

When death was yesterday's news.

Matthew 28:1-20

All the Gospels , as we call them, end with resurrection stories and the ascension because, and only because they are telling the story of Jesus physically walking this earth. Luke-Acts is the exception moving on to the Holy Spirit age in which we live.

Matthew's account is quite abbreviated , maybe he was running out of parchment to write on!

What we have is two recorded meetings of the women, one with an angel, the next with Jesus himself. Then there is reference to the guards and their tale.

Jesus' meeting with his disciples is condensed to one event in Galilee where he commissions them and us to 'go'.

There is much more in Luke and John but I want to concentrate on Matthew's record for one reason. Once you accept the resurrection has happened, what next? Or as the title I was given 'When death was yesterday's news', what next?

I cannot underline enough how important the resurrection is. It is the evidence of Jesus' divinity, the seal on his completed work of salvation on the cross, it is the final piece of the Jesus, here on earth story. A few weeks ago Sam discussed some of the evidence of the resurrection because it is key to our faith.

As Paul says "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*" 1Corinthians 15: 17, 19

He goes on to say

²⁰ *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹ *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

The death of Jesus paid the price of our freedom, propitiated for our sin, brought forgiveness and healing.

The resurrection of Jesus kickstarts new life. Eternal life comes from him, demonstrated by his resurrection, making death itself defeated and life beyond the grave a reality.

RESSURECTION AT FUNERALS

But what is our 'reason to be' now our sins are forgiven and we have new eternal life. Are we just hanging around waiting to die so we can join Jesus in heaven?

It is quite significant that the resurrection is most celebrated at funerals! Commonly, Christian funerals begin with "Jesus said *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."*

And my favoured reading at the graveside or crematorium is from 1Corinthians 15:52

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

... then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ *"Where, O death, is your victory?*

Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In these grim days, we need to grasp the significance of the resurrection. COVID-19 may kill the body but death is defeated. Dying may be horrible but it leads to eternal life for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In our worrying about this pandemic get our eyes fixed on the resurrected Saviour. It is Jesus who says ¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

We do not pray for the dead because Jesus says that whoever believes has eternal life. You have eternal life now, it is growing inside you since God implanted new life in you as you turned from your sin and by faith grasped the hand of the Saviour.

THE COMMISSION

Jesus comes to his disciples, who just like us are a mixture of people at different points in their journey of faith, some worshipped, some doubted. To all of them he has a special message – a directive, a blueprint, and action plan for the rest of this age.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Very familiar to us as the 'Great Commission' but full of astounding statements. Can I just point out 6, not that I am going into detail about any of them.

1. Jesus claims status of world ruler
2. The mission of these Jewish men is to make disciples of ALL nations, not just Jews.
3. The declaration over baptism is of a triune God
4. His teaching is complete and sufficient.
5. He will be with all of them, all of the time, wherever they go.
6. This new age has an end.

Jesus was ever the revolutionary but he does not seek power, he is calling for his disciples to carry the message to all who will hear it.

We believe that this commission is for all disciples not just the ones on the mountain in Galilee.

So when Death is yesterday's news, recognise afresh who Jesus is. This is his world, not Trump's or Putin's or Xi Jinping's (SHI DJI-PING), Boris Johnson's, Mohammed, Buddha, yours or mine or anybody else's. He has the power and authority but he expresses it so differently to us, He extends his kingdom by dying on a cross for us, inviting us to receive salvation and live the new resurrection life.

He was the Word of creation, now he is the King who has laid down his life for his creation, now he is the living Saviour and Lord to whom every knee should bow and will bow.

And Jesus says 'Go!' Hold on, not just yet, remember you are to 'stay at home' at present. But we are required to go. And that is not just for missionaries and church ministers, it is for everyone. Even the housebound, WHAT!

Listen, we live in an age where communication covers the world. You are a rare person if you don't have a phone or internet connection. At least one of our fellowship heard about Jesus through someone thousands of miles away. Because they used the systems of this world for the glory of God and to 'go and make disciples of all nations'. So while you are sitting at home wondering how all this will turn out, get busy Use your phone, use your text messaging, use your email, Whatsapp, Signal, Zoom, Facebook, Twitter and whatever else you can use to tell others the Good News of the Kingdom. We have worshipped together this morning in a way we would not have imagined a month ago. Thanks to Darren's hard work the church has moved out of Deane Avenue into your front room! Praise the Lord for his enabling by his Holy Spirit to equip us for this time! But it isn't for us to enjoy alone. This Good News is eager to reach out to family, neighbours, friends anyone we know. How? By talking to them. Look you enjoy receiving a phone call, so make someone happy by ringing them! And even better build a relationship where you can share your story of how you discovered Jesus is alive and living in your heart.

Secondly, get to know what Jesus said. In fact get to know all the Bible. I have been putting extracts of what Jesus said on Twitter and Facebook for years. I have 768 saying of Jesus. And I haven't included, yet, what he says in Revelation or what he says through the apostles and the Old Testament. There is a lot to learn and sometimes re-learn. So make sure you getting into the habit of reading God's word every day. Absorb the teaching of Jesus it is the most important knowledge you can ever know.

Thirdly, Jesus promises 12 men that he will be with them always. They , in a few years dispersed, Thomas to India, Paul to Western Europe, the others all over the known world. How did he keep his promise?

He returned to his Father and sent the third person of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus called his disciples to follow him as he lived in and moved about Israel. The Holy Spirit is not tied to a physical body he is in each disciple. He has the capacity to be with you and me and with Christians all over the world at the same time. So the command "Follow me" does not mean being in one place together but going out into the whole world.

Church as we knew has changed in the last few weeks but the commission and the means remain the same. The challenge today is to go while sitting at home. It begins with prayer. Start praying for a vision of how you respond to the command to go. Pray over every one you know. And them make contact! Then pray again and respond to the stirring of the Holy Spirit to tell your story about what God has done in your life. Who knows maybe our first opportunity when we are able to meet again will be a mass baptism of all those who God has called and we have faithfully taught the Good News to.