

SERMON 3rd April 2016

Today's gospel reading ended with these words:

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

In these words John tells us the purpose of his gospel.

Out of all that Jesus did and said during His earthly ministry John selected just 7 miracles, some significant teaching of Jesus, together with the details of His death and resurrection,

All with the purpose to persuade us:

1. who Jesus was: The Christ, the Son of God
2. And by believing and responding to this truth, we may have life in His name.

Reading John's gospel is not an intellectual exercise, like a history lesson. It's not a biography of the life of Jesus. It's a compelling narrative to bring men and women to Christ, to be brought into a transforming fellowship with Almighty God. To have LIFE, Eternal LIFE, true life as a real experience.

John's Gospel starts off with a bang.

We said some of chapter 1 together at the start of the service.

It leaves us in no doubt who Jesus was (and is) even though the words may sound mysterious.

Let me remind you how it begins: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.** And later.

In Him was life and His life was the light of man. And finally, Just to make sure, we know who we're talking about, this one who was with God, and was God, in whom was this power of giving life, **was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.**

It's mind boggling.

The Son of God existed before time began, was active in creation, and now comes to earth, full of grace and truth, to bring us to Himself. It's the basis of the Christian faith.

Having made this statement about Jesus, the **next 10 chapters** give us selected instances of what Jesus actually did and said, to demonstrate that this man, Jesus, was indeed, God made man.

What man could change water into wine, heal the sick, feed 5000 people out of almost nothing, walk on water, give sight to a man born blind and raise Lazarus to life after 4 days in a tomb?

It's a man, who when challenged by the Jewish authorities, on one occasion said **"Before Abraham was, I am"**. He used the name of God given to Moses, and the Jews understood that and took up stones to stone Him.

Later, He said, **"I and the Father are one"**. Again the Jews took up stones because, they said, Jesus, a mere man, claimed to be equal with God.

And the final 10 chapters concentrate on the last days of Jesus leading to His death and resurrection – the supreme test of who he was and why He came.

If you don't read the Bible very often, or you are looking for some inspiration, why not read these 21 chapters, in small doses, take chapter 1 as a statement of who Jesus was and then read the evidence for yourself, as portrayed by John in the rest of the gospel.

For today, I want to focus on today's gospel reading about the resurrection.

First the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples without Thomas, and then again a week later, when Thomas was present. I'm sure you all know the story well.

Just imagine Thomas' reaction when confronted by the risen Christ. Having emphatically declared "unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, **I WILL NOT BELIEVE** he suddenly finds the Risen Christ standing before him, reminding Thomas, what he'd said in his very own words.

Thomas realises the truth in a blinding moment and cries out, "My Lord and My God"

I think Thomas' response, is, in some ways, the climax of the gospel.....the gospel, written to tell us who Jesus is, so we can then make our response.

And what better event to convince us than Thomas meeting the risen Lord and what better response could be made, than this. My Lord and My Go?

1. Firstly, we should note It was prompted by coming, dramatically in Thomas' case, to believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This is an essential step for us all. We need to be certain about the resurrection.

What sort of Christian faith would we have without the resurrection?

I see it like this.

Here was this perfect man . Several times the Bible emphasises He was sinless. He taught His followers to pursue love, forgiveness, humility, gentleness, faithfulness, purity, and compassion.

But In the end, evil men put Him to death. We read as they took Jesus, "This is their hour and the power of darkness." Evil has to do with violence, arrogance, pride, greed, lust and so on.

If there was no resurrection, what would that say to us?

In the end, in this world, evil ultimately overcomes good. Wickedness is stronger than truth and honesty. If you want to be a decent person. Try your best, do what you can. Try to be pure, honest, faithful, reliable. But in the end you'll fail. Because when evil raises its head it will triumph over good.

It's an approach to life that spells gloom, defeat and futility.

And if the eternal Son of God proved not to be eternal after all, what hope do we have in life or death?

I cannot imagine any reason why we should ever want to pray to a God whose Son came to destroy the works of the devil and ends up being destroyed by evil himself, never to rise again.

Why even try to follow His teaching?

So, firstly, the response of Thomas was made as he embraced the truth of the resurrection. An essential part of our faith.

We need a risen Saviour, one who is alive and active, who has triumphed over death and sin. One who even now reigns in glory with His Father, who will one day return to judge the living and the dead, and to bring us into His eternal home.

In truth, Christ is risen. Hallelujah, He is risen indeed!

2.And what was it Thomas cried out?

Firstly, "My Lord".

And this is the response we should make in coming to Christ.

The Bible uses the word believe, sometimes trust ,or faith, as the essential step to becoming a Christian. But we have to be careful what it means.

We can believe all sorts of things, but that doesn't necessarily make any difference to the way we live.

But to acknowledge Jesus as "my Lord" gives us a much better understanding of what's involved in responding to Him in faith. It embraces belief, and trust, and it is clearly a life changing response. It's very personal. Not just Lord, but My Lord.

The idea of knowing Jesus as Lord is mentioned many times in the NT.

In Luke's gospel Jesus says, "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say."

He goes on, "I'll show you what he is like **who comes to me, hears my words and puts them into practice**, He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid foundations on rock" Digging foundations on rock takes commitment in time and effort.

Then Paul in Colossians says something similar: "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in the faith as you were taught". Perhaps that

sounds more encouraging; more like a plant that over time pushes down it's roots whilst growing upwards.

But both pictures sweep away any idea that this can be a part time interest , whilst you get on doing something else. For Christ to be Lord, He must be Lord of everything. As someone has said. If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.

Coming to Jesus, receiving Jesus by faith means acknowledging Him as Lord. It requires us to live in daily fellowship with Him. It means digging down deep into rock, being rooted in Him. Being built up in the faith. It implies commitment.

It's an insult to God to think we can be casual, part time believers and enjoy all the blessings and benefits of God's love and grace; won for us by a saviour who suffered in our place for our sin.

So our first response to the risen Christ is to love and serve Him as our Lord, with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. It is the only true response we can make.

Finally, Thomas not only cried out My Lord but also My God.

The final and greatest acclamation.

He must be Lord of our lives, because He is the eternal Son of God.

As God He is worthy of our worship, praise and devotion.

In case you worry that Thomas went over the top in an emotional outburst, just note how Jesus responded to him.

"Because you have seen me, you have believed". He endorses Thomas' response. Its as if Jesus says, Well done Thomas, you believe it at last. Yes I am your Lord and your God.

But continues: Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed.

And over the centuries, millions have been so blessed. They believed and received the life, just as John wrote, in his gospel. It is the message of hope from a God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

My hope and prayer about today's service, is that you will be both **challenged** and **encouraged** in your Christian life. I have certainly been challenged in preparation. We don't come before God proudly, or boastful , but humbly, sincerely and grateful..... but eager to please Him more.

So I leave these challenging ideas. We need to make our own responses.

To know in our hearts that Christ is risen indeed, with all that the resurrection means..

To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that by believing we may have life in His Name.....recognising that in our hearts we need

to acknowledge Him as both our Lord and our God, and being committed to an on going fellowship by being rooted and built up in our most holy Faith.

MOMENT OF SILENCE