

2nd Sunday before Advent 19th November 2017

1Corinthians – Growing a Spirit-Filled Church

1Cor 15.12-28 The resurrection of Christ

PRAY

No one expected *the resurrection* - no one. Even though Jesus had spoken of his own resurrection many times - sometimes directly such as at the Last Supper and sometimes less obviously in parables - nobody really heard what he was saying. The disciples were puzzled by talk of Jesus rising from the dead because there was no precedent in history. This wasn't a lack of faith, but just an incomprehension that a living person could be killed stone dead, and then raised to a new bodily life the other side of the grave, whilst the rest of the world carried on as before.

No one expected the Resurrection...

Jesus had spoken
of it but there
was no
precedent,
and surely if it
happened at all it
was at the end of
time...



Surely the resurrection, whatever it was, if it happened at all would be for all people at the same time, at the end of history.

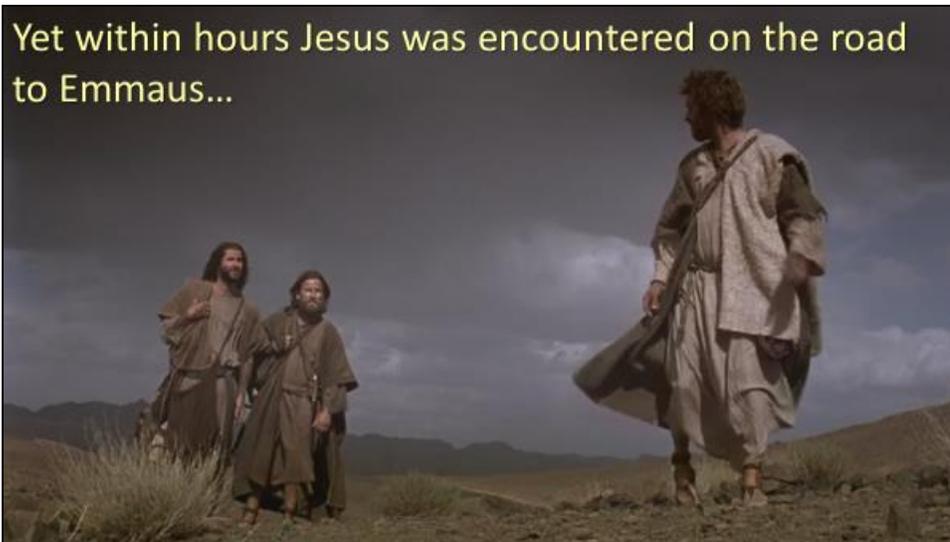
And we see this confusion in the Gospel account. The women are bewildered until the angels explain what has happened.



And the disciples, even though they hear the women's words, cannot believe what seemed to them nonsense. Even Peter visiting the empty tomb and seeing the strips of linen is left deep in thought. Surely it can't be...

But within hours the disciples had encountered the risen Jesus, 2 whilst on the road to Emmaus

Yet within hours Jesus was encountered on the road to Emmaus...



and the rest, apart from Thomas, that same evening in a locked room. Their incomprehension was met with a physical encounter of the risen Jesus, and then they believed in the resurrection.



And to the disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem...

So what about us? Do you believe in the resurrection? Or are you skeptical? Last Easter a survey of the faith of UK Christians was splashed over the newspapers. The key statistic quoted was that 72% of UK church attenders believe in the resurrection. That's utterly shocking as it means 28% didn't believe in the most essential part of our faith. I was gob-smacked.

72% UK Church attenders believe in the resurrection...



...so 28% don't believe in the core of Christian faith...

But perhaps this level of skepticism has always been around, because just 20 years after the resurrection, Paul, who himself encountered Christ on the Road to Damascus, is having to tell the Corinthians why belief in the resurrection is central, and without it there is no Christianity.

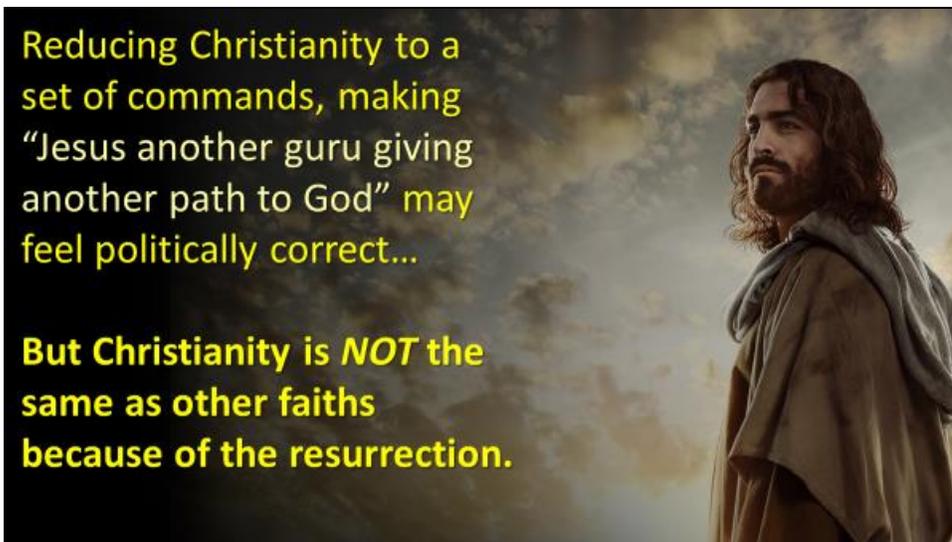
In Corinth it offended intelligent minds to believe in such fanciful ideas as resurrection - surely, said the philosophers, when people spoke of the Messiah being raised from the dead, they were just saying in a fancy way “Jesus is my leader.”

In Corinth talk of **resurrection** offended Greek minds...



So philisophers argued the Christians just meant by it
“Jesus is my leader...”

But as Tom Wright so elegantly puts it “that’s all very well if Christianity was simply a set of ethical commands, or if Jesus was another guru giving another path to God.” Reducing Jesus to just another good teacher seems much more politically correct to those who struggle with the idea that one faith truly brings relationship with God and others by implication do not. But Christianity is radically different from all other faiths *because* of the resurrection.



And in 1Cor 15 Paul unpacks why we need to believe in Christ being raised from the dead.

His argument focuses on the implications for sin and death depending whether Jesus was resurrected or not:

- a) **If Jesus has been raised from the dead**, then he is the Saviour, the Messiah, and the power of death over us all has been broken. Jesus is the first man for whom death was not the end, and through believing in Him, death is now not the end for all humanity. Death in biblical thought is always seen as the result of sin, humans turning away from life-giving God to vainly try and find life elsewhere. So if death is defeated, all our sin has been dealt with and removed too.

If Jesus is raised:

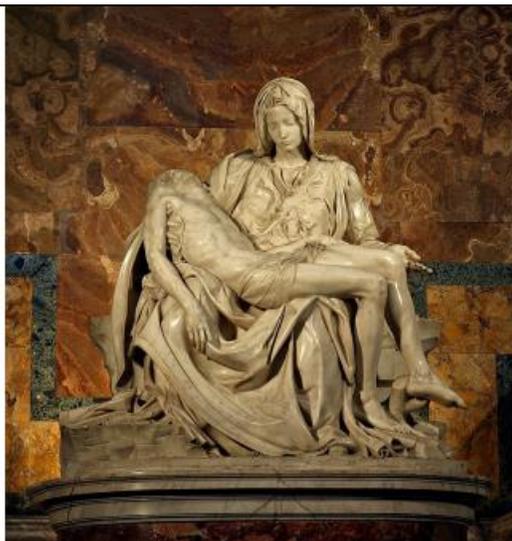
- He is the Saviour.
- The power of death over us has been broken.
- Death is no longer the end for all humanity.
- If death is defeated, all our sin has been dealt with and removed too.



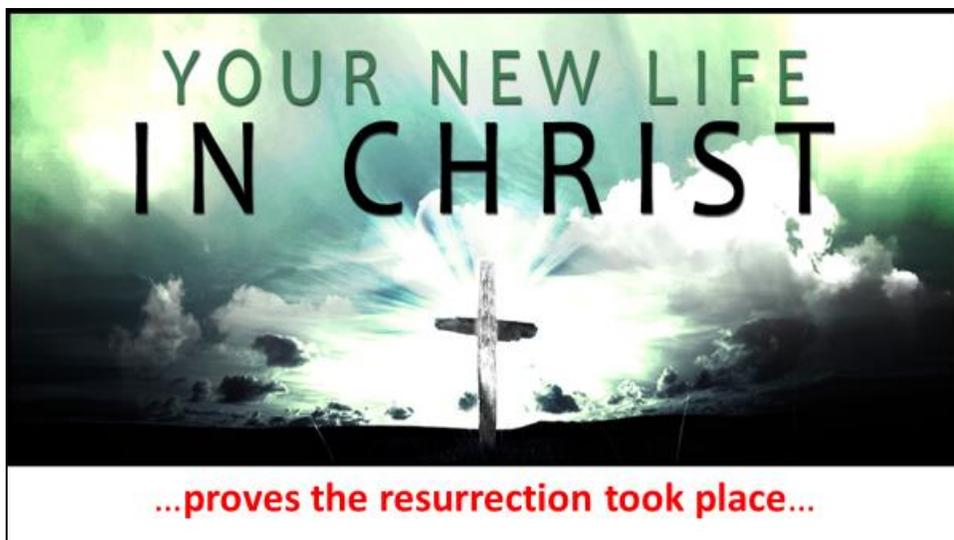
b) **But if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then he isn't the Saviour, and his cross had no effect whatsoever. That means as Paul says in v17 that we would still be in our sins, and our faith is futile. Moreover, he says that bearing in mind how much the Christians were hated, persecuted and struggling in Corinth, if you don't believe in the resurrection you might as well just throw in the towel now and embrace an easier life. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (v19).**

If Jesus wasn't raised:

- Then he isn't Saviour.
- The cross had no effect.
- We are still in our sins.
- Our faith is futile – you might as well give up (v19).



Now this passage follows on from copious teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, and so Paul is effectively saying to the Christians in Corinth to have some joined up thinking. “Come on - if you see the work of the Holy Spirit amongst you in all these ways, if you see people receiving healing, living new lives, and you have experienced that new life, then that is only because Christ took away the sins that held you back, and through his resurrection has breathed resurrection life in you through the Spirit. The present reality is what it is because Jesus died and rose from the dead. Nothing else explains what you see and experience.”

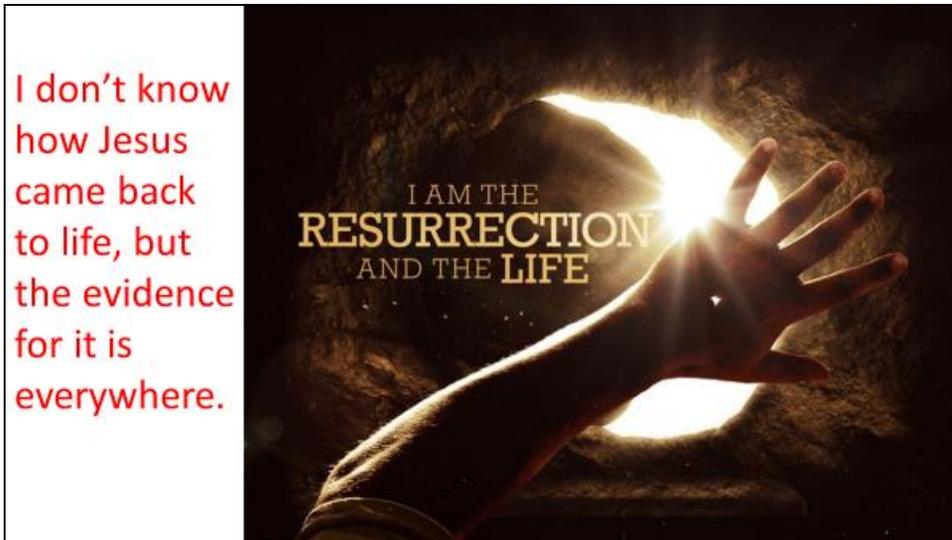


I fully understand how people can struggle to comprehend the resurrection. It isn't explainable to the human mind. But do you have to understand something to believe it? I believe in the internet and emails, but I haven't a clue how the technology works. I know a caterpillar enters a cocoon and comes out a butterfly or moth, but how the body's chemical rearrange is miraculous.



In the same way I don't know how Jesus came back to life, but do I believe that the God of the universe who created all things accomplished this - absolutely! I see God at work all over the place and I see change,

healing, hope, wonder, new life, and I know where it all stems from.



The resurrection, which changed everything that very first Easter Sunday. How about you? Do you believe it?

Then in vv20-28 Paul goes beyond what the resurrection achieved and explains how Christ being raised has started the process of putting the whole cosmos back into shape. His argument is complicated, so I want to unpick it very simply.

1. vv21-22 - Through a human being Adam, sin entered the world and on its heels death, and so that meant there had to be another human to get

us out of the mess. Adam's sin brought death to all people, but through Christ's resurrection, everyone will be raised. [those who believe in Jesus to eternal life with God, those who don't to an eternity outside God's presence]

Christ being raised started the process of getting the whole cosmos back in shape (1Cor 15.20-28):

1. Through Adam sin entered the world, so another human had to rescue us... (vv21-22)



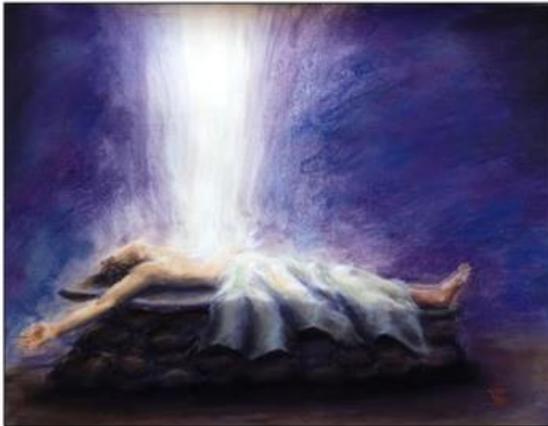
Through Christ's resurrection, everyone will be raised

The great theologian Jurgen Moltmann expressed in a single sentence this change achieved from Good Friday to Easter as: "God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him."

2. v23 - Jesus is the first to be resurrected, but when he returns at the end of time all shall be resurrected - more on that topic next week.

Christ being raised started the process of getting the whole cosmos back in shape:

2. Jesus is the first to be resurrected, but when he returns we will all be resurrected
(v23)

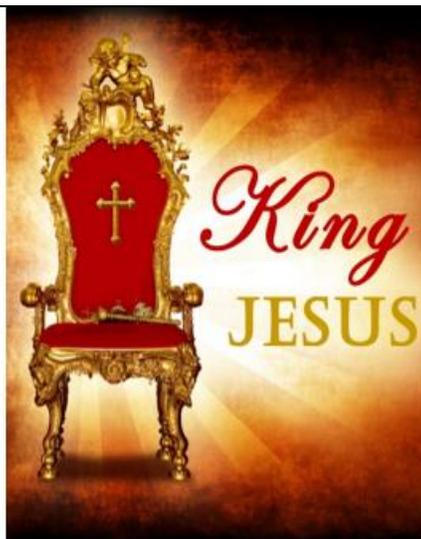


3. v25 - Jesus is the Lord of the world, reigning with the purpose to defeat all the enemies of God who deface, oppress and spoil his world including humanity. Paul is referring of course to the time we're living in now, where Jesus is Lord but sin, death and the devil still affect the world.

3. Jesus is the Lord of the world (v25)

He reigns with the purpose to defeat all the enemies of God...

Sin, death and the devil affect our world, and our role is to bring Jesus' love to every unredeemed place...



And our role as Christ's disciples is to bring His love and resurrection life to every part of our world that does not yet know Him. And for us that's in our community of Holbrook, our workplaces, the places where we live and amongst our networks of friends.

4. v24 - This task will be complete when Jesus returns, and (v26) the final enemy death itself will be ultimately defeated when everyone is physically resurrected.
5. vv27-28 - At that point the whole cosmic order will be back in place with God over all and Jesus revealed to everyone as the Son.

4. The task is complete when Jesus returns (v24), all are resurrected and death is finally defeated (v26).

5. At that point the cosmic order is restored with God over all and Jesus revealed to all as the Son (v27-28).



Paul wants us to know that the resurrection isn't just for our personal salvation, for our sins to be removed and for us to be given new life. No, the resurrection is for the restoration of the whole of creation. Our new birth as Christians is just one part of a plan for the universe which is unfolding.

But at the heart of all Paul is expressing is the truth that *death is the enemy*. If you have known the anguish of loss in bereavement - you know this. Some people try to soften the blow of death by pretending it doesn't matter that much, or write poetry saying such silly lines as "death is nothing". That's blasphemous drivel - to say anything other than death is the enemy is in Tom Wright's words: "to deny the goodness, beauty and power of God's good creation." Death is so much the opposite of God's original intention that the whole point of resurrection is to defeat this evil. Death, which entered the world following Adam's sin, damaged the beautiful creation God had made, but in

Jesus' resurrection the process of restoring creation has begun.

Death is the enemy

To deny this
"is to deny
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Tom Wright.



The whole
point of
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through
resurrection,
restoration
has begun...

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is everything. Without it we were lost with no hope, with death sure to end our days for ever. But when God raised Christ from the dead, the shackles of death were destroyed, and the whole trajectory of human history was transformed.

The Resurrection of Jesus is everything...

Without it we
have no hope...

But if we live in
the truth of it,
our lives will
never be the
same again...



No wonder Paul tells us to truly believe so that the shadows of death no longer darken our days and we can walk in Christ's light. If we truly grasp the wonder of the resurrection our lives will never be the same again, and we will know the true joy of salvation.

I want to close with the remarkable story of a Methodist minister whose love of the Lord, and life lived in His service is a shining example of a life transformed by resurrection.

Revd Dr William Sangster had inspired thousands of people through his ministry at Central Hall Westminster through the dark years of the Second World War, and he was renowned for his preaching, writing and his love and compassion to all. His faith shone out like a beacon. But sadly , in his late 50s he began to lose his voice and mobility. He was diagnosed with an incurable condition that caused progressive muscular atrophy.

Revd Dr William Sangster – a Methodist minister renowned for his preaching, writing, love and compassion.



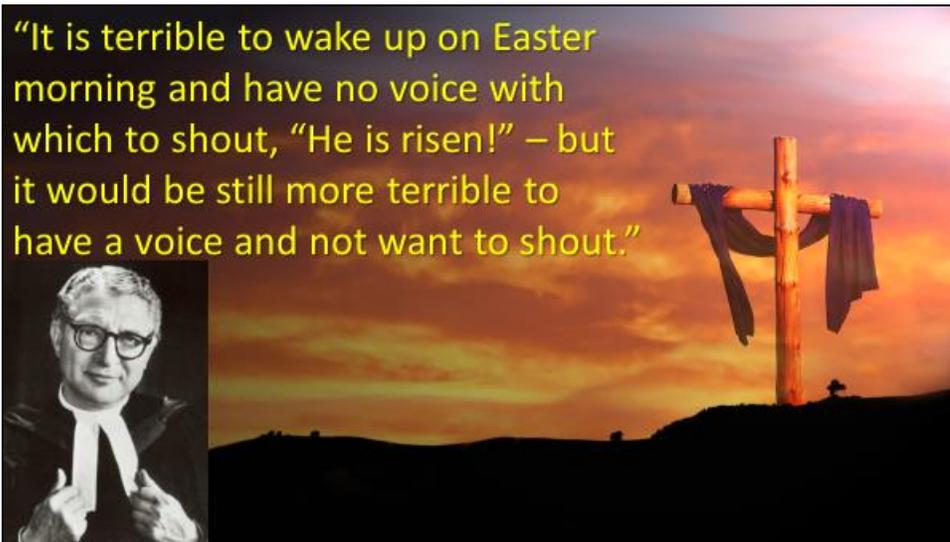
In his late 50's was diagnosed with incurable muscular atrophy

He recognized he didn't have much time left in this earthly life, so he threw himself into writing and praying. In the midst of his suffering he pleaded, "Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead."



Sangster wrote:
 "Let me stay in
 the struggle,
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 mind if I can no
 longer be a
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Sangster's voice eventually failed completely, and his legs became useless, but he stuck to his writing. On Easter morning 1959, just a few weeks before his death, he took a pen and shakily wrote his daughter Margaret a letter. In it he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, 'He is risen!'"—but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."



Amen.