St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
April 4th 2021 Theme: Easter Resurrection

(Black slide)

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

If we could personalise God (which we quite possibly often do) giving his beloved son Jesus a reason and some parental support for going through the events of this past week, there are a variety of modern comments we could conjure up.

‘It’s OK, I’ve got this’ is one such option, in response to the occasional slightly worried question from Jesus. It could also well be the words plagiarised by the pop group The Beatles two centuries later, and routinely used as the theme of books, plays, operas, and millions of songs over hundreds of years.

*All you need is love, love, love*, son.

Along with one of my all-time favourites, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s ‘*Love changes everything’,* plus any of the many others which may now be springing to mind*.*

Jesus had spent three years showing both his disciples, and anyone else who was willing to see and listen, just how much he loved anyone who believed in him. I get a sense that the women sort of did, especially the Mary’s – mother, aunt, Martha’s sister, Mary Magdalene. The latter in particular was completely overcome with grief when she thought she had lost Jesus forever and couldn’t even find solace in the burial rituals which might have slightly eased her pain. That grief was turned to joy when Christ greeted her and asked her to be the bearer of this news to the other disciples.

So she too, **needed physical reassurance**, the promised resurrection did happen.

That situation may help us understand a little how people feel who have lost a loved one and don’t have a body to farewell properly according to their culture and rituals, thus achieving some sort of closure.

Then, the men – it seems they too were not so easy recognising this situation of being on the receiving end of total love and what that could mean for them. Even Peter, who Jesus chose as his Number One man, didn’t understand until after Jesus actually **appeared to him** following his resurrection. Then, as we know from our reading from the book of Acts of the Apostles this morning, Peter spent the rest of his life communicating the Good News of Christ’s message to anyone who would listen, along with carrying out many healing miracles in Christ’s name.

I’m not sure, even 2000+ years later, that we fully understand the depth of that love for us. Especially, if, like Peter from time to time, we don’t believe we are worthy of it. Peter got over his doubts, and so can we, even if we don’t get a physical contact to confirm God’s greatest gift. In fact, every year we Christians gather and retell Christ’s story of triumph, death, and resurrection, as a reassurance and reaffirmation of that ultimate gift of love. Any sight of him is with our hearts, not our eyes. By that ritual of retelling, we can continue to fix the core message of God’s great love in our minds and hearts, so that we can feed on it until the next time of telling.

John’s version of the resurrection is the most personal and intimate of all the descriptions. Matthew, Mark and Luke were stunningly brief. They did all refer to multiple women coming to the tomb before daybreak, with Mary Magdalene specifically mentioned by both Matthew and Mark. Each of those versions had an angel claiming Jesus had been raised from the dead, but there was no contact with Jesus himself.

It is increasingly thought that the writer of John’s gospel was possibly the young disciple obliquely mentioned a number of times, as “the beloved disciple”. We’ll probably never know, but what is interesting and important for us as Christians, is that its writer was totally focused on getting his readers “to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in his name”.

The thing is, the celebration of the Easter resurrection itself, can become what the fuss is all about and can cloud part of the reason behind it. The ‘Why?’. Women talked, couples argued, and the followers of Christ didn’t know how to respond to the publicity. Rumours of the resurrection captivated the talk, imaginations, and instant messages of everyone around Jerusalem that First-century weekend. Their words still do matter and are critical in the recording and recognition of this incredible event.

However, our familiarity with the text risks missing the poignancy of the particular moments used to convey these events and the ‘Why?’ meaning behind them. The sound bites we read today from what we know as John’s account of the good news represent a moment that has been recounted for two-thousand years. To present this event to regular Sunday participants and yearly Easter Sunday attenders as continually memorable and remarkable, is a challenge. Particularly when there is no expectation or requirement to look closely at the ‘Why?’, and if understood, give reciprocal love back to this giver. If that happens, the gift is even the greater, but that isn’t the deal.

This event and its consequence, described in such ordinary language, with such ordinary people the first to experience it, is still reverberating around the world 2000+ years later. Nothing that has been said or written has successfully buried or discredited it. Therefore, for those of us who choose to believe, that belief has us being the recipients of the greatest gift of love that could possibly be bestowed on us.
The ‘Why?’ – because God so loved his world that he **gave** his only son, so that everyone who believed in him may not perish but have everlasting life.

We can be, maybe often are, the recipients of a variety of gifts that come from a loving relationship with the giver. If we accept it, today’s gift of love does indeed change everything.
Amen

Lighting the Pascal Candle

*The Paschal candle is lit at the very beginning of the Easter Day service. It represents the light of Christ coming into the world, the risen*[*Christ*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ) *as a symbol of light (life) dispelling darkness (death).*

*It is then lit for every service up to Pentecost, plus when there is a Baptism (Placed by the Font) or a funeral (placed by the casket).*

(Before lighting)

"Christ, yesterday and today, [the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_and_Omega). To Him belongs all time and all the ages; all glory and dominion is his now and forever. **Amen."**

"By His holy and glorious wounds may Christ our Lord guard and keep us." Accept this Easter candle, a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God.

**Amen**

As it is lit:

"The light of Christ, rising in Glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all humanity, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

**Amen**