

SERMON RESURRECTION HOPE – FLESH and BONES

Many of you may or do know that the early Christians wasn't called Christians. **They were called people of THE WAY.** WHY? Because they were people who aspired to live out in their lives in this radically different **WAY** of what it means to be truly human, as revealed by Jesus Christ. **The Way** that Jesus called the Kingdom of God

And as we reminded ourselves over Easter, Jesus spent his entire ministry teaching and living out this Kingdom of God WAY. Painting the picture what life looks like when it's lived out according to Gods good purposes. When humanity lives, the way God created us to be. Which basically looks like this



**It's when 'the captives (physical or Spiritual) are set free' - 'the hungry are fed'
 'the broken are made whole' - 'the marginalised are included'
 'the dividing walls of hostility are dismantled.' -
 and when we realise that 'death does not have the final word'**

And Jesus of course, also called on people to repent. Now there's a biblical word that's been too often clumsily mis-used and so mis-understood.

To repent, simply means to change the direction of your life. "Open up your minds" said Jesus, to a different **WAY** of seeing and being and live this **WAY** instead. Because this is the **WAY that** cherishes, respects, and dignifies ALL the LIFE that God created.

As I said on Good Friday, it's a WAY that helps us to see the world **through more beautiful eyes.** Christ-like eyes.

And the main reason the early Church grew, so rapidly, is because these followers of the Christ-like Way, just lived it out in the everyday reality of their lives. Often in very difficult circumstances.

So people were intrigued and attracted by this different WAY that seemed to give people a deeper sense of meaning and purpose for their lives.

Its why these words from Madeline Engle are such a telling wisdom for any church community.



**We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe,
 Or by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are.
 We draw people to Christ by showing them a light that is so lovely
 that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.**

The reason I feel so strongly about these words is because it's my own lived experience of coming to know and be part of this **Resurrection Hope. The WAY of this light so lovely.**

Because this is me in a former life.



This isn't me at a Vicars retreat with 3 other vicars training to be a priest. This is me in the punk band I was in, doing a promo picture for our new single and we thought it would be a bit provocative to dress up as Vicars and poke a bit of fun at religion. Because none of us were very keen on many aspects of organised religion.

Our local paper, the 'Birmingham Evening Mail' actually banned it as too controversial. And the bizarre thing, is that I'd never seen this photo since the day it was taken, until a friend told me it was up on the internet from Lord knows where or how.

Now apart from the fact that this shows me that God clearly has a great sense of humour because here I am now wearing a real dog collar. It was a good 20 years after this photo, that I actually began tentatively, suspiciously explore the Christian faith

And there were 3 main things that drew me into this journey.



1. **The PERSON of Jesus Christ** (compelling then, even more compelling now) –
2. **The WAY of Jesus Christ.** (Compelling then, even more compelling now)
3. And becoming part of a church community that genuinely aspired to try and **live out this WAY of Christ.**

Now were any of us perfect? Far from it, but we did believe in this **Resurrection Hope**, and we wanted to try and live it out as best we could in the mercy and beauty of God's grace.

So I today I want to explore 3 features of this resurrection appearance of Jesus to his frightened disciples hiding in their locked rooms of fear. And I want ask, when the presence of Christ is with us and among us, what challenges and what encouragements can we take for our own Resurrection Hope?

And the first feature comes from these words of Christ to His disciples.



39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you can see, I have."

One of the most compelling things for me as I explored following this Way of Christ 20 years ago, was to realise that my resurrection hope, is completely located in the flesh and bones of life. Which means that the beauty of our hope isn't some abstract concept. It means that it's connected and relevant to every aspect of our lives

Think of the opening words of John's gospel... ***In the beginning the Word became flesh***. We the Church are known as what? We are the **Body of Christ**. Called to be the hands and feet of the Christ-like WAY in this world.

Christ even sits and eats fish with the disciples and shows His wounds to Doubting Thomas. The beauty of our hope is that when Christ is with us and among us, it's both in the spirit of things and the flesh and bones of things. Especially in the carrying of wounds and healing of our wounds.

**THE SECOND FEATURE TO BRING OUT IS THIS ...
THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AMONG US IS ABOUT OPENING OUR MINDS TO THIS DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING AND BEING. Its about transformation.**

And it's captured in these words from today's encounter....



45 Then Christ opened the disciples' minds, so they could understand the Scriptures.

Which begs a deeper question.

What is it that Christ is so keen for His disciples to understand about scripture?

Because he's just done the very same thing to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus.

It's an interesting question, because the disciples are Jewish people are RAISED on scripture. But clearly for Jesus, it's one thing to **know** scripture and another to **understand** scripture.

For me, this is a crucial question, because there's been a number of not very Christ-things said and done in the name of scripture.

But for us to understand what it is that Jesus wants the disciples to understand, we have to go to the context of John 5:31. This is Jesus speaking to the religious elite.



"You search the Scriptures because you think that's it's in these words you will find eternal life; but these scriptures are bearing witness to ME"

This is Jesus opening all of our minds to a very crucial truth.

If anyone wants to truly understand scripture, we have to see **all of it** through the lens of Christ. **All of it** through the way and the authority of Christ.

How many times do we hear Jesus say “you have heard it said” but now I tell you the better way. You’ve heard it said that an eye for an eye a bit of revenge is okay, but now I tell you a better way. Learn to forgive, as much as 70x7. We believe, remember... that Christ is the Author and perfecter of our faith.

As Jesus makes clear in verse 44...

This is what I told you when still with you, everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

And if we want the best example of why this is so important, then look no further than the life of St Paul himself.

This is the man who was transformed by an encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. This is a man who knows His scriptures. He’s a total expert. But does HE truly **understand** them through the lens and the way of Christ?

Why is he even on the road to Damascus? Because Paul believes that His scriptures call on him, to commit violence in the name of his religion and his defend His God. Ironically against the early Christians. Followers of THE WAY.

But literally, in a blinding flash of revelation, Paul has his mind opened by the risen Christ to a different and more beautiful WAY. The most excellent way of Love.

A WAY so beautiful, He changed direction in His life and then urged all followers of Christ to live out this same WAY in today’s reading...



8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right and without guile, whatever is lovely and admirable—and if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. In other words, clothe yourselves in love because this binds everything together. Make this WAY your highest priority.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE FINAL FEATURE OF TODAY’S ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST.

And in many ways, given the times in which we now live, it’s probably the most challenging and the most important.

How telling is it, how significant is it, that the very first words of resurrection hope that Jesus gives is... **“peace be with you”**. **And who does he give these words of peace to?**

He gives them to His own disciples who are fearful, frightened and anxious and locked in their rooms of fear. How can this speak to you and Me today?

There's no doubt that we are living in what many are calling, the 'age of anxiety'. The real Pandemic for all of us, but most worryingly perhaps, among young people, is either chronic anxiety or low-level floating anxiety.

But is really that surprising?

For two whole years we've had a relentless bombardment on the dangers of covid. Where almost every media headline has basically screamed "be very afraid". All this with the backdrop of climate change and now we have Ukraine. Is it any wonder that St Paul said that **the peace of God, can often transcend our understanding?**

I think there's a really big question at play for all of us.

How can the presence of Christ with us and among us, bring us a peace that runs deeper than our NEED for safe certainty?

Because there is a delicate balance going on with this.

At what point does our need for safe certainty and the need to feel in control, begin to negate the power of being people who live by faith.

Because as we know, following the WAY of Christ, isn't going to bring the disciples a life of 'security'. **BUT**, with the presence of Christ and the Spirit among them and WITH them, they do approach life differently.

NOW they gain a peace that runs deeper than their need for safe certainty.

NOW they move from a place of fear to a place of courage.

Now they can begin to step out in faith.

How can this truth encourage all us today, because none of this is easy?

Well I'll finish with the words and the deep, deep wisdom of St Paul. A man who definitely knew what it was like to live this transformed life, and THE WAY of Christ, **in the flesh and bones of life.**

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but bring every situation, to God in prayer. spend time in Prayer. Do this said Paul, and the peace of God, which so often transcends all our understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.