

## Talk for Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May.

Before I talk about the main challenge that these two passages, John and Acts, bring, I would like to share a little of what the reading from John means to me.

Early in my Christian life I always felt called to serve, whatever that might mean or entail, and my real encouragement for this was the passage from John. I was blown away by the fact that Jesus was on the beach cooking fish for his friends. Not the equivalent of your modern-day barbie!, but an act completely outside the sphere of the Society of that time. Cooking/serving breakfast was the task of slaves/servants/ women of the household. It was totally beneath the dignity of a Jewish man to do this menial task. Added to this, it wasn't Jesus the healer/preacher/teacher on the beach but Jesus, the risen Lord about to take his place on the throne, the right-hand of God with all authority for heaven and earth His.

If that is not an example of true serving what is?

So the real challenge that these passages bring is one of strength of faith – belief. Have you noticed that in the Gospels no-one expected the resurrection? Even though Jesus predicted his death -and resurrection – several times across his ministry, no-one, when they heard the news that Jesus had risen said “ I knew he would do it”. No-One expected resurrection and no-one, quite frankly, believed it at first. Whichever Gospel story you read, the initial reaction to the resurrection is fear and disbelief. Peter and John saw the empty tomb and went back to their homes still not understanding that Jesus **had** to rise from the dead. When Mary, having met the risen Lord returns to the disciples with her news, Luke tells us that the disciples considered it to be nonsense – and with some justification, because who would believe her story?

Now we have in our Gospel reading from John a very telling statement: “ None of the disciples dared to ask him ‘who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. Even now, after a number of appearances of Jesus, there is a certain amount disbelief. The only certainties in life, we are told, are death and taxes, and if the dead don't stay dead where does that leave us? What can we count on? Resurrection breaks all the rules, and that makes us uncomfortable.

### **Or does it?**

Many of us have heard the resurrection story year on year, even Sunday by Sunday, so that it no longer catches us by surprise. Perhaps we have lost the

wonder with which the resurrection was first received. Perhaps we have misunderstood how resurrection affects us. Maybe we could try to think ourselves back 2000 years to experience what the first Easter 'felt' like. But what about thinking the resurrection into our normal daily lives? When we do that we encounter two common problems.

The first is that we have the mistaken view that faith somehow abolishes doubt, when, actually, it is difficult to have faith without also having doubt. Faith without doubt becomes blind obedience or duty. Faith and doubt are inextricably linked. They are two sides of the same coin. So the resurrection – did it happen? Doubt says "I hope so", Faith says "I cannot understand it, but I trust the promise of God.

In Acts we find Paul (Saul as he was then) very firm in his belief that all Christians should be eradicated. That was of course until Jesus decided to deal with him. He didn't strike him dead with a bolt of lightning or erase him from the earth, but transformed him into one of the greatest preachers/teachers of the Gospel, of his time and of our time. Jesus used Paul's very firm belief to promote the Gospel not to dismiss it.

The other common problem is that we confine the resurrection to a point in time with which we have no connection. We confine resurrection to an activity that happens only after death. But the truth about resurrection is that it happens today, and it happens in life – we just need to look for it.

**Resurrection happens whenever we, the Church, make a difference.**

**God is living and active among his people. God is living and active among us.**

**THAT IS RESURRECTION.**

Amen.