

Sunday 11th April 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Theme: “The comfort of Jesus’ resurrection”
“Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!!*”

Introduction:

Do you like me have times when you doubt what you believe? (*cf. Thomas, in Easter Sunday message*). Do you have times when you doubt whether God exists, whether Jesus really is who he said he is, and whether Jesus really was sent by God to suffer and to die for us?

If you do, you are not at all unusual. We are all at times tempted to doubt what we believe. The apostle Peter warns us that “*our* enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (*1 Peter 5:8*). The Devil tries to lead us down the path from faith through doubt to unbelief. The Devil’s aim is to lead us from faith in God and in Jesus as our Saviour to a position of unbelief.

God, however, gives us the strength to resist this temptation, and He gives us ways to escape it (*1 Cor. 10:13*).

God has given us pointers to the truth of what we believe. He has given us rails that we can focus our attention on and grab hold of, rails which prevent us from falling into the abyss of non-belief.

Those of you who have gone walking in the Grampians in Victoria will know what I mean when I speak of rails which prevent us from falling. When Jeni and I and the boys were in the Wimmera, we did quite a bit of walking in the Grampians, and there are many places there where only the odd rail or two prevents one from falling onto the rocks below (*e.g., walking down to the bottom of McKenzie Falls*).

This morning, I would like us to focus our attention on *the rail which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. There are other God-given rails which support us in time of doubt. There are, for example:

- 1) The rail of nature, the world around us, which drives us to the conclusion that God exists....
- 2) The rail which is the person of Jesus himself (*his words have the ring of truth about them, and then there's his life of love, and his miracles, all of which point to who he is*)
- 3) The rail of our own experience of God's activity in our life (*our own experience of the Holy Spirit's activity in our life, and of answered prayers...*).

But this morning, I want to focus particularly on the rail that is the resurrection of Jesus.

Part 1: The evidence for Jesus' resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus is an event for which there is overwhelming evidence. Many have sought to disprove the resurrection, but have been forced by the weight of the evidence to confess that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened. Frank Morison was one such man.

Frank Morison writes that as a young man, when he recited the Apostles' Creed in church, he used to stop dead at the word "buried" in the Creed; he used to say of Jesus, "he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried", and not go on any further.

Frank Morison set out to write a book which would completely disprove the resurrection of Jesus once and for all. However, instead of that, he ended up writing a book entitled *Who Moved the Stone?* in which he came to the conclusion that there is most certainly "a deep and profoundly historical basis for...*the sentence in the Apostles' Creed: 'The third day he rose again from the dead'*" (p. 192).

Like Frank Morison, if we also look critically at the evidence, we too, I think, must come to the same conclusion.

What evidence is there in the New Testament for the resurrection of Jesus? Well, three main lots of evidence are offered by the NT writers for the resurrection of Jesus:

- 1) The empty tomb (*grave*)
- 2) The appearances of Jesus to his disciples
- 3) The existence of the Church itself

Let's look at each of these three points, that the NT writers give us in order to convince us that God raised Jesus from the dead.

1) The empty tomb

After Jesus had died on his cross between two thieves, in full view of all, and under the supervision of the Roman soldiers there, he was buried in a tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea (*Luke 24:50-56*). About Jesus' *death* on his cross, there was no doubt: a Roman soldier, according to John's account even made doubly sure, by thrusting his spear into Jesus side (*John 19:34*). And what came out? "Blood and water poured out", John tells us, sure sign that Jesus was dead.... Because when a person dies, his blood coagulates and separates into clots of blood and serum, a watery-like substance.

Jesus was buried in Joseph of Aramathea's tomb on the Friday night, shortly before six o'clock when the Sabbath day formally began, *yet very early on the Sunday morning that tomb was empty*. The women found the tomb empty when they went to anoint Jesus' body with spices. Jesus' body was missing from the tomb. On this fact, both Jesus' friends and his enemies agree. The empty tomb is one of the certainties of history.

In fact:

1. There is no record of anyone doubting the truth of this claim.
2. The rumour which the chief priest started, that the disciples stole Jesus' body, reflects the fact that the chief priests knew that the tomb was empty (*Matt. 28:11-15*)
3. In any case, if the grave was not empty the disciples' proclamation that "God had raised Jesus from the dead" could have instantly been disproved by anyone journeying the short distance from Jerusalem to Jesus' grave.

The empty tomb appears to be one of the certainties of history.

2) The resurrection appearances

But as one writer points out:

The empty tomb alone (however) would never have brought widespread belief in the resurrection (of Jesus). It would (only) have occasioned bewilderment. But something happened on that Sunday which explained why the tomb was found empty, and it sent the friends of Jesus into the streets with joy on their faces and courage in their hearts to proclaim that death had been unable to chain him.

This ‘something’ was the appearance(s) of Jesus, alive, to some of his friends on...(that) first Easter day. (And) during the six weeks that followed, there were many such meetings... (M. Green, *Christ is risen, so what?* (p. 44-45).

Who did Jesus appear to? Well, on that first Sunday, he appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden by the tomb (*John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9-11*), to a group of women who were probably on the road to Bethany to tell the news about the empty tomb to most of the disciples there (*Matt. 28:8-10*), to Peter (*Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5*), to Cleopas and his companion, on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13*), and finally that night to all the disciples, bar Thomas, and of course Judas who had betrayed Jesus (*Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23*).

In the six weeks that followed, Jesus appeared to his friends and others “many times, in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive” (*Acts 1:3*). On one occasion, Paul tells us, he even appeared to “more than five hundred of his followers all at once”, probably in Galilee, as Jesus said he would (*1 Cor. 15:6; Matt. 28:16-20*). Paul adds an interesting comment to his mention of this appearance.... He writes:

“...most of whom are still alive, although some have died”.

In other words, Paul is saying: “Go ask some of these five hundred witnesses, if you still have doubts about the resurrection of Jesus!!

Some seven weeks or so, after that first Easter Sunday, Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples, stood up and proclaimed to the people in Jerusalem for the harvest festival:

You killed...(Jesus) by letting sinful men crucify him. But God

raised him from death...and we are all witnesses to this fact (*Acts 2:23,24,32; cf. Acts 3:15*).

And they are reliable witnesses at that!! Take Peter for example: he spent his life proclaiming the risen Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and finally he was willing to die for what he knew to be true. He was crucified upside down in Rome... (*Barclay, The Master's men, p. 24*),

And similarly for the other disciples: they were willing to suffer and even to die for what they they knew to be true: that God had raised Jesus from the dead (*Ibid.*) Now, who is willing to suffer and to die for what they have made up...!?

3) The church itself

And then there's the existence of the Christian church itself.... Without the resurrection of Jesus, how could frightened, disillusioned men and women have gone out to proclaim Jesus, a man who had died in disgrace on a cross....

And why would others have trusted their lives to Jesus, if they weren't convinced by the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection that Jesus *was* alive....

Down through the ages, people have followed Jesus, convinced that he is alive, and that he is who he said he is. Why? Because the evidence for Jesus' resurrection convinces them.... Yes, but more than that.... Because they've experienced Jesus working in their life and changing it. I know that I have: I'm radically different to the sort of person I would be without Jesus working in me....

I remember John Smith, the bikie evangelist, saying:

"I believe in Jesus because he changes lives. He's changed my life, and he changed the lives of many, many people whom I've come into contact with...".

Ordinary people like you and I know that Jesus is alive because he has changed our life....

You know, too, much about the rituals and customs of the early church points, also, to the truth of the resurrection. For example, the Christian rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper only really make sense in the light of the resurrection of Jesus.

Baptism involves a dying to our old life, and a coming forth as a new person (*Rom. 6:3-4*). I guess that this is more apparent when a person is dunked in water. Our old self is drowned, and we come out of the water a new person: a forgiven child of God, in whom the Holy Spirit now lives. Listen to what Paul says about this:

“For surely you know that when we were baptised into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptised into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life” (*Rom. 6:3,4*).

Michael Green comments:

“How could they have faced going through with a travesty like that if Jesus had in fact not risen from the dead?” (*Ibid.*, 51).

And he adds:

“It was the same with ‘the Lord’s Supper’, as they called it. It was the Lord’s not simply because it was held in memory of his sacrificial death on the cross, but because the Lord was present in their midst as they celebrated it.... Unlike all the Greek community meals in honour of a dead hero, they rejoiced to share in communion with a living Lord. You could not take part in the Lord’s Supper without having *this ...truth* made very clear to you” (*Ibid.*)

But above all, the change from worship on a Saturday, the Sabbath, to worship on a Sunday by the early church *only* makes sense as a result of the resurrection of Jesus on a Sunday, the first day of the week.

The early Christians were Jews, and Jews worshipped on the Saturday, the Sabbath, the day God rested from his work of creation. But the early Christians changed their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. Why?

It must have required some simply staggering happening to trigger such a thing off. The New Testament gives us one– the resurrection

(*Ibid.*, 54).

Part 2: The significance of Jesus' resurrection

Times of doubt will come our way.... You can't be a Christians without having times when you are tempted to doubt that what you believe is true. But, at such times, hold on to the rails that God gives to us: to support us in our faith, and to stop us falling off the cliff into the abyss of unbelief.... And one of these rails that God gives us is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. For this, the evidence is utterly overwhelming....

God's raising of Jesus from the dead assures us that Jesus really is who he said he was. God's raising of Jesus from the dead assures us that Jesus really is the Son of God who has sent by God to die for us, and to take upon himself the punishment that we deserve for our sins. As such, the resurrection of Jesus is of great comfort to us.

Conclusion:

Let me finish with an old story that you've probably heard at various times: **A Russian lecturer, a member of the Communist party, was addressing a packed audience on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He spoke at considerable length, seeking to discredit it.**

At the end of his speech, an Orthodox priest rose and asked if he might reply. He was warned that he could have only five minutes. 'Five seconds is all I shall need', was his reply. He turned to the audience, and gave the delightful Easter greeting, characteristic of the Eastern church. '*Christos aneste*', he cried, 'Christ is risen'. Back with a deafening roar came the traditional reply from the crowded hall, '*Alethos aneste*', 'He is risen indeed' (p. 62).

May God bless each of us when we focus on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. May it always give us great comfort in times of doubt.