**Luke 24:1-8**

**The resurrection of Jesus**

So today we continue our series of sermons on ‘What Christians Believe’. We have thought about being created in the image of God to worship him. We have thought about how we fall short of that through our sins. We have thought about how God covenanted with humanity to love us despite our sins. We have thought about how the prophets prepared the way for Jesus – God’s ultimate sign of love. And last week, we thought about how Jesus died for us to restore us to God.

And this week, we are thinking about the resurrection of Jesus and just how important that is for us as Christians.

In fact, the resurrection of Jesus is one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith.

“Jesus is risen from the dead”.

The Christian faith does not make any sense at all without this statement. The existence of the church makes no sense without this statement.

“Jesus is risen from the dead”.

This statement is what took a small group of broken people in 1st-century Palestine and grew their movement into the largest religion in the world that has shaped society for 21 centuries across the entire world.

“Jesus is risen from the dead”.

This statement has given strength to martyrs for thousands of years as they have faced persecution and execution for their faith in God. And this statement is what gives us hope in all our experiences of grief, brokenness, failure and loss that are so often the hallmarks of our own lives.

“Jesus is risen from the dead”.

This is the ultimate confession of the Christian Church through the centuries and this is the foundation for what we believe and practice here in Enfield today.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stressed the importance of this when he wrote that, if the resurrection were not true, then “we are of all people most to be pitied”. But we have seen the impact of the Christian faith through the centuries. We have heard the testimonies of billions of people who testify to the resurrection. Many of us have our own stories to tell of our experience of the resurrected Christ…and so, with confidence, we too can proclaim, “Jesus is risen from the dead”.

However, the truth is that, for many people, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead seems like a complete absurdity; a ridiculous notion, completely contrary to all reason. For many people, the resurrection of Jesus seems like a myth invented by deluded people as a way of explaining the unexplainable. For many people, death is simply the end: there is no way that someone can come back to life again. The dead stay dead, right?

But the onus, I think, is on people to disprove the resurrection rather than on us as the church to prove it. We have the testimony of the women at the tomb. We have the testimony of the disciples, whose lives were irrevocably changed. We have the witness, as Paul says in Corinthians, of more than 500 people who saw the risen Christ. We have the experience of countless billions throughout history who claim to have met with the Risen Christ, and the experience of so many of us here this morning who would claim the same thing.

In reality, given the testimony of so many throughout history the resurrection does not seem like an absurdity at all but instead it is a miracle beyond all explanation.

But those who would deny the resurrection are not alone. Even a few verses later in Luke 24, the first disciples accuse the women of telling them “an idle tale”, which is a phrase in the original Greek that describes the type of babbling words that result when someone has a fever. For the first disciples, the women had lost touch with reality: they were, quite literally, out of their minds. For the first disciples, as for us, the resurrection of Jesus was difficult to believe because that event seemed to go against all logic, all rationality. And even the women had not actually seen the risen Christ, according to Luke: like us, they had to accept this event in faith rather than through sight.

So the resurrection, from that first Easter morning through to today, has always been a difficult event for us to get our heads round. But nevertheless, it is the focal point of our faith and the basis of all that we believe about God.

And as we think about the resurrection this morning, there’s just three things I want to say about it.

And the first is this:

**1. The resurrection initially brings confusion, not clarity**

This may seem like a strange thing to say, but it’s true. The truth is, as Luke records it, that the experience of the resurrection of Jesus for these women began not in joy but in grief.

Let’s think for a moment about how those women were feeling that first Easter morning. Over the previous 7 days, they had experienced the most extraordinary trauma: one week previously, they had experienced the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, so their spirits would have been high and their hearts filled with expectation. But then everything started to go downhill. Within hours, Jesus was being questioned and criticised and rejected. He was then betrayed by one of his friends, put through an unjust trial, tortured, mocked, whipped, and crucified as a common criminal. The hope they had a week ago had been ripped out of their hearts and they would have been utterly traumatised.

And it is important for us to remember the psychological trauma of the situation. These women were human beings, just like us – they were not plaster cast saints - and the trauma of finding the body gone is the same trauma that we would have felt. And that’s what Luke tells us in verse 4 when he writes these words: “[The women] were perplexed about this”. The missing body did not bring them clarity – it left them utterly confused.

And the truth is that the resurrection may also leave us feeling confused today. In fact, in some ways, we are much happier with a Jesus who died than a Jesus who was raised: we like to have memories of Jesus as a teacher, a social revolutionary, someone who taught great parables, a compassionate healer. But that Jesus is dead. We can’t just honour his memory with the spices of our worship: we are not here to worship the dead Jesus, we are here to worship the risen Christ.

The words of the angels ran counter to their intuition, verse 5: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen”. That is the basis of our worship: even though it begins with confusion rather than clarity.

**2. The resurrection challenges our certainties**

The angels said: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen”. They receive a word to be believed: which is where we are at today: we are called to receive the word by faith – and the proof comes later, once we have believed.

We might wish that God had chosen an easier way for us. It would have been easier if Jesus had just walked out in front of the women, in radiant glory, or that he had been there to have a conversation with them about what had just happened. But he didn’t – just like with his parables, Jesus doesn’t want to make it easy for us because he knows, and we know, that it is in the struggling that belief happens.

And when we hear the message of the resurrection, our response is unbelief. But the question is, what are we going to unbelieve?

Our experience tells us that the dead remain dead. But the Gospel tells us that the dead rise to new life. Now, we have a choice as to which one of those statements we are going to unbelieve when these claims collide with each other: one of them can’t be right!

I use the word ‘unbelief’ very deliberately because having ‘unbelief’ does not mean that we believe nothing. Instead, it means that we believe something else more strongly. We need to decide what we will place our belief in and what we will unbelieve: the logic that the dead remain dead, or the Gospel that the dead rise to new life. We must believe one or the other and if we choose to believe the Gospel, then we are having all of our certainties challenged.

Yes, the resurrection of Jesus challenges our certainties. Death may be real, but it is not final. Life has the last word. And as Christians, we are called from an old belief in the power of death, to a new belief in the victory of life. Jesus says to us in John 10:10 that he has come so that we may have life in all its fullness and the resurrection is both the greatest example of that life and also the source of that life for us.

So firstly, the resurrection initially brings confusion, not clarity.

Secondly, the resurrection challenges all our certainties.

**3. The resurrection results in a response from us**

Once they had grasped the resurrection, the women and the disciples responded, and their response is the same that we should make too, if we are to live as Christians. There are 4 things to say about this, very briefly: The first response for us to make is

*1. Rejoicing*

The text of our Gospel reading itself does not show this but the rest of the New Testament is a testimony to the disciples’ rejoicing once they had grasped the implications of the resurrection. Death had been defeated, Satan had been defeated. Joy became the defining characteristic of the first disciples because the resurrection is the ultimate proof that God can be victorious over anything in our lives: our failures, our weaknesses, our sickness, our fears, our anxieties - even our death. None of these have any power over us anymore. Yes, they still exist: we will all doubt, we will all get sick, we will all die and so on - but none of these things define us or control our ultimate destiny. The power of these things over us has been defeated in the resurrection [Romans 8].

If you know the truth of the resurrection in your life, then you will know joy - which is not the same thing as happiness, of course, but a deep knowing, often despite the circumstances of our life that may rob us of happiness.

If you don’t know joy, then you may not know the power of the resurrection.

*2. Remembering*

Remembering is an important spiritual discipline. Each week in Communion, we remember that Jesus said “Do this in remembrance of me”. If we are to have hope for the future, we need to look back and remember how God has been present with us throughout our whole life.

In verse 8 in this Gospel reading, Luke says of the women “they remembered his words”. Jesus had told them repeatedly that this resurrection would happen but they hadn’t really engaged with that and had probably forgotten it.

How many times have you heard in church and through the Facebook page and in private conversations, and in the hymns we sing, that God is with you and will be with you as you walk into your future? If you are finding the present or the future filled with anxiety, then you need to make some space to remember…As you remember, as you remember God’s presence with you and his promise that he promises to be present with you through all time, so that will make sense of your life.

Rejoicing.

Remembering.

*3. Returning*

The women left the grave and returned to the disciples and it was in the returning that they found hope for the future.

There is a temptation for us to stay in the graveyard of our disappointments. There is a temptation, when life gets tough, for us to move away from church or neglect our spiritual disciplines through the week. But the truth is that we will not find peace there. We need instead to return to the Christian community, return to our spiritual disciplines, where we can reflect together on the reality of the risen Christ. And it is in that place that we will find peace and hope for the future.

Rejoicing.

Remembering.

Returning.

And finally…

*4. Reporting*

The women returned to the disciples and they reported all that had happened. And in that reporting, everyone was encouraged and grew in faith.

If you have experienced the resurrection of Jesus for yourself, you should follow the example of the women in this story and report it to others, tell others the good news of the resurrection so that they too can be encouraged into a relationship with the living Christ.

So, in conclusion, then…The resurrection is absolutely central to what Christians believe. If we don’t have a resurrection, then we don’t have a faith – it is that simple. And we need to remember first that the resurrection initially brings confusion rather than clarity because it goes against all our logic and intuition, second, that it challenges our certainties as we learn to unbelieve and believe afresh, third that the resurrection challenges us to respond through rejoicing, remembering, returning and reporting.

Do you know the resurrected Christ for yourself?

Don’t worry if you are confused – that’s a sign of faith.

Don’t worry if you have lost your certainties – that too is a sign of faith.

If you know the resurrected Christ for yourself, then respond: respond by rejoicing, respond by remembering God’s goodness to you – past, present and future, respond by returning to the Church community in faith and enthusiasm, respond by reporting what you have experienced to other people.

If the world needs one message above all others at this time in history, it is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how the resurrection can transform individuals, communities and nations.

And if you and I won’t tell people this Good News, then who will?