

SERMON EASTER SUNDAY 2022 – Why look for the living among the dead?

There was one question in that Resurrection account from Luke's gospel, that leapt out at me, for the times in which we now live. **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”**

I'm a great listener to Podcasts, and in all these conversations I'm hearing a similar refrain. “Are we looking for life among the dead things?”

The Pandemic journey of the past two years has shaken our world to the core. All of our fundamental institutions have been under a searching scrutiny, which has left many people searching for meaning and purpose. Many social commentators are asking... **“Are we in Post Liberal society - even a Post Secular society.** Many people are beginning to feel that we are looking for life among the dead things. Dead-end ways that no longer make any sense. There's a spirit to the age, something in the air, that yearns for a resurrection. A resurrection of the sacred.

So today want to talk about 2 main things.

- Firstly, the big picture context of what this day is all about and what this means for you and I in the everyday reality of our lives.
- Then I want to finish by locating **all of this** unashamedly in on our own St G's community.

On Friday we had a truly beautiful Good Friday occasion. All of us had come to ponder the saving power and the world changing events of the Cross. And it was very moving.

It felt like new shoots of resurrection hope. A lot more people came than we were expecting and there was a real sense of people feeling able to return and we also had a number of visitors, who said some very encouraging things to me about our church.

So today is a day for celebrating the risen Christ and New creation. Life among the dead things

So we want to celebrate new green shoots and new possibilities in our own community, as we as we emerge from what's been a long and challenging journey.

Resurrection hope in our ministry and mission

And we have some very encouraging news to share with you.

But lets start with a video and a song that captures this mood and spirit perfectly.

VIDEO - HERE COME STHE SUN

- **SO LET'S START WITH THE BIG PICTURE CONTEXT OF WHAT THIS DAY IS ALL ABOUT. ITS TRUE ESSENCE.**

To fully grasp and understand what this day is all about, we have to fully understand the big picture context in which resurrection it sits. And there is no bigger context and no bigger truth for our Christian faith than this. Captured in those opening words from the Book of Hebrews.

HEBREWS 1
 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now God has spoken to us through his Son.
 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character and nature of God.
 Do we always recognise the full significance and the full IMPLICATIONS of this truth?

HEBREWS 1 **1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 But now God has spoken to us through his Son. 3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character and nature of God, Jesus Christ is the exact representation of God's very nature and being.**

JOHN 1
 The Word (Christ) became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
 We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 COLOSSIANS 1
 The Son is the image of the invisible God. God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

St Paul says exactly the same thing in Colossians 1:5

The Son is the image of the invisible God. God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

And then this crucial truth of our faith straight from the mouth of Christ Himself talking to disciple Phillip. **“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.**

Do you want to know what the character of God looks like? Then look at Jesus. I'm not sure that even we as Christians always fully grasp the magnitude and the implications of this fundamental truth of our faith.

And yet, everything that we need to understand about our understanding of scripture and what it means to be a follower of Christ... HAS to flow out from this one core truth.

1. Firstly, think about what this means for all that Jesus taught us and lived out in His Life.

Jesus spent his entire ministry teaching us about the Kingdom of God. **And the Kingdom of God is central to our faith.** Put very simply, the Kingdom of God is when we live out life on earth the way God created and intended it to be lived out. Jesus is revealing to us what God cares about. Its what the Beatitudes are all about. It's what all his parables were about. Jesus painting the picture of what life looks like when it's lived out according to Gods good purposes. When we look for the living things among the dead things.

2. Secondly, Jesus' resurrection is a vindication of EVERYTHING that Jesus taught us Everything He died on the cross for

And everything he then called us to follow and live out.

If Jesus didn't rise, then the Cross simply means that everything in this world that diminishes and dehumanises us got the last word. All the dead-end ways of self-serving power, violence and injustice, they all had the last word. The meek don't inherit the earth, they just get crucified.

But Jesus Christ did rise. And God is pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ.

So now EVERYTHING is now different.

Now we have the sure and certain hope that the power of Love, wins out.

The arc of the universe DOES bend towards justice

Everything that was good in the original creation is reaffirmed.

It's all within an eternal perspective of course... But as we keep saying, ETERNITY is now in session but.

And no-one captures the truth of all this better than Tom Wright so let's hear these words from Tom

Jesus's 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, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about. The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom. The decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven. The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you are now invited to belong to it.

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And it's those last words that are the most exciting part for me.

WE are invited to participate in God's redeeming, renewing purposes.

To look for the living things among the dead things.

It's always has been the most exciting part for me ever since I came to faith. Only 3 things last into eternity said St Paul, faith hope and love. And the greatest of these is love. Well, I have complete faith in the power of hope. The hope that love never fails. Christ-like love will redeem and restore all that is broken, hurting and lost.

- Do I feel overwhelmed at times with the way of world? Yes I do.
- Are there times when I cry with despair at the folly of humanity? Yes I do.

But in the end, I believe the words of Jesus Christ. With God all things are possible.

Now more than ever I want to be part of a Church community that seeks to be the light of Christ in the world. That seeks the living things among the dead things.



As St Paul puts it to the Church of Corinth. *9 For we are co-workers in God's service; we are God's field, God's building.*

And what excites me is that I see new possibilities opening for the church.

In today's passage the Apostles didn't believe the women when they said the tomb was empty. They thought their words seemed like nonsense. There are many (and I used to be one of them) who think the Resurrection of Christ is nonsense.

But as I said at the beginning, there are now many more now beginning to ask deeper questions about reality and life. They think that the way we've been living is nonsense. It makes no-sense.

Is this materialistic, mechanistic approach to life with no sense of the sacred. No reverence for the gift of God's created order, really the way to find the livings? Abusing our environment. Treating everything as a commodity to be bought, sold and thrown away.

In short, we've tried living without God and many people are beginning to feel that it isn't working.

We as a community like everyone have been through a very difficult time. But we are emerging strongly, with new shoots and new possibilities. I'm a great believer that in every crisis there is possibility, we just have to look for them and have the courage to pursue them. To believe that with God all things are possible.

So I want to spend a few minutes sharing some good news that are part of these new green shoots of resurrection hope.



CRUCIAL CONVERSTATIONS ONLINE PODCASTS

As I said, I take a great deal of interest in the numerous Podcasts that are having these kinds of conversations and I've been greatly encouraged by a new openness to talk about spirituality and even more encouraged by the openness to talk about Christ and Christianity.

It gives the Church an opportunity that we haven't seen for a long time. **But we can only contribute to this conversation if we are part of the conversation**, so this is what our new Online ministry called **'Crucial Conversations on Faith, Hope and Love'** will be all about. We want to our build bridges of dialogue to talk about our faith authentically and openly and not defensively.



HAYLEY LEWIS

One of our key strategies has been our desire to encourage Lay ministry. In the Anglican world this simply means anyone who's not ordained. We very much wanted to encourage Hayley and she's on a Leadership training equipping course called Arrow. Our **very own Chris Grantham** headed this up for many years doing a great job but now it's the turn of someone else. Who just happens to be one of our **very own Chris Clarke**.

Like everything else this has been a covid interrupted but Hayley came back a few weeks ago from her first **'in person' retreat** and she was buzzing with new ideas and a deeper sense of God's calling for her life.

Interesting to note that the Diocese have recognised that the future of the Anglican Church has to be about equipping and resourcing lay ministry and they've appointed someone to head this ministry up. Who just happens to be our very **own Karen Spoelstra**.

So it's good to see the people of St George's figuring so prominently in being co-workers in God's service. For us this is super encouraging and all part of the New Shoots.



CHURCH HALL ROOF

When we get to work on the Church roof, the Church hall will be our home. But the church Hall has a bad leaky roof and has become a really urgent case. But with all our other commitments we've been skating on thin financial ice, so we haven't been able to move forward with confidence.

But long story short, I was in conversation with a couple from our community a few weeks back and they asked us how much the church Hall roof would cost. I said 57,000 dollars. **Well, 2 days later they gave us the full amount.**

They wanted to remain anonymous, but they did say feel free to use the story in order to build up the faith of the community as you see fit. So this is what I'm doing. **What this does for me personally and I know for the Leadership team, is strengthen the conviction that God is with us in our challenges.**

After all the testing situations of the past 9 months, we can move forward boldly and dare greatly. I'm convinced that the grace, courage and goodwill of our people will take us to even deeper places in our collective faith walk in Christ.



JESSABEL UNNI

The final piece of good news and a new green shoot with new possibilities is this. A huge part of our prayers has been for someone to be our new **Children's and Families Co-ordinator** after Steph left. Steph was both Youth and Children's and families person but moving forward we felt we'd prefer to have different people for the different roles.

So it gives me enormous pleasure to say that **Jessabel Unni** will be our new Co-ordinator. Jess said she felt a real sense of God taking her into a new season in life where she wanted to give back to church after focussing understandably on her 5 awesome children. We will pray for Jess in the heartbeats



COLIN RUGE - SPIRIT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

I'LL FINISH WITH THIS. Last night as I was slogging away on this Sermon. An email came through from our very own Colin Ruge who if you don't know him, is a retired Anglican priest and 90 years of age.

A few weeks back Colin and wife Ruth both went down with Covid. Obviously, we were tad worried for Colin, because I think being 90 qualifies as the vulnerable age group. But Colin and Ruth returned to church a few weeks back. NOTHING was going to keep them from being part of a worshipping community. And Colin read one the readings at our Good Friday service.

Anyway, he sent me an email and I want to read it to you because for me, this captures **everything** about the spirit of this community throughout this Pandemic Journey and everything about how we will go forward.

Hi Josh,

I have just listened to Jessabel's message in the last of the series and would like to record how blessed I have been from that message and all the people, including yourself, who have given us their thoughts on the Beatitudes.

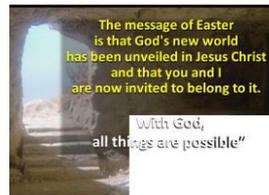
One speaker talked about paradoxes and the challenge from Jesus about " Kingdom living ". Well I want to accept this challenge and I pray to God, "help me to meet that challenge."

I am encouraged by the verse that tells us that the crowds who gathered around Jesus must have been all different... different ages, different ideas, different faith, but Jesus' message was for all of them, Just as it is for little old me.

You see I look at Colin and I'm truly inspired. Colin is living proof that we are never too old to learn from Jesus.

Never too old to be excited about being part of God's redeeming purposes.

We are all different people, with different ages and different ideas about our faith but Jesus message is for ALL OF US. So let's encourage each other as we take on the challenge. Pray for each other and support one another. And most of all Live out Jesus command to love one another.



Because The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you are now invited to belong to it.