

SERMON: The Power of Jesus' Resurrection

Ezekiel 37.1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.6-11; John 11.1-45

Beloved Father, as we prepare for Holy Week may we give your Son all thanks and praise for his loving sacrifice for our sakes. Amen.

I'll begin with a couple of questions and at the end I'll invite your own responses to them: Do we believe in the power of God to resurrect each one of us? How has that power impacted on our belief in Jesus and the way in which we follow Him?

As I reflected on my own answers to these questions it took me back to when I was about 14yrs old. My father decided to return to his ancestral faith, Roman Catholicism. He had never had myself and my older sister baptised so we found ourselves attending classes with the local priest. I was already at the age when I felt I knew everything so I gave the priest a fairly difficult time with lots of questions. One of those questions was about the virgin birth. "Tell me father, how could that possibly have happened? It's against all the God given laws of nature isn't it?" In his Irish brogue, his answer to this question and every other curly one I asked was: "To be sure son, it's one of God's holy mysteries."

Now, that answer didn't satisfy me much back then and so, for many years, I searched for answers to life's difficult questions in other worldly places. In my twenties, as most of you know already, that led me to work in the trade union movement. In that career I saw the best and the worst of humanity. I saw power used wisely and power horrifically abused. I wanted permanent solutions to this conflict yet none were forth coming. I wanted to know how evil could be overcome and a perfect world built. I scoured through left and right wing political ideologies, explored various philosophers from Des Cartes and Rousseau to Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, but no satisfying answers were attained. My childhood priest's "holy mysteries" remained just that. I was pretty stubborn though. I continued wrestling with God about his imperfect world until my early 40's. But by then I'd had enough. I left St Mary's in the Valley in Calwell, turned my back on God and for three long years walked in the wilderness. Although I was at the peak of my secular Union career, I was in the depths of hell spiritually. It was only then that God led me

to the answers I craved. And the essence of those answers lies in today's gospel reading.

The account of the death and resurrection of Mary's brother, Lazarus can only be understood on the basis of one fact: Jesus is the Son of God. There is no wriggle room here. Either Jesus is who he says he is or else this story is a lie.

Given the importance of this statement I invite us all to carefully reflect upon what Jesus said and did. Upon hearing of Lazarus being ill, in verse 11.4 Jesus said: *"This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* This has the more obvious meaning of the way people would directly experience God's glory in action when Lazarus is literally raised from the dead. But there is also the deeper connection to Jesus' glory being shown on the Cross. Several times in the gospel of John it is made clear that the Son of God is to be glorified by his death and resurrection on the cross. As William Barclay explains: *"In the fourth gospel it is clear that Jesus regarded the Cross both as His supreme glory and as the way to glory. So when Jesus said that the cure of Lazarus would glorify Him, He was showing he knew perfectly well that to go to Bethany and to cure Lazarus was to take a step which would end in the Cross – as indeed it did."* It's well worth noting that this chapter in John concludes in verses 46 to 57 by recording that it was the notoriety Jesus gained through his resurrection of Lazarus that spurred the Jewish leaders on to seek his crucifixion.

In the next section of our reading Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that Lazarus is not just sleeping but is really dead. In verse 14: *"Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.'" Sometimes I must admit to feeling jealous of the disciples. For three years they were in the presence of Jesus as he performed so many miracles and signs of his divinity. How easy would it be to believe in Jesus if I had experienced what they did! Of course, that is not our path and yet we too can be powerfully convicted through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We too can be given an unshakeable belief in our Lord.*

It is this belief that Mary expresses in verse 27: *"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."* She said this in response to Jesus's bold declaration to her: *"I am the resurrection and the*

life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus' question is meant for us as well. Do we believe this? Do we accept that as the Son of God, Jesus not only resurrected Lazarus but was himself resurrected on the Cross? Do we accept that our belief in Jesus guarantees us eternal life?

For many years I didn't. I would go to church but I felt like an outsider. It seemed everyone else had this amazing faith except me. I wanted it desperately but it just wasn't there. I went on Parish Council, I joined the study groups but I still didn't really believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

That's why I eventually left the church but God didn't leave me. He led me to three Christian brothers who were running men's groups through Tuggeranong Baptist Church. After about 12 months being discipled by these men, I found myself kneeling before the Cross in tears, overwhelmed by Jesus' love for me. I finally knew that He had died on that Cross and was resurrected for me. I was finally able to repent for having rejected Him for so long. The answers to all the world's dilemmas that I had wanted to solve for so long were set before me through the actions of one person. Jesus, my Saviour, was the Saviour of the whole world. Through Him there is hope for a restored world, through Him there is the gift of eternal life. That gracious revelation radically changed my spiritual direction and began a new chapter in a wonderful and challenging faith journey. Brothers and sisters, we are all on that journey and whatever stage we are at is AOK: God knows what He is doing with each one of us.

So there you have my answer to the two opening questions: Do we believe in the resurrection? And how has its power impacted on our belief in Jesus and the way in which we have followed Him? Now is the opportunity for anyone to share their own thoughts on these two points.

My concluding prayer is that we may all reach out to Jesus, asking Him to remove any barriers that may be stopping us from deepening our belief in Him. May we praise, honour and adore Him for His glorious life, death and resurrection. AMEN.