

Reflection – Easter Day
31-03-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 10: 34-43	Peter testifies about Jesus God accepts all through his death and resurrection
Hymn to the risen Christ	Jesus conquers death, All made alive in Christ
1 Corinthians 15:1-11	Our faith rests on the resurrection
John 20: 1-18	Jesus is risen from the dead and appears to Mary Magdalene

Introduction

I recall another Priest I know telling me how he began a sermon one Easter morning, by walking up into the pulpit, and beginning to have a shave. He completed the job, and with a cleanshaven face declared to the congregation, "You can go and tell those you know who aren't here today that the priest had a shave in the pulpit, and when they tell you that they don't believe you, you can tell them that he did, and that you can confirm it, because you saw it with your own eyes".

That's a primer for what those first disciples of Jesus probably said, when they met opposition to their message, that Jesus had risen from the dead. They believed it, because they had seen it with their own eyes.

So today, I would like to explore the resurrection of Jesus. I'd like to look at how it was such a powerful lifechanging experience for those first disciples of Jesus and why it is still such "Good News" for us here today.

Jesus Died

Firstly, you can't have a resurrection without first having a death.

There have been some who surmise that Jesus hadn't really died. He must have just appeared dead, but he recovered after they placed him in the tomb. This seems like a highly unlikely scenario to me. The Romans were military conquerors' who knew how to kill people. Also, in John's gospel it is recorded how Jesus was already dead before the other two crucified with him, and when one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, blood and water flowed. Now we know the science of the human body a lot better today, and when someone dies the clot separates from the serum, and so part of the blood is red, and part of the blood is clear. Not only does the bible record that Jesus died, the description of the event gives us an indication, based on what we know today that Jesus, really did die.

Others have surmised that the disciples of Jesus stole his body. This also seems unlikely as they were willing to be tortured and die, rather than deny the resurrection. If they really knew it wasn't true, then they probably would have said so, rather than die for something they knew to be a lie.

Then there are the gospel accounts of women being the first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. In first century Palestine, women would not have been accepted as witnesses in a court case, so historians point out, that if you were going to make something up, you would most likely have used male witnesses. Historians have also pointed out, the fact that the women were mentioned, is that embarrassingly, at the time, for those first disciples, it probably was true.

And then we have the story of Thomas, so well known as Doubting Thomas. Thomas had not initially been with the disciples when they first saw Jesus, so he would not believe. But when he saw the resurrected Jesus he declared,

My Lord, and My God!"

Jesus Resurrection

As unlikely as it seems, the most plausible explanation is that the resurrection really did happen. That is why the first disciples believed that Jesus rose from the dead, and that is why they recorded it in the pages of the bible.

We state the resurrection in the creed, week by week as we come to Church, and it is a normal part of our Christian faith. But when we really dwell on it, and think about it, it really is something quite amazing and an event that dramatically changed the lives of those who personally witnessed it.

Let's look now at what some of the scriptures set down for today tell us about how the first followers of Jesus responded to the resurrection.

In chapter ten of the Acts of the Apostles we have the famous speech by Peter who was one of Jesus closest companions. Not only does Peter describe the life death and resurrection of Jesus, and what Jesus taught about himself, but he also claims to have shared food with Jesus, after he rose from the dead.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, we hear how Paul, who was not one of Jesus original followers, states that the teaching which is of first importance, is that Jesus died, was buried and rose on the third day.

And in John's Gospel we hear how Mary, initially thought the risen Jesus was a gardener, as she no doubt did not expect to find Jesus alive. And it was Mary who went to announce the resurrection to the other disciples.

The impact of the Resurrection for Jesus first followers

As we read the Bible, we see the impact it had on the lives of the first followers of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles, records how the first followers of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached about who Jesus was and what he came to do and three thousand believed and were baptised.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, his first followers found a message of Salvation and a message of Hope.

In Jesus they found meaning and purpose above anything else they had experienced in life itself.

Even the fear of death could not stop them from following Jesus, because they knew that Jesus had overcome death, and Jesus had promised them that if they put their faith in him, they too would overcome death. They had witnessed the resurrected body of Jesus, so they knew that they too, would one day be resurrected with Jesus.

Following Jesus now

Just as Jesus called people to follow him when he lived and died and rose again two thousand years ago. Jesus calls people to follow him now.

And just as Jesus' first followers experienced the power of God's love in their lives when they decided to follow him, we can experience that now.

Christianity is still the most powerful force for good in our world.

As Christians we can have power, even over the fear of death, because of what Jesus has done for us.

We cannot see the resurrected Jesus like those first disciples, but if we are willing to look, we can see all the evidence, and we can see the difference in the lives of those who have decided to follow Jesus in their lives.

In King Charles' Maundy Thursday message, he recalled the words of Jesus, that Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. As Christians today we follow Jesus because we know that he died for us, and we are strengthened to be able to follow Jesus, because in his resurrection we can have hope that nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

The first disciples of Jesus witnessed the resurrection, and in the last words of the resurrected Jesus recorded in Matthews Gospel, Jesus sent them out to make disciples of all nations.

We are here today two thousand years later, because the hope and love they experienced in the resurrection of Jesus was real, and God wants all humanity to experience God's love, just as they did.

Conclusion

Today we light what we call the new fire, and from it we light the Paschal candle, as a symbol that Jesus has passed from death to life.

The resurrection may seem extraordinary, it may seem difficult to believe because we know the reality of death in our world. But I think that is the point. God wanted us to know how much we are loved by God.

The death of Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice for us, and the resurrection of Jesus gives us the ultimate in hope for the future.

This is not a shy hope, or a wishful or fanciful hope, but rather a hope grounded in history, in eye witnessed events, which shaped lives for the better then, and can shape lives for the better now, today.

In Jesus we have hope beyond anything this world has to offer.

This was what those first disciples of Jesus found when they witnessed the resurrection. This is what we as Christians are offered today, to live into now.

May you have a Happy, a Holy and a Blessed Easter. Amen.