

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on 1 Peter 1:3 – 5**

**Theme: “Against all odds, the irreversible will be reversed”**  
**“Look forward to the future with a ‘living hope’”**

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***Outline:***

- 1. The irreversibility of death...**
- 2. ... will one day be reversed.**

***Introduction:***

Our world is a world where the word “irreversible” seems to hold sway. All around us, people *die* from one cause or another. Husbands, wives, children, friends, all die slowly or quickly as the case may be: but all die eventually.... Each of us is headed in that direction, *towards a seemingly irreversible end.*

Death seems to be the final irreversible full-stop at the end of all our lives, a full-stop that seems to make a mockery of all of our ambitions, our desires, and our achievements....

***Part 1: The irreversibility of death***

Philip Yancey has written a number of stimulating books, one of which is entitled *The Jesus I never knew*. He begins a chapter on the resurrection of Jesus by talking about his first encounter with the irreversibility of death.

Let me read to you what he writes:

**In early childhood, I associated Easter with death, not resurrection, because of what happened one sunny Easter Sunday to the only cat I ever owned. Boots was a six-week-old kitten, solid black except for white “boots” on each of her legs, as if she had daintily stepped in a shallow dish of**

paint. She lived in a cardboard box on the screened porch and slept on a pillow stuffed with cedar shavings. My mother, insisting that Boots must learn to defend herself before sampling the huge outdoors, had fixed a firm date of Easter Sunday for the kitten's big test.

At last the day arrived. Georgia sunshine had already coaxed spring into full bloom. Boots sniffed her first blade of grass that day, batted at her first daffodil, and stalked her first butterfly, leaping high in the air and missing. She kept us joyously entertained until the neighbor's kids came over for an Easter egg hunt.

When our next-door playmates arrived, the unthinkable happened. Their pet Boston terrier Pugs, following them into our yard, spied Boots, let out a low growl, and charged.

I screamed, and we all ran towards Boots. Already Pugs had the tiny kitten in its mouth, shaking it like a sock. We kids encircled the scene, shrieking and jumping up and down to scare Pugs off. Helpless, we watched a whirl of flashing teeth and flying tufts of fur. Finally Pugs dropped the limp kitten on the grass and trotted off.

I could not have articulated it at the time, but what I learned that Easter under the noonday sun was the ugly word *irreversible*. All afternoon, I prayed for a miracle. *No! It can't be! Tell me it's not true!* Maybe Boots would come back – hadn't the Sunday school teacher told such a story about Jesus?

Or maybe the whole morning could somehow be erased, rewind, and played again minus that horrid scene. We could keep Boots on the screen porch forever, never allowing her outside. Or we could talk our neighbors into building a fence for Pugs. A thousand schemes ran through my mind over the next days until the reality won out

and I accepted at last that Boots was dead. Irreversibly dead.

For then on, Easter Sundays in my childhood were stained by the memory of that death in the grass. As the years increased, I would learn much more about the word irreversible (*Yancey,209-210*).

Each of us has learned, I guess, over the years what the ugly word “irreversible” means. If you haven’t, you either very young, or you have led an incredibly blessed or sheltered life. Who among us hasn’t stood at the edge of a grave and watched someone that we love being lowered down for the last time, *and realised that no matter how much we longed for them to be still with us, no matter how many schemes we had in our mind for turning back the clock, it was not possible! What had happened was irreversible!* The person whom we loved, and still love, was dead! Never again in this life will we speak to them, or joke with them, or do things with them....

***Part 2: ...will one day be reversed***

Is the word “irreversible” then the final word, the final reality that we all need to come to grips with!? Thank God, no!!

Listen to what Peter reminds us of, in our Bible reading for this morning:

**Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, and which is kept in heaven for you. You are being kept safe, by faith, for a salvation which is ready to be revealed at the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).**

Peter is stating that we who have been baptised have been born

again to a new life, a life that is marked by us having a “living hope” for the future. Our hope for the future is not a dead hope, a hope that is based on wishful thinking, but rather an alive hope, a hope that is certain because it is based on concrete reality. And the concrete reality that our hope is based on is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the basis of our hope for the future.

This is what Peter is saying in our text:

**Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead....**

And this is what Paul echoes and enlarges on again and again. Listen to what Paul has to say in his first letter to the Corinthians. There he writes:

**Now, since our message is that Christ has been raised from death, how can some of you say that that the dead will not be raised to life? If that is true, it means that Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe.... But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised....**

**Someone will ask, “How can the dead be raised to life? What kind of body will they have?” You fool! When you sow a seed in the ground, it does not sprout to life unless it dies. And what you sow is a bare seed, perhaps a grain of wheat or some other grain, not the full-bodied plant that will later grow up. God provides the seed with the body he wishes; he gives each seed its own proper body....**

**This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised it will be immortal. When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised it**

**will be beautiful and strong. When buried, it is a physical body; when raised, it will be a spiritual body.... Just as we wear the likeness of the man made from earth, so we will wear the likeness of the Man from heaven....**

**Listen to this secret truth: we shall not all die, but when the last trumpet sounds, we shall all be changed in an instant, as quickly as the blinking of an eye. For when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, never to die again, and we shall all be changed. For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. So when this takes place, and the mortal has been changed into the immortal, then the scripture will come true: “Death is destroyed; victory is complete!” (1 Cor. 15:12-54).**

The seemingly “irreversible” will one day be reversed. Of that, you and I can be certain as we focus on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: because *God’s raising of Jesus from the dead is the basis and the guarantee of our hope, our certainty, that we too will be raised one day from death....*

Let me read to you how Philip Yancey writes about this amazing fact:

**Not so long ago..., three of my friends died in quick succession. One, a retired man in excellent health, fell over dead in a parking lot after dining out with his wife. Another, a young woman of forty, died in flames on the way to a church missions conference when a tanker rear-ended her car in the fog. A third, my friend Bob, died scuba diving at the bottom of Lake Michigan. Life came to a halt three times that year.**

**I spoke at all three funerals, and each time as I struggled with what to say that old, ugly word *irreversible* came flooding back, with greater force than I had ever known. Nothing I could say, nothing I could do would accomplish**

what I wanted above all else: to get my friends back.

On the day Bob made his last dive, I was sitting, oblivious, in a cafe at the University of Chicago, reading *My Quest for Beauty* by Rollo May. In that book, the famous therapist recalls scenes from his lifelong search for beauty, especially a visit to Mt. Athos, a peninsula of monasteries attached to Greece. There, he happened to stumble upon an all-night celebration of Greek Orthodox Easter.

Incense hung in the air. The only light came from candles. At the climax of that service, the priest gave everyone three Easter eggs, splendidly decorated and wrapped in a a veil. "Christos Anesti!", he said – "Christ is Risen!" Each person present, including Rollo May, replied according to custom, "He is risen indeed!".

Rollo May writes, "I was seized then by a moment of spiritual reality: what would it mean for our world if He had truly risen?" I read that passage just before returning home to learn that Bob had died, and Rollo May's question kept floating around in my mind, hauntingly, after I heard the terrible news. What did it mean for our world that Christ had risen?

In the cloud of grief over Bob's death, I began to see the meaning of Easter in a new light. As a five-year-old on Easter Sunday, I had learned the harsh lesson of irreversibility. Now, as an adult, I saw that Easter actually held out the awesome promise of reversibility. Nothing – no, not even death – was final. Even that could be reversed.

When I spoke at Bob's funeral, I rephrased Rollo May's question in terms of our particular grief. What would it mean for us if Bob rose again? We were sitting in a chapel, numbed by three days of sorrow, death bearing down upon us like a crushing weight. How would it be to walk outside to the parking lot and there, to our utter astonishment, find Bob. *Bob!* With his bounding walk, his crooked grin, his

**clear gray eyes. It could be no one else but Bob, alive again!**

**That image gave me a hint of what Jesus' disciples felt on the first Easter. They too had grieved for three days. On Sunday they heard a (wonderful) new... sound, clear as a bell struck in mountain air. Easter hits a new note of hope and faith that what God did once in a graveyard in Jerusalem, he can and will repeat on a grand scale. For Bob. For us. For the world. Against all odds, the irreversible will be reversed (*Yancey, 210-211*).**

***Conclusion:***

“Against all odds, the irreversible will be reversed”. What wonderful news this is for us! The resurrection of Jesus by God is our pointer to what lies ahead for us. Like Jesus, we will have a re-created body and we will live with him in God's new world, a world where there will be “no more death, no more grief or crying or pain” (*Rev. 21:4*).

We can look forward to the future with a “living hope”, confident that death isn't the end but simply the gateway to a new life with Jesus.

What a future, what an inheritance, to look forward to!!

May God bless us as we live our life as His children, trusting in Jesus as our Saviour, and following Jesus wherever that takes us. Nothing in this world *is ever worth throwing away all that God has in store for us...*