

**Readings:** Matt 28.1-10 & 1 Corinthians 15.1-11

**When I was part of a church youth group, and later as a youth leader, the spiritual highlight of the year was Easter camp.**

Easter camps were a lot of fun with concerts, sports, time at the beach or surrounded by native bush.

Sometimes we would have a dawn service on Easter Sunday.

We gathered in the darkness, which symbolised the gloom and hopelessness of the disciples.

We read about the women, *After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.* (Mt 28:1).

The first light reminded us of these women, who wanted to go to the tomb as early as permissible by law, to go and tend to Jesus' body.

The rising sun would bring to mind the resurrection of Jesus, the spiritual light dawning upon the women as they found the tomb empty and met with the risen Lord Jesus.

With growing light, the disciples heard the news and the wonder and puzzlement that would soon be dispelled by the appearance of Jesus, the light of the world.

**Did any of you ever go to Easter camps when you were at youth group?**

Maybe some of you were leaders organising bible studies, giving pastoral care to young people, arranging the games or cooking the food.

There are Easter Camps taking place right now all across the country, at Mystery Creek there is a camp with 5000 young people registered – keep these camps in your prayers.

**I think that Easter is the most spiritually powerful time in the Christian calendar.**

Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead has such power to send ripples through human history, strong enough to move human hearts and able to touch the spirits of human lives.

The message of the cross and the empty tomb is at the heart of the gospel.

### **Recently we have been looking at Paul's letter to the church at Corinth.**

We noted Paul began by focusing on the cross in Chapter 1 and he ends with a great chapter on the resurrection.

The cross and the resurrection belong together. Each informs the other and together they form a powerful story.

Last week we were reminded of his words... *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* (1 Co 1:18).

From a merely human perspective the cross may look like weakness and foolishness, but on the cross God was dealing powerfully and fully with the sin of humanity.

As Peter wrote, *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.* (1 Pe 3:18).

So, on the cross the power of God was at work, to place our sin on Christ and give his righteousness to those who would believe.

### **God's power may have been hidden from view on the cross, but it is made blazingly obvious at the resurrection.**

*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.* (1 Co 6:14).

God raised Jesus from the dead and had his angels roll the stone away from the tomb so that it could be found to be empty.

This is the amazing and wonderful power of God, that having paid for our sin on the cross; he used his power to raise Jesus to life.

**Across the centuries the cross has been the symbol of Christianity, and rightly so, but I often wonder if our symbol should have been the empty tomb.**

The cross is easy to depict in gold, silver, wood or to represent in paintings and sculpture – but how do you depict an empty tomb.

In an empty tomb there is nothing to see, precisely because it is empty.

The tomb is there but no one is home.

As Christians we are people of the resurrection.

We meet on Sundays, because Sunday was the day of resurrection.

**Today we begin a series on the resurrection and its implications.**

I invite you to take the time today to read this chapter again.

It is all about the resurrection.

Today we look at the heart of the gospel, and in this Paul is again doing the ground work to help his readers understand what he is about to say about the resurrection.

Over the next two weeks we will look at what Paul says about:  
The importance of the resurrection  
and then what the resurrection body will be like for us.

***For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. (1 Co 15:3-5).***

This is the gospel in a nutshell, it is a wonderful summary of the gospel message – Christ died, was buried, was raised on the third day and appeared to people.

If this was the only scrap of the New Testament writings to survive, we would have still have most of the gospel.

It is likely that Paul takes these words from an early Christian creed or hymn the Corinthians would be familiar with.

Doctrine was important to the people of the early church.

Paul tries to set it out clearly, in words used by the church to confirm their faith and to set out what it was they truly believed.

### **This is a message of importance – eternal importance.**

We focused on the importance of this message last week, and you can download or listen to it from the website, so I won't dwell on this aspect today.

### **Paul received it and passed it on to others.**

This message didn't originate with Paul.

As mentioned it was very likely an early creed.

It was a creed taught and confessed by the wider church.

It was a creed or hymn that likely predated Paul's conversion and which he learned from others.

Although he had a unique meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road, the gospel he shared with others is based on what was passed on to him.

He learned about it from those he persecuted.

He had a wonderful mentor in **Barnabas** who encouraged him.

He had the opportunity to meet with the Apostles to check out some questions he had.

For a period of time he had **Luke** the gospel writer as a travelling companion.

Paul also uses the phrase **according to scriptures**.

Paul was a **top student** and teacher of the Old Testament scriptures.

He was able to look into these scriptures and see how they linked precisely with the life and teaching of Jesus.

So, from his knowledge of scripture, his exposure to the teaching about Jesus from a range of people, learning the core, central tenets of the faith, Paul received the good news which he then passed on.

This becomes a model for us.

None of us has the intellect and spiritual standing of Paul, but we can each faithfully pass on what we have received about the message of Jesus.

### **The message is not complicated**

Dead, buried, rose, appeared – easily remembered.

Jesus died, was buried, rose on the third day, and appeared to many people.

You don't need to be a scholar to remember this.

Dead, buried, rose, appeared.

### **Christ died for our sin.**

Paul is about to teach them some great truths about the resurrection, but to do this he needs to reaffirm that Jesus really died.

If Jesus didn't die the resurrection is meaningless.

Jesus didn't swoon, pretend or just give a convincing rendition of a dying man – he actually died.

The flogging he had received would have weakened him and brought him close to death, some people actually died from the flogging with the shock, loss of blood and sometimes the damage to vital organs.

The torturous hours on the cross finished Jesus off.

The Romans who had experience at this confirmed his death and this was attested to when a spear pierced his side, probably through his heart and lungs.

The response of his mother, disciples and friends adds to the fact of his death. They were distraught, fearful that they might be next.

They hid themselves away despondent and crushed in Spirit.

Jesus died – the Romans ensured it, and the crowds witnessed it.

### **He was buried**

His death is supported by the fact of his burial.

He was wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb which was sealed by a heavy stone that was difficult to move.

**It is not quite right to say that no one expected what would happen next, because while they did not believe Jesus would rise, the religious leaders did worry that someone might steal his body, so they arranged for the tomb to be guarded.**

Their conversation with Pilate confirms they were sure Jesus was dead.

Pilate listened to the Jewish leaders and sent them to the tomb with soldiers to guard it and instructions to ... ***make the tomb as secure as you know how.*** *“So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. (Mt 27:65).*

The aim of these leaders was not to keep Jesus in the tomb – they knew he was dead and so there was nothing he could do to get out – their aim was to stop his disciples from getting into the tomb so they could not steal the body.

Their concern about body snatchers underlines the fact that Jesus was dead and they knew it.

With the guards, the seal and whatever else they did, you can be certain the leaders did not leave that tomb until they were sure it was totally secure, tamper proof and watched over by guards.

They were certain no one would get in.

**But you can't keep a good man down – God raised Jesus from the dead.**

Jesus didn't raise himself, he was dead.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and to make sure people found out about this, God had angels roll the stone away so they could see it was empty.

The angel had a wonderful message for the women ... *you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, (Mk 16:6-7).*

This was the good news that left the women trembling and bewildered.

The women had come expecting a corpse, wanting to caringly tend to Jesus' lifeless body and give Jesus some dignity in death. But instead they received unexpected news, *He has risen! He is not here.*

**Jesus had not risen in only a spiritual sense, whereby his spirit rose while his body remained in the tomb.**

This was a bodily resurrection.

There was a wholeness and a fullness to this.

It was not a partial resurrection – but a complete resurrection in which Jesus whole-self rose from the dead.

It was this risen Lord that people would see, touch, eat with and hold a conversation with.

**Jesus' appearance was not an aberration of one person who might have been deluded, it was multiple appearances to many people in a variety of places.**

Many people of that day could witness to the fact they had seen the risen Jesus.

Among them were the women who went to the tomb, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Apostles, including doubting Thomas, 500 people who had gathered at one time and lastly to Paul himself.

Paul the persecutor of Christians, himself became a Christian after seeing a vision of Jesus on the Road to Damascus.

Paul, who was writing these things knew them to be true, not just because others had told him, but because he had seen Jesus for himself.

**Jesus Christ, truly dead, truly buried, truly risen, and truly seen by many people.**

In these verses, an ancient creed, Paul has laid the foundation for what he is about to teach regarding resurrection.

This creed predates Paul's own conversion and takes us back to what the early church believed and confessed.

These are the foundations of faith the church is built on.

These statements are Christian bedrock.

They are tested, verified, steadfast and sure.

They are the beliefs of the eyewitnesses, passed on to Paul who through his writing passes them on to us.

### **These few words have significant implications for all people in all places and in all times.**

This is the core of our faith which we reflect on and celebrate this weekend.

This is what Easter is all about, and it outlines the meaning of the Easter Story.

God loved us and although we were separated from him by sin he did something about that.

He did what we couldn't do for ourselves – he sent his son to die for us, taking all our sin into himself, taking our punishment and suffering and dying for us.

All seemed to be over, but then on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead giving proof of this with Jesus appearing to many people.

This points to the new life that we can enjoy, and to know that when we commit our lives to Jesus, we also can look forward to a resurrection life in the presence of God through eternity.

### **What difference does this make to us?**

This is the core of our faith, so it makes a significant difference to every aspect of our lives.

This makes the biggest difference anything can make.

It is the difference of forgiveness, peace with God, new life, new purpose, new direction, and the certainty of eternity spent with God.

In Christ we become changed people, children of God, part of the family of faith, born again, and filled with God's Holy Spirit.



This changes every moment of everyday.

We become people of prayer connected to our Heavenly Father.

We become people of the word, the bible, nourished spiritually, shaped, challenged, changed and transformed by the power of God at work in us.

We enter into a dimension of spiritual life, engage in a spiritual battle, use spiritual gifts and make a difference as we work with God to build up his kingdom.

Our priorities change so we pray like Jesus, God, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We become more Christ-like – taking on the values and characteristics of Christ, becoming more compassionate, showing mercy, growing in love and faith, stretching spiritually. We see death differently, its sting is removed and we become people of hope.

We are certain that on the day when Jesus returns the dead will rise – resurrected, and the living will be transformed and carried with all the saints into his presence.

### **All this because Jesus died and rose again.**

Therefore we have great reason to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and to rejoice in the message of the cross, the message of the gospel.

So we give glory to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen