**EASTER SUNDAY MORNING 2021 - “Reversing the Irreversible”**

**Matt 28:1-15** *‘Come, see where he lay, now go tell his disciples he is Risen’!*

What struck me reading through Acts last week was the simplicity of the job description given to the disciples. Essentially it was; go tell the story, and as you go doing this the Holy Spirit will confirm your message of good news by signs. If I was to ask you what is the message of Easter I wonder what your one-sentence answer would be? Maybe something like Jesus died on the cross for our sin. But in fact, it is the resurrection that is the main event, not the cross. As much as the cross is central to our faith it is the resurrection that is the pivotal hope that guarantees our lift-off to new life! It is the resurrection that breaks the power of death and disease. It’s the resurrection that enables us to live now with the presence of the Holy Spirit. It’s the resurrection that seals the fate of Satan and the demonic realm. It’s the resurrection that the whole turn-key moment in history is based on. It’s the resurrection that lifts Jesus from all others and authenticates his claim to be the Son of God. It’s the resurrection that provides the way for every one of us to know that the claims Jesus made are backed up by the very power of God. Claims to heal, and forgive, and rebirth, and renew and empower and energise all find their source in the main event of Jesus life….resurrection.

So much so that Paul writing years later would say in **1 Corinthians 15:15** *If Christ has not been raised then your faith is useless*. Philip Yancey writes in his book ‘The Jesus I never Knew’… what resurrection does is - Reverse the irreversible! Medicine calls it atrophy – it means that part of our bodies start dying from the moment we are born, that we are made and for that matter ‘remade or renewed’ constantly. So how old are you really? Believe it or not, your lungs are six weeks old - and your taste buds just ten days! So how old is the rest of your body? Many people fret about ageing, little realising that whatever your age in years, some of your body parts are just a few weeks, even days, old. Liver -liver cells only have a life span of around 150 days. You can take 70 per cent of a person's liver away in an operation and around 90 per cent of it will grow back within two months. The brain – Is as old as you – all 100 billion cells of it. The heart – recent research has shown that your body renews itself about four times over your lifetime. So how old are you really? Medically speaking, parts of you are older than other parts of you. But atrophy is a process at work inside us that is irreversible. That we will all one day – die. But friends there is a part of you that does not atrophy, does not wear out, does not die but lives forever. And that part of you is your Spirit, which God has placed in you and where he wants to inhabit or dwell.

What does it really mean for us that Jesus ‘Reversed the irreversible’ and rose from the dead? What difference does it make to our lives? What does it mean for the loved ones that have departed from this world either in old age or untimely tragedy? What does it mean for people today who live with heartache and grief? Can there be a resurrection now of their lives – or when loss and grief strike us all over? Something within me wants my life to be resurrected now. What does it mean for the millions of people who never give Jesus a second thought other than an expletive from time to time?

What is clear from the reading of the Bible is that the early believers staked everything on the resurrection of Jesus. It was not just a novel add on to Jesus’ remarkable life – it was the turn key pivotal truth that unlocked everything and made everything make sense. For if the resurrection is not true then everything Jesus taught and stood for crumbles. It’s an all or nothing showstopper.

So let’s examine for a few moments today the responses of the early believer’s, what actually happened – it might surprise you. The written records in the four gospels tell the resurrection as a shocking event that no one was anticipating. Those who meet the risen Christ are fearful and terrified thinking they have seen a ghost, they just cannot grasp it but clearly, it’s him. It’s almost like after attending a funeral you answer the door and the person is there in front of you again – “I’m back”! – and you are stunned. Because all you have known about death until this point is that it is irreversible, it’s the end. In his book entitled ‘Who Moved the Stone’ – Howard Morrison set out to prove that the resurrection was a myth or a hoax. He proposed that the disciples so desperately wanted to believe it was true, they conspired together to make up the story and manipulate events to appear so. The book tells how his research resulted in his most profound conversion!

Let’s look briefly at four stories of response to the news of the resurrection;

**From Grief to Hope - Mary**

We start with the most well-known – Mary at the tomb overcome with grief – going to bury Jesus and who did not recognise him thinking he was the gardener until he called her name! And hope was born in her at that moment. And my question to you today – is this, has he called your name? All around us people live with grief and loss and Jesus can change that into hope and optimism. And he comes to us in times of grief and loss and calls our name – and at that moment our lives are changed. The risen Christ can and does heal the brokenhearted… and Mary knew that.

**From Denial to Renewal– Peter and the other disciple**

Upon hearing of the news from the women, Luke tells that Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb, saw and believed. The story goes on to tell of Peter’s disillusionment and sense of failure after denying Jesus. And now this amazing news that Jesus was alive and appearing to his followers. Unable to cope with his desertion he goes back fishing. Then comes John 21, which tells the story of rebirth and renewal; how Peter meets the risen Christ by the water’s edge…….’do you love me’ he is asked three times. Maybe for you today, resurrection Sunday is a day for you to hear Jesus say to you….do you love me? Yes, Lord, I do. To find your way back to the Father after a time of failure or denial.

**From Disappointment to Joy – Cleopas**

The two on the Emmaus Road knew about the woman’s tomb visit and Peter’s confirmation. But they too lived with this ‘death is irreversible’ sentiment until Jesus shares a meal with them and they suddenly recognise him. Then he mysteriously disappears and they rush back to Jerusalem to tell their story that Jesus is alive and out there somewhere, appearing from time to time. Even then, some struggled to believe until Jesus arrives in their midst and shares a meal with them. Friends, if we are honest many of us from time to time struggle with faith, and disappointment, when life events around us seem to fly in the face of a God, and that God is more absent than present and more disconnected than active. Like those early disciples, we are into praying; Lord, protect me, bless me, help me, and when life events conspire to offer us something different it appears to us as though God has gone AWOL. Our prayers are unanswered and we live with a disappointed faith in a God who we had hoped would be the answer but failed to turn up when it mattered. What surprised these two was that God had heard their prayers, he was up to something different entirely. And Jesus draws near to them and meets us, and even warms our hearts – not necessarily always answering the questions but bringing to us insight that he is in the midst of our pain and disappointment meeting us. And our eyes are opened to Him and who he is…. And bewilderment confusion and disappointment turns to joy.

**From Unbelief to Abandonment - Thomas**

Fredrick Buechner when writing of the resurrection tells how hard it was for those early disciples to believe that Christ had in fact risen. There were no angels in the sky or kings bearing gifts like his birth – he just appeared on a road, beside a lake or in a room in rather ordinary circumstances. Many struggled with faith until they encountered the risen Christ…none more so than Thomas who upon announcing that he would not believe unless he could touch for himself the marks on the body of Jesus. He was given that experience… only then to fall at his feet….my Lord and my God.

I’m glad Jesus still carries those marks on his body. Because those marks say to me when I struggle or am bewildered or grieving, that I’ve been to your planet - I’ve lived with the confinement and suffering of being human, and I still bear the marks of it. And I have the power to raise your life up above your challenges and circumstances. And my power has defeated sin and death forever…I can reverse the irreversible! What strikes me about these stories is what Jesus did not do. He did not march into Jerusalem before Pilate or Sanhedrin or those who condemned him to death announcing – I’m back! He did not do public miracles or grandiose demonstrations of Godlike power. And he only appeared to people to invite them to believe. And in those six weeks, Jesus transformed those early disciples into a fearless missional movement. This is the greatest evidence for the resurrection! And down through the centuries, people keep experiencing the risen Christ. People who are grievers and who now can hope. People who are doubters and abandon themselves to his mission. People who are disappointed and who find a new sense of purpose and joy. People who are in despair and who find faith and hope for a new future. People who are failures find renewal and restoration.

What did the angel say at the tomb on the first morning of a new era… **COME SEE** – where he lay, now **GO and TELL** them he has risen from the dead! How does this work? Well, Jesus said….I am going away so that the Holy Spirit can come and indwell you….live in you. It’s me living in you really, because he and I and the Father are the same! He is alive and around here…he lives in me and you by his Holy Spirit. It is when I invite him into my life…and then ask regularly to be filled by his Holy Spirit – controlled by him….something happens that is amazing, powerful, life-changing and unmistakably Godlike. Do I become instantly perfect, no I don’t, but I do start living a new kind of life from the inside out. And that friends is the great news of Easter Sunday. He is risen….. (He is risen indeed).