

Very Good News

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Date: 23 June 2002

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[0 : 0 0] St. John's Shaughnessy Church Many people look at the Christian faith and they admire it and they like a great deal about it and they can go along with it for much of it but they find the idea of the resurrection just a little bit disturbing and difficult to believe.

At our former service there was a woman who teaches sign language and I asked her to show us what it is, what death is and what resurrection is. And death is this and resurrection is this.

And I think that is a nice picture of the way our culture thinks about the resurrection. We love the creation story and the fact that the world is good and full of purpose. We like the story of the Garden of Eden although it does make us feel vaguely uncomfortable.

And we don't really take the idea of sin and judgment. Still Jesus' death can be a noble and moving sacrifice. But it's when we come to the idea of the resurrection that people think that Christianity is just a little bit weird.

And it turns Christianity from being a noble moral system into being a story like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. And I think people can accept a great deal of Christianity so long as the resurrection is marginalised.

[1 : 5 0] The problem of course is that there is nothing more central to the Christian faith than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if you marginalise that you marginalise Jesus himself.

And what you end up with is not a noble religion but just a husk, a glass without any water, television without any signal.

And whatever else it is, it's not Christianity. We read the story this morning. We were reminded again that that day, the dawn of the resurrection, is the beginning of the new world, the new creation.

It is the beginning of the fulfilment of all God's purposes in creation. And it means that death and evil and everything we have done to reject God does not have the final word.

And it means that our lives are not meaningless. But the meaning is caught up in the person of Jesus Christ. It means that there is forgiveness and a fresh start and eternal life with him.

[2 : 5 6] And it's distressing to some. But good news for all. And I think that's one of the reasons why we ought to insist on keeping the BCAD in our conversations.

Well let me try and address this by looking at two points. And the first is this, the facts of the resurrection. If you've read through the Gospels, you know they give us a picture, all four of them, of Jesus as a man of shocking power and loveliness.

Who seems totally at ease speaking about matters of life and death. Who thinks of himself as the one whom we will meet after we die.

Who claims to be the resurrection and the life. And three times in Jesus' ministry he predicts that he's going to go to Jerusalem and be crucified.

And then three days later rise again from the dead. And I don't know if you've ever thought about how impressive that is. I mean it's one thing to predict that you're going to be crucified.

[4 : 04] It's a totally other thing to predict that you're going to rise again and for it to happen. It's very impressive isn't it? I think it is. And you know that Jesus' resurrection is different than anything else that takes place ever since the creation of the world.

You know in the Gospels Jesus raises three people back to life again. At least three. Three that we know of. But each of those raisings is different than the resurrection.

Because each of those people was merely resuscitated back to this life where they would die again. But Jesus was raised to a different kind of life. A deathless life.

The life of eternity. It meant that death could no longer hold him. And he is the first man of this new creation. And that's the point that's being made in the first verse of Matthew 28.

We're told it's after the Sabbath. It's after the seventh day. It's the dawn of the first day. It's a new dawn. In verse 2. Mary and Mary go to the sepulchre.

[5 : 12] Behold there was a great earthquake. An angel of the Lord descended from heaven. Came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning. His raiment white as snow.

And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. And the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid. I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. For he has risen as he said. Now each of the four gospels tells us that Jesus was crucified and died.

He was dead three days. And on the third day the women go to the tomb to complete the burial ceremony. And to their utter amazement they find that the massive stone that was on the door has been flicked aside.

That there's a blazing angel sitting on the stone. And the guards are lying around like dead men. It's a wonderful thing you know because every single account of the women and the early disciples tells us that despite the fact that Jesus predicted it, none of them had any expectation or idea that it was going to take place.

[6 : 28] In fact they needed convincing themselves. And I think that's one of the reasons why the angel appears to the women. He's rolled the stone away from the tomb not to let Jesus out but to let us see in that his body is no longer there.

It is a well and truly empty tomb. And then to make things absolutely clear the angel says, Jesus who was crucified is risen as he said.

In other words you haven't gone to the wrong tomb. That very Jesus Christ. He is risen from the dead. He was dead. He is no longer dead. He is risen.

He's not been reincarnated. He has been raised from the dead. And I think we're so familiar with this concept. It's hard for us to imagine the transformation that has taken place in that very event.

The first time in history the iron grip of death, the one thing that holds us in fear, has been broken from the inside out. And the angel is saying, Jesus has defeated that death, that one thing that stands against all of humanity which we are powerless before.

[7 : 45] The result of our disobedience and disbelief. It has now been breached by one Jesus Christ who has gone through death, come out the other side and is now alive and lives forever so that he might open a way for us to move through death as well.

I read of a Muslim in Africa who became a Christian, a young man and when his friends asked him why he had become a Christian, this was his answer. He said, well it's like this.

Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions and you didn't know which way to go. And there at the fork were two men, one dead, one alive, which would you ask for directions?

You know the empty tomb convinces no one. And so as the women race off to tell the disciples, Jesus in verse 9 graciously appears to them. And they fall at his feet and they worship him because it's not a vision, it's not a hallucination, it's not an apparition.

This is a bodily resurrection. Again, it's not just a resuscitation back into this life. They didn't worship Lazarus but they worshiped Jesus. Here is Jesus, bodily raised from the dead with feet that you can hold on to.

[9 : 05] And this is one of at least ten resurrection appearances that occur in the New Testament. Over a period of 40 days, Jesus appeared to his followers, giving them proofs, demonstrating that he had risen from the dead.

He didn't need to do that. He could have gone straight to heaven to be with God but he would have left us in the dark. And his resurrection body is different than the earthly body that we have and that he had.

It seems it's no longer bound by the usual material limitations. He seems able to pass through certainly the tomb and certainly the sealed doors of the upper room.

He's able to appear suddenly and disappear suddenly. He can walk for miles and then make himself recognized. He eats food and drinks drink.

He has a fish barbecue at one stage but he doesn't seem to need to. He has a transformed body. His personal identity remains intact.

[10 : 08] But he has entered into a new kind of existence. And then after those 40 days he ascends to heaven to be with God. They are the facts.

But of course what on earth is the meaning of these facts? And it's impossible for us to even begin to come to terms with the meaning of these things.

We will be exploring the meaning of the resurrection for all eternity. But I think it's best to say that the New Testament tells us there are two key elements to the meaning of the resurrection.

And the first is this. Jesus is now Lord. Jesus is now Lord. You see what are the first words that we hear from Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28?

In verse 16 we pick it up. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him.

[11 : 08] But some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

And the word authority is not just naked power. It is the right and the freedom to act and decide as he wishes. It is God's authority. And he has been given all in heaven and on earth.

You see it is God's massive yes of approval to the work of Jesus. It is God saying, Your death, it has dealt with evil and it has dealt with sin.

It is God saying, This is my son. You can trust the things that he says. When he speaks about me and he speaks about the life to come, he speaks with my authority.

When he speaks about the meaning of life, what is right and wrong, when he speaks about death and heaven and hell, he knows what he is saying. And I have raised him from the dead and brought him up to my right hand and enthroned him as the ruler of the world so that he now has all authority in heaven and on earth.

[12 : 29] And his authority is unrestricted, unqualified, unconditional. It goes from the smallest subatomic particle to the furthest reaches of space.

And it draws under its canopy every man, every woman and every child who has ever lived, every spiritual being in heaven and in hell. It doesn't diminish over time.

It doesn't weaken with the different circumstances of our lives. His authority embraces all angels, archangels, powers, principalities, evil spirits, the natural world, the supernatural world.

He has absolute authority and freedom and right. There is no area, there is no people, there is no culture, there is no individual who lays outside his domain and his power and his authority.

And that is why twice in this chapter, Jesus happily receives the worship of his disciples in verses 9 and 17. Because he is aware that now that he has risen from the dead, there is a new moment.

[13 : 41] And the moment is marked by his universal lordship. And if there is any doubt whatsoever, what Jesus does is to include himself in the name of God.

You see that in verse 19. He instructs us to baptise in the name, one name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

From now on, the name of God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the heart of the Christian faith. It's the heart of the Christian message.

If you turn back and look at the way that the early Christians used to share their faith and speak about their faith with their non-Christian friends, the heart of their message sounded something like this.

You thought that Jesus was irrelevant. You thought that he had nothing to do with your spiritual well-being. God has chosen him to be the ruler of the world and has raised him from the dead and enthroned him in heaven where he is now Lord and Christ.

[14 : 47] That is the meaning of the resurrection. Jesus is Lord and Christ. The meaning of the resurrection is not primarily that you are very important to God, even though you are.

It's not primarily that there is life after death, even though there is. It's not even that you should go to Jesus and receive what he has to give to you, even though you should.

The primary meaning of the resurrection in the New Testament is that Jesus is Lord and ruler of all things. He has conquered death. He is now the ruler and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

And that's why becoming a Christian is a fundamental recognition that we live in a world where Jesus is the Lord. He is the one who is the key to life and death. We have asked God to open our eyes to the fact that we have not treated him as our ruler and that we need to turn and recognise him and ask him to be our God.

That's the first meaning of the resurrection. Jesus is now Lord. But there is a second. And it is that Jesus is now the saviour of the world.

[16 : 03] I think there are many people who think that Christianity is about getting life after death, after living a pretty decent moral life now.

And if you have been a Christian for more than three or four months, you will know that that's the exact opposite of what Christianity teaches. Christianity is a rescue operation where God sends his son to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, to give us what we could not give ourselves.

He sends Jesus who dies our death and who rises again and by doing that gives us access to the tree of life which we lost in the garden. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is never just belief that there's some sort of vague thing called life after death.

It is the specific belief that Jesus has opened the door of salvation to us, that something has happened in the real world. It's not about me finding some spiritual dimension to my life.

It is about the living God who's reclaimed his creation. It's not the immortality of the soul. It's not the annihilation of the soul. It's not the reincarnation of the soul.

[17 : 16] It is about dying with Christ and rising with him and that is what the picture of salvation is. Have you ever noticed that reference at the end of verse 20 in Matthew 28?

He says, Look, I am with you always to the close of the age. The fact that I am raised from the dead means this age is coming to an end.

It means that the new age has begun, the new creation. That's why the New Testament is at pains to point out that he has poured out from heaven the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Because what the Holy Spirit does as he comes into our lives is he gives us the resurrection life of Jesus. He brings us into the new creation that we may be born again.

And I know people use this idea of being born again as a kind of a credit badge for being an A++++ churchgoer. I've heard people say, I go to church and I'm a Christian but I'm not one of those born again types.

[18 : 24] Born again was an idea that Jesus introduced and it's not focused on you individually or me individually. It is about us being joined to the power of this new thing, this resurrection life.

The power of his salvation. The life of the new creation. The Holy Spirit is not given to us so that we might have private spiritual experiences. not even so that we might enjoy his guidance and wisdom even though that does happen.

The primary reason is so that we might see Jesus as our Saviour and our Lord. That's what salvation means. Well now, this all comes to bear on us very importantly.

What does it mean? Let's go back and read verses 18 to 20 again. Jesus said to them, All authority in heaven on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[19 : 29] And though I'm with you always to the close of the age. See, the place where all of God's purposes from creation to new creation come to bear in our lives is as we become disciples of Jesus Christ.

The salvation that he's won through his death and resurrection is for those who are his disciples. And being a disciple means two things. The first is it means responding to Jesus as Lord, becoming a learner, becoming a follower of him.

And you cannot follow Jesus unless you are following the real Jesus. The one whom God has sent from heaven with the words of God. It means coming to him and being a pupil and a learner from him.

And that requires a fundamental change of mind. It means turning away from my own self-government and doing my thing and turning towards the true God and Jesus Christ as the true ruler.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonians says, You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers from the wrath to come.

[20 : 52] If Jesus is the only son of God if he is the resurrection and the life if he is the new creation and the one that is enthroned at the right hand of God becoming a disciple of his means stop pretending that I am the ruler and to bow to him and to turn to him in repentance and ask him for a fresh start and the power to follow him.

That's the first part of what it means to respond to respond to him as Lord. But being a disciple also means to respond as Jesus as our saviour because being a disciple is not just learning it's not just an academic thing there is a deep personal allegiance that is involved.

It's not just recognising his great power and authority but it is seeing in Jesus Christ our hope and our salvation and our life and our everything.

It's what the Bible calls faith. It's not a religious experience or leaping in the dark. To say I have faith means I am relying on I am depending on I am trusting and we have faith all the time in all sorts of things.

I mean we have faith in the people who are our friends and family we have faith in the seats that we're sitting on we're relying on them and every time you get into someone's car and they drive you somewhere and depending who they are they're in charge of where you go you are relying on them.

[22 : 29] Faith isn't a separate object in itself. People sometimes say have you got faith? It's like saying have you got reliance? Have you got dependence? Have you got trust?

The question of course is reliance on what? Do you have faith in what? The issue facing all of us is do you have faith in Jesus Christ that he died for you on the cross and that he rose on the third day and offers us salvation?

Are you trusting and relying on him? Or are you trusting and relying on something that you have done? That you have been baptised or that your uncle was an archdeacon in the church or that you've been a church member for a thousand years or that you might have given a great deal of money?

If you're relying on those things that's not Christian faith. Christian faith is not trust in what I'm doing. Christian faith is trust and reliance on Jesus Christ to take away our sin to bring us to heaven to bring real change by his resurrection power in this life.

And the way in which we turn to him and the way in which we respond to him being Lord and Saviour is to simply talk to him. To be honest with him and to admit that we have rebelled and deserve his punishment and to thank him and to ask him to accept us on the basis of Jesus' death and to change us into someone who wants to live as his ruler.

[23 : 59] And I'm going to pray a prayer in a moment and if you would like to do that as all of us should to turn to Jesus and to continue turning to him and to be his disciples day by day responding to him as Lord and Saviour why don't you bow your head and pray this with me.

Dear God I know I am not worthy to be accepted by you. I do not deserve your gift of eternal life. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you and I need your forgiveness.

Thank you for sending your son to die for me that I may be forgiven and thank you that he rose again to give me new life. Please forgive me and change me that I may live with Jesus as my ruler that I might follow him all the days of my life.

I ask in his name. Amen. This digital audio file along with many others is available from the St.

John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org That address is www.stjohnschaughnessy.org On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy.

[25 : 33] We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others. Thank you.

Thank you.