cruel and painful.

In this first part, we will reflect on the significance of the tomb in the resurrection story, and then later Matt will focus on the new life that we experience through the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb is only one part of the Easter story – the risen Christ is the other part.

#### Photos of Israel

Several years ago, Athol and I visited Israel with a work party that painted a school in Ibillin and a hospital in Nazareth. We were able to see many places that are recorded in the Bible. The exact places of Jesus' death and burial are not precisely known, however there are some places set aside like a memorial and give an indication of how things might have been in Jesus' time. *Powerpoint photos.*

#### The 'in-between' time

During Lent, I have been reflecting on the time between Jesus' death on the cross and the resurrection. The time spent in the tomb. Darkness. Cut off from life. A time of silence, waiting, entombed. Jesus' body was lying on a stone ledge in the dark.

We so quickly move from the suffering of the cross to the joy of resurrection. We know that as believers we live this side of the resurrection. We know how the story is fulfilled, while we wait for it to be fulfilled completely when Jesus returns. The 'in between time' seems a desolate time – nothing happens while we wait for the dramatic surprise of resurrection.

What was that 'in-between time' like for Jesus' closest friends? There was a promise yet to be fulfilled – He said He would rise on the third day. For those first disciples, Friday was a black day of death and despair, and Saturday – the Sabbath - a day of emptiness and horror.

For them, on that day, it was all over. All finished. What could life possibly mean now?..... where is hope?

### **The Bible account**

In Luke's version of the resurrection story, the women went to the tomb early on the Sunday morning, with spices to anoint Jesus' body. They found the stone at the entrance to the tomb rolled away, and when they went in there was no body. Two men, in dazzling robes, told them that Jesus was not there – He was risen – and to remember that He said He would rise on the third day.

The women, naturally, were terrified, and rushed to tell the disciples – who thought their report was nonsense and didn't believe them. Peter ran to the tomb and when he looked in, he saw the empty linen wrappings that had been around Jesus' body.

The women had to wait through their grief, their discomfort and uncertainty. They faced their fear – going into the difficult place of death – the place where they expected to find Jesus' body. They are a picture of faith – believing before they actually saw Jesus alive, because they remembered what he had told them about his death and resurrection.

### **Today's context**

Let's bring this tomb and resurrection experience into our context today. There are many around us, neighbours, friends, family, who are in a tomb of grief, despair, feeling that life is hopeless. Sometimes we are there ourselves. In those times, people sometimes wonder whether God is present with them.

*A story of a friend's experience, their world turned upside-down.*

That real-life situation echoes so many experiences of life. Each one of you will know in your own life, the times where you feel your world has been turned upside down. On a larger scale, we react with horror at the gassing of people, including children, in Syria. Or the violence and fear that has erupted on Manus Island, PNG.

Because Jesus suffered, we know that He identifies with our suffering. In our human situations and experiences of life, we are often caught in periods of trial, which we endure waiting for hope to come, waiting for healing from illness, waiting for situations to be reversed or to improve, waiting for relief from despair.

It's like living between Good Friday and Easter Day. We wait for new life to come. In that waiting, we have glimpses of resurrection, and sometimes stunning experiences of resurrection, when Jesus comes alongside us to give comfort and strength.

### **Challenge**

What is your experience of Easter? A waiting time? An encounter with the risen Lord?

One of the details in the Bible account of the resurrection refers to the 'empty linen wrappings' in the tomb. This Easter time, are there graveclothes that we need to discard and leave in the tomb? What do the empty linen wrappings represent for us?

We are invited out of darkness into the light of resurrection, out of death into new life, leaving behind the things that wrap us up in despair, loneliness, worry.

Resurrection means that failure will not have the last word. Resurrection means that wherever the Spirit of God comes to the hearts of people who are crushed by life, they begin to find hope, when they thought it was all gone. When we think - 'That's it. No more. I've had enough;' if we wait, on the third day (which is symbolic), there will be new life.

If your circumstances make you feel like you are in a dark place – like a tomb – remember that Jesus knows your weakness, he knows your need, and from his unlimited resources he will pour into your broken and thirsty life the comfort and healing and spiritual strength you need. We all live with regret, the silent wound or ache we carry with us. Easter is an opportunity to deal with regret, to have our slate wiped clean, to get another chance through what Jesus accomplished on the Cross.

My prayer for each of you is that you will know Christ and the power of his resurrection in a fresh way – because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that gives us new life!

## **Sermon Part 2 - Easter Sunday**

### **What is this New Life in Christ we celebrate today?**

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 2  
Corinthians 5:17

What exactly is this New Life in Christ that we celebrate on Easter Sunday? How has life become new in the light of Jesus' resurrection?

This sounds like a tough question, but John brings it down to earth for us as he closes his gospel with a wonderful fishing story.

“Simon Peter said, “I’m going fishing.”

“We’ll come, too,” they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.”

Why had these disciples gone fishing? It was probably a case of wanting to get on with life. To do the next thing. After all fishing was the world they knew. It would have felt strange going back to it, after all they'd been through with Jesus, but they had families who needed looking after, who might well have suggested doing something sensible for a change - like earning money - like catching some fish.

But it didn't work. They certainly knew fishing. They were old hands, most of them. They would have known the right spots, but nevertheless they worked all night and found nothing.

This is a picture that even if we're not into fishing, we probably all relate to. Life can be like that. It can be a lot of hard work, and then leave us empty-handed and tired.

If we're to explore what the new life we celebrate at Easter is all about, you must first put yourself with the disciples in that boat. What projects have you been labouring over, and getting nowhere?

We are all searching for life, and I don't just mean survival. We are seeking for all that brings goodness, fullness and joy to life. We are likely all here today because we understand that it is God who brings life. The joy of Easter is that God has truly come to us in Jesus Christ. Death can't stop him, nothing can separate us from him and new life gushes out as Christ works in us.

### **1. New Life is being Surprised by Jesus**

The first thing about new life in Christ is that we are surprised by Jesus...this is how it all starts. And when Jesus ceases to surprise us, that may be the moment we have stopped listening to him.

Like the disciples in their fishing boat, we watch for the dawn, watch for the figure on the shore. Listen for his voice. And then do whatever he tells us to do.

Jesus called out, "Fellows, have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!" So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it.

There is enough fish for breakfast for the whole village! **New life is being surprised by Jesus&the abundance he brings.**

—> Befriend Jesus - read the gospels, pray to him, tell him that you want to know him personally. Listen to what he says.

### **2. New Life is recognising a strength beyond ourselves at work**

After all the excitement of the big catch of fish...hauling it ashore...

Then there's this interesting exchange: "When they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread. "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus said... "Now come and have some breakfast!"

Jesus is already cooking fish and bread on his charcoal fire. He doesn't need their catch. He is capable of looking after the meal himself. In writing this gospel, John never wastes words. There's no filler. He is telling us something about working under Jesus' direction, something vital about the relation of our work to his in this new life.

How dreadfully easy it is for Christians to get the impression that we've got to do it all. God, we imagine, is waiting passively for us to get on with things. If we don't organise it, it won't happen. If we don't change the world, it won't be changed.

What a load of rubbish! Whose hands made the sun rise this morning? Whose breath guides us to think, and pray, and love, and hope? Who is the Lord of the world anyway? It's God, the creator. Neither the church nor its individual members can upstage God. Jesus welcomes Peter's catch. He asks him to bring some of it. But he doesn't need it.

Of course we should work hard. Of course we are to be organised. Of course laziness and sloppiness and half heartedness is not an option in the kingdom of God. If it's God's work we're doing we must do it with all our might. But let's have no nonsense that it's all up to us, as if poor old Jesus is not able to lift a finger unless we lift it for him. In fact, we are much more likely to work effectively once we get rid of that stress-inducing notion. Jesus remains in charge, powerful and strong. And thank God for that!

**New life is not all up to us - our hope is that a strength way bigger than us is at work.**

—> Don't be anxious. Trust in the renewing work of Christ.

### **3. New Life provides a Fresh Start with Renewed Purpose**

In my experience as a minister, I have not become a mental health expert, but I do know a little about the healing of memories, and the finding of forgiveness that can go back to buried hurts, fears, failures or sins that have not been dealt with. I have had the privilege of working pastorally with people, and watching as a deep unhealed wound was gently exposed, dealt with in love and prayer, and enabled at last to find healing.

This scene between Jesus and Peter is one of the most spectacular interchanges in the whole Bible. It is a great story of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Ch 13 - Peter insists loudly and emphatically that he at least will remain loyal to Jesus. He's not going to let him down. In fact, he's prepared to lay down his life for Jesus' sake.

Ch 18 - we watch helplessly as Peter tries and fails. He follows, but when he gets there it all goes horribly wrong. Three times he denies that he's one of Jesus' followers - and the cock crows.

And then here Peter is talking with Jesus again: a scene he could never have imagined happening. Jesus goes to where the pain is, as he so often does (is this why so many of us resist his gentle advance, like someone putting off seeing the dentist until they just can't bear their toothache), The most remarkable thing about it is that, by way of forgiveness, Jesus gives Peter a job to do.

When Peter professes his love 3 times, (The 3 questions correspond to Peter's three denials) Jesus doesn't say 'well, that's all right, just don't do it again. He says: 'Well, then feed my lambs, Look after my sheep, feed my sheep'.

Here is the greatest secret of the new life we have in Christ: Somewhere inside us there is a love for Jesus, and though you've let him down enough times, as we all have, Jesus wants you to heal the hurts and failures of the past, to find that love you have for him, then he wants to give you a chance to express it, and to give you new work to do.

These are not things for you to do to earn his forgiveness. Nothing can ever do that. It is grace filled from start to finish. This work of New Life are things to do out of joy and relief that you are already forgiven.

So not only is Jesus trusting Peter to get back to fruitful work, and to turn his undoubted though wobbly love for Jesus to good account. It is more, Jesus is sharing his own work, his own ministry with Peter.

This is new life:

1. New life is being surprised by Jesus&the abundance he brings.
2. New life recognises it is not all up to us - our hope is in a strength way bigger than us at work.

New Life offers a fresh start with a renewed purpose. We're forgiven and trusted to join in Jesus' work of renewing the world.