

Raised in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Morning, Mike. So humbling and delightful to be here with you. I've been a bit absent in recent weeks, and I'm so glad to be back in my home church with you all.

I want to preach from the reading that John just read to us on the verse, Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

So it's a little worrying when the vicar stands up at the beginning of the service to introduce you and says you're about to preach on a subject that I've never heard of before. And so what I'm going to talk to you about is your identity in Christ as disciples of the risen Christ.

Someone say amen. Amen. And what that means and what that looks like in your life, but reflecting on it, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples are not on the face of it that encouraging, are they?

John tells us in his Gospel that when Jesus appeared to the disciples, they were in a locked room. And the reason they were in a locked room, John tells us, is because they were fearful.

[1 : 2 1] Luke tells us about the confusion of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And how they only recognized the risen Jesus when he broke bread with them and had breakfast with them.

And then, of course, there's Peter who denied Jesus three times before Jesus' death on the cross. And then you remember in that curious scenario, again in John's Gospel, Jesus asks Peter three times, do you love me?

To the point where Peter, we're told, was hurt by Jesus' repeated questioning of him and was a little embarrassed, I guess, because of his shame at his denial and the upset that Jesus would ask him not once but three times for some kind of reassurance.

Now, on the face of it, the experience of these disciples in the very earliest days after the resurrection is, I think you could describe, just a little shaky.

These disciples who would become lions of the faith, people who would take the Gospel to the far-flung places of the known world as it was then, didn't make a particularly encouraging start.

[2 : 5 2] Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a happy ending to a story which would otherwise be not very satisfying.

It is the essence of who we are in Christ, our identity in Christ, who we are. Without it, we would just be remembering a dead hero.

And you remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. He kind of nailed it there, good and proper, when he wrote about the resurrection. Let me remind you that 1 Corinthians is one of the earliest epistles in the New Testament.

This is what Paul thought about the resurrection. He said, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are in your sins.

[4 : 15] The message about the risen Christ is for people who know what it is to be fearful. For people who know what it is to be shamed.

For people who know what it is to be confused. Which is just about all of us. The risen Christ is here in the power of his spirit right now.

Paul in Colossians, twice in four verses, tells us that we have been raised with Christ. That's in the past tense.

And that we're also told, remarkably, that when Jesus returns, we will appear with him in glory. Imagine that for a moment.

That you will not only know about the glory of God, if indeed you do, but you will share in that glory. In your risen life.

[5 : 20] Paul says two things here. Set your minds on things above and set your hearts on things above. In other words, emotionally set your hearts on the things that are above and intellectually set your minds on the things that are above.

Not either or. But both and. Some scholars think that these verses might have been part of an early hymn. Or indeed, might have been part of a baptismal liturgy.

That is, the words you say at a baptism. I want to teach you two fundamental things this morning about the risen life in Christ.

About your identity as disciples of the risen Christ. Firstly, I want to tell you that resurrection means that in Christ, heaven is your destination.

Romans chapter 10 and verse 9. If you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[6 : 31] The resurrection means that heaven is your destination. But I want to teach you also that if you are in Christ, the resurrection is your motivation.

For we are meant to live the risen life of Christ today. Back in the 19th century, people criticized the Christian faith because they said, it's pie in the sky when you die.

They observed that a lot of Christians, some missionaries in fact, were preaching the gospel to people who were starving. No, said some of the reformers of the 19th century, what you need to do is to feed hungry tummies before you preach the gospel to them.

People like William Booth and Charles Hadley Spurgeon were giants in reminding the church that we're not sitting around just waiting to die to go to heaven.

But we're called to live the risen life here and now. Heaven is your destination. I wonder if you have any assurance of that in your life.

[7 : 52] I know a lot of people might be sitting here this morning thinking, well, having assurance that I might go to heaven sounds like a terrible arrogance to me and it would be an arrogance if it was based on what you've done.

But it's not an arrogance because it's nothing to do with what you've done. It is to do entirely what God has done in Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary in the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven on your behalf.

The God of grace. The God who loves you even though you don't deserve it sent His Son. that we might have eternal life.

Life everlasting. And there's more in the New Testament about heaven and eternal life than just about any other subject.

More about heaven and eternal life in the Bible than there is about Holy Communion for instance. writers of the New Testament want to believe us to know that in Christ they would receive the gift of eternal life.

[9 : 13] Excuse me. Eternal life is not just an infinite extension of life as we know it. because for many of you that would be an intolerable thought.

No. Eternal life is life of a different order. The Bible teaches us that we shall have a new body when we are resurrected.

That's partly why Jesus in His resurrected body wasn't immediately recognizable to those early disciples. But reassuringly eventually the penny dropped for them and they recognized Him.

People say to me maybe you thought it when I die will I see my partner in heaven? That's a really tough question especially if your partner is not a believer. But if your partner is a believer then I believe ultimately you might recognize them in heaven.

I find that very reassuring. Imagine you will have a new resurrection body not immediately recognizable as the body you have now.

[10 : 35] I don't know whether there's anybody who stalks the planet who would rather have the body they've got at the moment with the one that they will have.

In my case I just need to look in a mirror. Heaven is your destination. You will get a new body.

There will be a continuity between you today and your resurrected body. It will mean the end of suffering. Imagine that. Imagine a way of being where there will be no more tears and no more crying.

In Revelation chapter 21 the very last book of the Bible you can read about that. Amazing words of John as he wrote that incredible book.

Revelation chapter 21 and verse 3 onwards. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and women and he will live with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[11 : 46] He will wipe every tear from their eyes there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. if I was sitting there this morning without trusting God without believing in God those verses on their own would change my heart because looking at this world right now as Tim implied in his prayers is not the most encouraging thing to do at the moment.

Heaven is your destination and in heaven you will not need hope anymore because the kingdom of God will be manifest.

Tom Wright wrote these words he said Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.

This earth all that God created the earth the heavens all that therein is will one day one day be redeemed.

and that's why it's not pie in the sky when you die because it begins now as the people of God seek the power of spirit to live the risen life that God has in store for them.

[13 : 22] What a tragedy friends that there are people who warm the pews or the business class seats of churches Sunday by Sunday and they have no idea what the risen life is or what it might look like in their lives.

Which brings me to my second point in Christ the resurrection is our motivation. How are we to live the risen life now?

How are we to rise above that which Jesus called the worries of this life the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things? Ask yourself this question do you want more of God or do you want more of money and things?

I know that's a little below the belt but it's something you should think about. Are you constantly wanting what others have more than what God can give you?

if you are I fear you're a deluded person there is another way to live and it's a way that is ushered in by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 46] Let me say very briefly three things about that. Firstly you can't live the risen life if you want to live a hidden life. Let me say that again.

You can't live the risen life if you want to live a hidden life. 1 John chapter 1 John nails it. He says this this is the message we have heard from him and declare to you God is light in him there is no darkness at all wait for it if we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness we lie and do not live by the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin.

I'm not going to ask you to put your hands up but I wonder how many of you sitting in church today effectively live a hidden life.

There are aspects of your life that you cannot talk to anybody about because you are so ashamed and you would love to give it up but you don't know how to give it up and therefore your life is in the darkness and it's hidden and while it's hidden you cannot live the risen.

Set your minds and your hearts on things that are above says Paul. Second you can't live the risen life if wanting what you want surpasses what God wants for you.

[16 : 42] I think there are a lot of people who deep down inside know that actually when it comes to talking about their motivation the idea is not to please God but the idea is to get what they want out of life.

You wonder why the world is the way it is? The reason is that most people ignorant of God are just living for themselves. Not everyone who calls me Lord Lord said Jesus will enter the kingdom of heaven but only only those who do the will of my father.

You can't live the risen life if wanting what you want surpasses what God wants for you. And finally I would think it would be very very difficult to live the risen life if you let the hope that resurrection brings drain from your soul.

There are a lot of things that human beings can deal with in their lives. We can deal with a lack of dignity. We can deal with a measure of shame but when we lose hope it's our last resort.

hope is our resurrection surely means that we are a people of hope and for those people for those of us who trust Christ and his death and resurrection for those of us who trust that hope is not an abstract idea.

[18 : 29] It's not like put your hands behind your back and cross your fingers. It's a historical reality. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have never met Jesus in the flesh. We have not had the experience of Thomas who could put his fingers in Jesus' hands and his hand into Jesus' side to have his curiosity satisfied.

No, for us, belief in the resurrection is likely to be a gentle and undramatic realization that he is alive.

And all this would be impossible if it wasn't for this very profound truth that the same spirit which animated Jesus' corpse and allowed him to walk out of the tomb is the same spirit that's in this church this morning.

It's the same spirit that wants to give you real assistance in living the risen life. It's the very same spirit that can convict you of your sin and make you repent and come to Christ afresh and start to live the life that he has for you.

[19 : 59] not some imaginary fantasy of life which is what you want but no, the life that he, the maker of the heavens and the earth and all that therein is has for you.

I want to end with a remarkable encounter I had about six weeks ago when I was in Houston doing a week of teaching and preaching out there.

The rector had written to me in advance, he wasn't going to be there and said, would I turn up at some women's meeting? He said, I think it could be quite good.

I'm like, well that would be a first for me. So I went along and these upscale wealthy Houston women in all their glad rags dressed to the nines and me and my staff colleagues at the church in our dog collars and a lady stood up.

Her name is Jean Lakin. She's a Rwandan national. During the troubles, she was a Tutsi and you will know that the Hutus slaughtered the Tutsis in thousands.

[21 : 23] She watched while her own mother and father and family were butchered with machetes, hid in the bush, was found, was raped, escaped, was adopted by a foster family who took her to the USA only to discover that the man in the foster home was a sexual abuser.

father. If I didn't know Jesus Christ, I could never imagine how anybody could get past that.

And I'm imagining that sitting in church this morning, a number of you thinking exactly the same thing. how does anybody ever get past that? I have a book here.

It's called A Voice in the Darkness. This woman goes around the world and talks to people about forgiveness.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that's the risen life? Because I sure as heck do. For those of you sitting there this morning who got stuff that you can't get past, that must surely be an encouragement.

[22 : 50] Things could not go much worse in life for any human being than they did for poor Jean Lakin. You can get this book.

You can read about it. She wrote in the cover to Mike and Anthea, God is your light in the darkness.

He is your strength. Listen to me. Some of you are struggling with fear.

Some of you are struggling with confusion. Some of you are just struggling with some basic stuff like paying the bills in your house. some of you are angry.

Some of you feel shame. And you can't feel any of that stuff and live the risen life. And this morning, God in the power of His Holy Spirit wants to speak in your ear and think again.

[24 : 02] God will be alive. And if you ever struggle believing some of the stuff in the Bible, then here is a historic, concrete example of the 21st century.

She's alive. Not just physically alive, but alive in God and alive in His Holy Spirit. I want to ask you this question.

who wouldn't want that? I cannot believe that any of you would say no. Jack Hayford, that guy that wrote that worship song we used to sing in the 90s, Majesty, anybody remember that?

Jack Hayford said once, I heard him preach a sermon, he said, nothing messes up a graveyard like resurrections. And nothing, nothing messes up your life in Christ if you're trying to do it without believing that Jesus is raised from the dead.

And you need to set your minds on the things above. And you need to set your hearts on the things above. life. Because there is light in the darkness.

[25 : 29] And it can be yours. And it can be mine. And we need it. In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to invite you, if you feel that God has spoken to you this morning, I would like you just to stand up now please, if you would.

Don't be shy, just get up, get up, get up. Thank you. Thank you. You want to live that risen life that Christ has for you, get up now and I'll pray for you.

I'm not going to humiliate you in any way whatsoever. Let the Holy Spirit whisper in your ear. This is such a big deal, friends.

Such a big deal. Father God, I pray for these people who got up on their legs and want to commit themselves again to that risen life, maybe some for the first time Lord.

[26 : 45] I want to pray for people in the house who are fearful, who are angry, who feel shame, who feel all these negative emotions that can get in the way of who we are in the risen Christ.

Lord, would you open our hearts in new ways to receive your truth, to know your grace and your forgiveness.

But Lord, help us please to know the power of your Holy Spirit. Lord, because we know that you want to change us from the inside out.

Come, Holy Spirit, now. Fill your people. Heal your people. Lord, that we may be followers of the risen Jesus Christ.

And the people who agreed said together, Amen. Amen. Amen.