

Easter Sunday - 2009

Sermon Text – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Theme: *“Passing on the faith”*

He is Risen! (He is Risen indeed!)

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Preparing an Easter sermon is almost a little puzzling. As I stand here before you, what am I going to preach to you that’s new? What do I imagine you’re going to hear that you haven’t heard about Easter before? Even the old preacher of Ecclesiastes points out, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, *and there is nothing new under the sun.*”

And yet it is also true what Paul says in today’s second reading, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” Paul is passing on the gospel message because it is so important for *each new generation* to hear the same, old, unchanging good news story again.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Jesus Christ – our Risen Lord

What is the good news that Paul is so eager to share with his listeners? “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-4). Let’s spend a few moments unpacking this.

That Jesus would die for our sins acknowledges that we have a problem that needs to be dealt with in the first place. All humanity has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory and so we are in need of a saviour. You can try to be your own saviour, but that path will always lead to failure for the physical death that awaits us all reminds us that no matter how hard we might try, we can’t beat death. Or we can put our trust in Jesus Christ as our saviour who has risen to new life, therefore defeating death. Christ has died as punishment for our sins so we receive the gift of eternal life.

Paul keeps referring to the Scriptures as the events of that first Easter happened in accordance with what had already been written. Jesus’ death and resurrection didn’t happen by accident, but because these events were part of God’s plan for restoring the broken relationship between humanity and himself. God had spoken by his prophets to let his people know that these events would take place so they would put their hope and trust in him.

Jesus was buried and raised on the third day. It is important to understand that Jesus was buried – which means he really did die. There wasn’t some form of coma or deep sleep for that wouldn’t need a burial. Instead Jesus died a real death – the death meant for us as a result of the sinful separation from God and his will for our lives. And just as Jesus work of salvation was completed on the cross, it is just as important to see that Jesus has risen again to new life. That Jesus has risen is proof for *us* that his sacrificial death was accepted by our Heavenly Father. With have a risen Lord who now reigns with to rule over us, not as a remote tyrant, but as a loving saviour who is prepared to sit with us in the midst of not only our joys and triumphs, but also our suffering and sadness. You do not have a defeated teacher or spiritual guide, but you do have a risen Lord.

Passing on the faith

Paul makes a big deal of Jesus appearing to the apostles and to many of his closest followers. As eye witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, there could be no doubt that Paul is telling the truth. Remember that Paul is writing to the congregation who are in Corinth which is a long way from Jerusalem, the site of the crucifixion and resurrection. Just as Corinth was a long way from Jerusalem, so we are a long way away, both in time and distance. And just as Paul drew on many witnesses to prove his testimony, so we have many witnesses who have given us a glimpse of Jesus' work, his death and his resurrection. We have their recorded testimony given to us through God's Word – the Bible.

And just as Paul worked hard to pass on that which was given to him, we are called to pass on the faith that has been given to us. We don't do this in a vacuum or by our own strength or imagination. Like Paul we pass on the faith that we have first received. Peter reminds his readers to "always be prepared to give a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). We don't have to make anything up but instead we pass on that which has been given to us. If your faith is small and simple – pass that on. If you have a mature and developed faith, well pass that on also. Both are just as important and just as effective in sharing the one Christian faith with all people. In fact genuine faith that is small and simple will be a lot more effective than trying to bluff people with long and eloquent reasons why you came to church on this Easter Sunday. That's what St Paul did – Christ died for your sins, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

We keep telling this unchanging story because it is a good news story. In a world that is crying out for good news, it is a blessing to be able to say, "whatever we see around us – it's not as good as it gets." The eternal life God has prepared for those who are baptised and believed is as good as it gets. What will this eternal life look like for you? I don't know the answer to that. I just believe that it will be an eternal life with no more tears, no more pain, no more death or suffering because that's what God's Word promises (Rev 21:4).

We are witnesses to God's saving grace as we pass on the faith to a new generation. We have been blessed to see once more on this Easter Sunday the good news lived out in Jarrah's baptism. God, working through his Holy Spirit, has brought Jarrah to be adopted by him as one of his own children. The Holy Spirit has been working through Jarrah's parents, Sally and Steven; through his wider family; through you as his godly family. Together you have been passing on the faith that the Holy Spirit gave you when you were baptised. Whether you attend services without fail, or maybe this is the first time you have come to church for a long time – you are all part of the unending story of Jesus' death and resurrection for the sins of all humanity so those who are baptised and believe may receive the gift of eternal life.

So on behalf of Jarrah and on behalf of all who have been baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, thank you for your part in passing on the faith.

Paul closes with a truth that brings great comfort to all who want to take part in the passing on of the faith for a new generation. "Whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." (v11) Paul says regardless of how you came to believe in Jesus Christ and his saving work the important thing is that someone preached or passed on the good news and so the Holy Spirit was given the chance to create faith anew. So don't be afraid to share your faith with others and don't feel you need the perfect opportunity to pass on the whole faith in one moment. It's enough that you share what has first been given to you.

The old preacher of Ecclesiastes was right, there is nothing new under the sun and I pray I've told you nothing you haven't heard before. But I also pray that today's Easter celebration is part of your journey as together we pass on the Christian faith to a new generation.

And may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in your risen Lord Jesus. Amen.