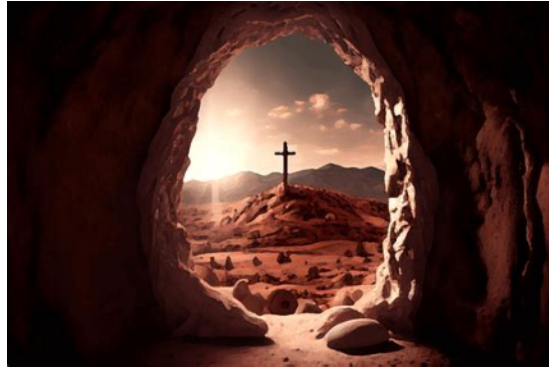

On the third day He rose again

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 12 April

Isaiah 53:7-10, 1 Corinthians 15:1-20



Let's pray, Lord Jesus, as we come again to your word, make it alive to us. May our hearts be captivated and our minds be expanded as we see you for who you are, our living Lord and saviour, amen.

For a couple weeks following Easter Sunday I want to look at another two lines in the Apostles Creed.

The two lines are "On the third day he rose again" speaking of Jesus. Then next week "the resurrection of the body", which speaks of us and our future. There are certainly all sorts of ideas floating around so let's see what the bible has to say.

"On the third day he rose again". The resurrection of Jesus has been called the lynch pin of the gospel.

Anyone who has ever ridden a bike knows how important it is to have a cotter or lynch pin securing the nut on the axle. We know that nothing good happens if that nut comes loose and the wheel falls off.

Our faith hangs on the claim that Jesus actual body was resurrected on that first Easter day. "He is risen indeed" is a claim made by hundreds of millions of believers from all around the world on Easter Sunday.

How do we know it was a literal physical event? The scriptures tell us that Jesus was able to be touched, and that Jesus ate something to help convince his followers he was no ghost.

The change in the disciples and followers is also pretty convincing. It would take something pretty dramatic to turn a bunch of frightened believers, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish religious leaders, into men and women who were willing to on the one hand stand against contemporary religion, and on the other hand, stand against the powers of Rome.

Let's be honest. Would you sacrifice, even die for something, all the while knowing it was based on a fantasy or wishful thinking?

The fact that 11 of the 12 Apostolic eye witness to Jesus life and resurrection went to their deaths rather than deny Jesus is pretty compelling.

And what of today, can we take it that Jesus still appears as believers trust in him? While I personally have never that I know of had a visitation from Jesus I have spoken to unassuming Anglicans in the pew who have shared with me a time that Jesus actually showed up.

I have no reason to doubt them. If I was a sceptic I guess I could put such things down to imagination caused by a physical, emotional or spiritual need.

However, given the evidence of Jesus resurrection that which we find in scripture, and the countless believers down through history who attest to a living faith, in a living Jesus, I have no reason to doubt.

Or to say it positively, I have reason to believe. So it's really a case of historical facts and faith working together.

The million dollar question is "do we believe it enough to have our lives, and indeed our eternities shaped by the historical fact of Jesus resurrection?"

In the opening vs of ch 15 Paul says.... :³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins was buried, was raised on the third day and that he appeared to Peter, the Twelve, to more than five hundred, most of whom are still living, then James, then all the apostles, and last of all to one untimely born he also appeared to me.

When Paul speaks of himself as "untimely born" he is using the word for abortion, miscarriage, still birth.

Given Paul's, as Saul's, history of persecuting Christian's and doing all that he could to destroy the church he seems to be emphasising how unworthy he feels. Does he even deserve to be here, let alone be an Apostle? "I am unfit to be and Apostle" Paul says in vs 9.

Hallelujah for vs 10. But by the grace of God I am what I am and his grace towards me has not been in vain.

Isn't it wonderful that no matter our past when we commit our lives to the resurrected Jesus our past is wiped clean and we start afresh. From death to life does not just describe Jesus. It describes the follower of Jesus. That the good news of the gospel.

It's Good News based on evidence. Facts and faith working together.

Given the evidence Paul is astonished that some might be questioning the physical resurrection... Vs 12 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?

Evidence. Faith. What else is needed? Enlightenment.

While there are many scriptural, historical and personal accounts of Jesus being alive it takes more than just evidence and a convincing argument for the resurrection to convince folk. It takes a supernatural work of God.

Even compelling evidence, like that I touched on in the children's talk, where Jesus escaped his sticky ointment and spice soaked grave cloths in the same way a butterfly might escape a cocoon, or a bird an egg shell while leaving the egg or cocoon intact.

That why Peter and John were convinced of the resurrection when they saw Jesus grave cloths. It was as if he had materialised through the wrapping leaving them intact.

One thing I know though after lots of conversations. Evidence may not be enough unless one is willing to see. And our being able to see and believe is a grace work of God. Paul, then called Saul, thought he could see and fancied himself as an expert in all things religious.

Jesus had to literally appear to him on that Damascus Rd and Paul was temporarily blinded as he saw something of Jesus glory. Then a few days later as Ananias prayed for him he received his sight he saw and understood.

Remarkable that one who doubted his right to be alive and called himself an abortion, would become the greatest pastor evangelist and teacher in the early church writing nearly a third of the NT. The grace of God was certainly not without effect that's for sure.

It's all the grace of God. A few weeks back as we looked at the post resurrection Emmaus rd story. I drew out how dependant we are on God to open our eyes. While we might say we found Jesus, its more correct to say Jesus found us. We see only as God discloses himself to us.

That was one of the points of what happens when Jesus is walking with two dispirited and downcast believers following his resurrection. Though Jesus walked and talked with them they were blinded to who Jesus was. The text says "their eyes were kept from seeing him."

That I believe points to a supernatural blinding caused by the enemy of souls. It would take a greater spiritual work to open the eyes of these two downcast believers enabling them to see it was Jesus who travelled with them.

Evidence, faith and enlightenment working together.

Jesus personally witnessed to them drawing on the scriptures that spoke of him and his saving work on the cross. It must have been the best bible study ever and yet they still didn't understand until and I quote "and then he opened their eyes".

Evidence and enlightenment working together.

Surely if one is spiritually blinded to some extent by the enemy of souls, which is what the passage is hinting at, it will take another, and let me say more effective and powerful spiritual work, to help us see.

The two race back to Jerusalem to find the other disciples who were in hiding. Jesus appears to the group who are terrified thinking they are seeing a ghost. Jesus gives evidence that he is no such thing inviting them to touch him and eating something. Then we get something of the same statement, ... ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations The point? Evidence and enlightenment work together. Both are needed. That's why we pray before we open the word.

I, we, believe by faith, given the evidence we have, and given the grace that has opened our eyes, heart and mind to accept that because Jesus has risen, our sins indeed can be forgiven.

Evidence, enlightenment and faith working together, making possible the way for us to live transformed and transformational lives by the power of that he so powerfully works within us.

We might look back on the events of those days and say well, yes a rather ignorant and gullible lot hanging out to believe such things. Not a bit of it. Greeks could not conceive the idea of the afterlife being in any way physical. Some of the Jewish religious leaders didn't believe in life after death either.

And you would be hard pressed to find any in the general population who would think dead people could come back to life. Especially crucified dead people.

Even Jesus followers, the very ones who had a vested interest and had been primed to believe the most, could not believe it and initially took some amount of convincing.

Pentecost of course would prove to be something of a game changer and we will look at that in a few weeks.

Back to the Apostle Paul. To help the believers overcome their natural scepticism given crucified dead had up to that stage always stayed dead, Paul turns the tables and looks at things from a different angle.

Ok so what's at stake if you don't believe, if you relegate the resurrection to the realm of the spiritual and non physical. If you hold that Jesus was nothing more than a great example of humanity. One in a long list of people we could call to mind as great examples from various religions and belief systems.

What if Jesus was just a very good person who did nothing more than show us how to be very good people? One could ask the question could you call a person good if that person claimed to be God and asked his followers to sacrifice and serve even to the point of death, which many of them did.

That aside. What's at stake? What's at stake if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead?

- Our faith and proclamation is futile: Vs 14.
- Our promises are fraudulent vs 15.
- Our hopes of forgiveness are farcical and we are still lost in our sins. Vs 17.
- We are forever parted from those we love. Vs 18.
- Lastly: If Christ did not rise we stand as objects of pity rather than people of hope. Vs 19. If for his life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied.

Living and dying for a lie is a pathetic and pitiable thing.

There is much at stake if Jesus did not rise from the dead. The cross is the crux of our faith and the resurrection is the lynch pin. Without it the wheels fall off.

Vs 20. But in fact Christ has been raised on the dead the first fruits of those who have died. "He is risen" "He is risen indeed".

- Our faith is not in vain.
- We are not misrepresenting God.
- We are forgiven.
- We will be united with those who have died in Christ.
- And rather than being pitied we have a great and glorious hope that transcends anything that we could aspire to in his life.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – Paul says in 1 Cor 2:9

Vs 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. In other words as he was raised from death, so shall those be who believe in him. Our future is resurrection and we follow the one who shows such things are real and tangible.

The big question that has exercised the minds and imaginations of many, and I have heard many theories, is what comes next in respect to our being resurrected and having new resurrected bodies?

But that is another line in the creed, "we look for the resurrection of the dead". In the second half of the chapter Paul goes some way to addressing what it means to be resurrected as believers. As he does so he does his best to answer the question, so what kind of bodies will we have, and why?

That's for next week and the second half of ch 15.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus as we journey through the coming week, with whatever it may bring, may we journey with you, our risen and living saviour, amen.