

**Easter Sunday
Resurrection Hope!
Mark 16:1-8
24th March 2024
Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

I don't know how you catch the news, perhaps on an app, but Yvonne and I still watch the 6.00 O'clock news, most days! Call us old fashioned. We sometimes find ourselves *wondering why* we put ourselves through the ordeal, because the news is filled with so much tragedy and sorrow. (And truth be told, for that reason we've sometimes had to turn it off, because it is too much for us to bear.)

But over the last week or so I've been scanning the news for stories with some note of hope in them, and I found two. The first was that short video from the Princess of Wales in which she explained one of the reasons she had delayed telling the public about her cancer treatment: she and Prince William were waiting until they could give their three children hopeful news, the news that their mother would be OK.

The other example was Rachel Goldberg-Polin, whose son is being held hostage by Hamas. She was asked if she thought she'd see her son again: "I really do. I believe it and I have to believe it. That he will come back to us. Hope is mandatory."

Hope is a "tomorrow word." It's the belief that tomorrow will be better than today, the conviction that the problems, injustices and tragedies of life will find some resolution in the future; hope is the desire that suffering, in the end, will not have the last word.

And I am convinced that Rachel Goldberg-Polin is right—"hope is mandatory." We all need hope to keep going! From low-level hopes such as finishing off some domestic project, to mid-level hopes about our health, families, relationships, careers or holidays, all the way to ultimate hopes about dying and death.

"My children need to know that mummy will be OK"

"I have to believe I will see my son again!"

Hope is mandatory because without it we sink into despondency, gloom and despair. The big question is where do we seek and where do we find this essential ingredient to life? The message of Easter is that all true hope comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Christianity is at root, a message of hope! One philosopher who is not a Christian, suggested that the main reason Christianity spread from the first century onwards at the expense of philosophy was because it offered hope, and especially hope beyond the grave.

Let's look at the evidence for the resurrection and then we'll see how it brings us hope.

The resurrection of Jesus is a fact!

Take that story we read a moment ago from the Gospel of Mark. Three friends of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome rose early on the first Easter Sunday morning to complete the burial customs of those days. (The spices they took were not intended to embalm the body but to show respect for the departed one, and to mask the smell.) On the Friday afternoon Jesus had been crucified and his body laid in a tomb. All three friends had watched the crucifixion at a distance, powerless and heart-stricken. Two of them had seen his body being placed in the tomb...which means they knew 1) Jesus was dead for sure and 2) where his body had been placed.

They would have brought the spices much sooner, but no-one was allowed to work on the Sabbath Saturday. So early Sunday morning, some 40 hours after his death, they set out. (We should note that it was a mark of the sincerity of their devotion that they were prepared to anoint a body which had been dead for so many hours.)

On the journey they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" When they arrived the heavy stone had been rolled away! And as they went into the tomb they were shocked to find a young man dressed in a white robe who was a messenger from God! "Don't be alarmed!" he said, preparing them for the biggest shock of all: "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid him. Go tell his disciples and Peter ' He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." They had come to pay their respects to a dead body, now they're being told that body had risen from the dead and they would see Jesus

again! The intensity of this news was just too much for them: “Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.”

Everything about Mark’s account has the ring of truth about it: The fact that the first witnesses to the resurrection were women for a start: in a Jewish court of law the testimony of a woman did not count. If you were making up an account to gain traction in the first century, you would not have mentioned women as the first witnesses! Then there's Mark’s honest mention of their reaction shock and fear! And again, if you were making up this story you’d say that the women were overjoyed at the news! But Mark says they trembled and ran away! And then when we add the testimony of the other eye-witness accounts in the New Testament, it is clear that the story of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is true! The three main lines of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus are:

1. ***The tomb was empty***—and the disciples had no motive for stealing the body because none of them believed Jesus was going to rise!
2. ***Many people saw Jesus alive***— from individuals on their own to groups ranging in size from 2 to 500; from believers to sceptics like Thomas; over a long period of 40 days! These eyewitnesses knew what Jesus looked like before he was crucified and the risen Jesus was the same person!
3. ***The origin of the church***. The third line of evidence is the origin of the church, which spread across the world. If Jesus had remained dead, his name and his movement would have been nothing more than a forgotten sentence in some dusty history book. But the church was born founded on this miraculous event! *“If Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”* (1 Corinthians 15:14) *“If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile you are still in your sins.”* (17) If a dead body could have been produced, the Christian movement would have collapsed! But it didn’t and Christians were prepared to be fed to lions, tied up in sacks and thrown to raging bulls, smothered in tar and set up as torches in the arena all because they were convinced that because they were filled with the hope, that since Jesus Christ rose from the dead never to die again, so would they one day!

Any reasonable person looking at the evidence must conclude that Jesus rose from the dead!

But how does his resurrection 2000 years ago give us hope today? How does that work? Let me share just two ways the resurrection of Jesus brings glorious hope today:

The Resurrection of Jesus gives us hope today

(1) The resurrection of Jesus brings us the hope of sins forgiven

The Bible teaches that we have all sinned against God. We may not like to hear that, but we've all broken the 10 commandments - and if we have never heard of those commandments, we've disobeyed the law he has put in our minds which we call conscience. We've had evil thoughts, we've spoken wrong words and we've done wrong deeds. And worse for us, since God is the righteous Judge of the universe, he must punish all wrongdoing! I stumbled upon a preacher on YouTube who was making fun of the story of Noah and the flood! "We can't believe in a God who gets angry and punishes the world by sending a flood." But the story of the flood is there to remind us that God is the righteous Judge of the world who must punish wrongdoing. Or else he'd be like a high court judge who set convicted perjurers, murderers and thieves free! The nation would be outraged! Justice would be offended!

God must punish our wrongdoing, but because he loves us he sent his Son to be punished instead of us! That is what was happening on Good Friday! Jesus was suffering for our sins! We can put it this way: if Good Friday signals the start of Jesus' payment for our sins, the resurrection signals the completion!

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against him." (Psalm 32:2) It is a wonderful thing to know that all the wrong we have ever thought, all the wrong we have ever spoken and all the wrong we have ever done has been forgiven - that's what the resurrection declares! It says "Paid in Full!" *"Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."* (Rom. 4:25)

The second hope which flows from the resurrection of Jesus Christ is ...

(2) The hope of life beyond the grave

Jesus rose from the dead never to die again! And he said, *"whoever believes in me will live,*

even though they die.” In other words, if we believe in Jesus Christ, then we will one day be raised from the dead in a glorious new body, never to die again!

Someone asked me this week if I had watched Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” - it’s a 2 hour film depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. It’s an attempt to be true to the horrors of Roman crucifixion. I said “no” because I had heard it was harrowing to watch.

Film or no film, the body that went into the tomb on Good Friday was bruised and battered by the treatment Jesus received from the Roman soldiers.

But the body that rose on Easter Sunday was glorified, healed and perfected! (All except for a few unique scars in his hands and feet and side which will serve as eternal reminders of his love for us.)

And everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will also, one day, be given a brand new body and will dwell in a new heavens and a new earth with God and all of his people!

As a church minister I've been to many funerals, Christian and non-Christian. And I would like to testify to this—Christian funerals are filled with hope! And can I say, even joy! That emotion might seem out of place at a funeral! Why hope and even joy? Because the loved one has gone to a better place and the next time we see them, it will not be in the old diseased body that was sown in the ground! Rather it will be in a new, glorious, imperishable, powerful, spiritual body! What hope! And even what Joy!

Let me close with this... The French Philosopher Luc Ferry (look fer-rie) says that the task of every human philosophy is to help people overcome the fear of dying, because “fear of death prevents us from living,” is how he puts it. It’s an honest confession, both that death is both the biggest thing people fear and a constant dark cloud hanging over their lives. But the resurrection of Jesus takes away the fear of death because one day if we believe in Jesus Christ we will die in the hope of eternal life. On this glorious Easter Sunday, do you have these two hope? That all your sins have been paid in full? And that you will one day rise from the dead? If you turn to God and believe in his Son, this hope will become yours. Amen.