

Sermon Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2013

1 Corinthians 15: 35 to 55 - Understanding Death and Resurrection

One of the first jobs I do during the winter when I am at home is clean out the ash container from the stove in the living room and lay the fire. Invariably the ash, embers and coal from the previous day's fire is still warm and when I put the paper and kindling in the stove it catches fire. The fire resurrects itself without me having to put a light to it.

This process has many parallels to today's theme of understanding death and resurrection. I understand that the warm ashes will ignite the paper and kindling. Our life in Jesus Christ is like the fire; the fire within us is God and it will never go out because we cannot put it out even by throwing water over it or even turning away from God, he is always there and in faith we acknowledge him thus the fire or spirit within us burns bright and warm. However, his fire or spirit is not extinguished even after death. Why, because we believe and know that when our time here on earth is finished we will ascend to God's heavenly kingdom and then be with him for eternity. To many this is a complete mystery; the idea that you can die and be resurrected. Personally for me this is not a mystery. Faith for me itself is a mystery something I will never fully understand or am meant not to fully understand but I do know and believe that having invited Jesus into my life I to will be resurrected after death. **John 11 verses 25/26 Jesus said 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'**

The Gospel reading recounts Jesus' resurrection and His revelation to Mary Magdalene and His disciples of which we are all familiar as a reading when they finally understood what Jesus had been saying about His returning after death. It is the reading from 2 Corinthians where Paul tries to explain to The Corinthians what resurrection actually means. In Chapter 15 Paul takes up the point that some of the Corinthians held that there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul deals with this by developing the idea of a transformation into spiritual bodies appropriate for the life of the world to come over the idea that people were resurrected into physical, perishable bodies. He says that if there is a natural body there is a spiritual body in verse 44. It is the spiritual which we accept when we invite Jesus into our lives, when we leave our burdens at the foot of the cross and accept His open arms. Paul writes about the 'last Adam' in verse 45; this is Jesus and because Jesus rose from the dead He became a life giving spirit for you and me and anyone who will turn to Him and start a new life . He is the source of spiritual life that will result in our own resurrection in a spiritual form which will never be weak and die. This is the meaning of death and resurrection.

Paul writes in verses 50 to 53 about the limitations of our human bodies and that it is impossible for this body to '**inherit the kingdom of God.**' Many in this life suffer from physical or emotional issues – the blind cannot see or the disabled cannot walk or emotional issues stop people from moving on. Yet through Jesus they can experience a new way to live by having faith and believing in Him. This process continues beyond death; Paul tells us in verse 51 '**We will all be changed.**' In other words we will all be given new bodies but those bodies will be spiritual rather than physical.

In verse 55 Paul writes 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting.' What does this mean? Is there victory in death and what sting is he talking about? Put simply, there can be no victory in death because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the 'sting of death' is referring to sin, which we know as believers God will forgive when we ask in penitence and faith.

Let me explain this sting and sin more. The devil apparently triumphed in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the apple and also at the cross of Jesus when He died; on paper sin overcame good. But God turned these apparent victories by the devil into stunning defeats when His son Jesus Christ rose from the dead. At that point a new beginning came about and death became no longer a source of dread or fear. Christ overcame it and one day as followers or believers in Christ we too will overcome death. Death has lost its sting!

So what do we have to do in the mean time? Paul tells us in verse 58 'Therefore my dear brothers stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.'

Live your life in faith and carry on with the good works of the Lord even when you do not feel there are any good results or rewards as a result of that work. Much of the work you do will come to fruition at some time in the future and you will not even be aware of it and certainly the reward is doing the Lords work. Do not hesitate, just get on with it and do the Lords work. Christ won the ultimate victory for you and me which changed our lives once and for all. So, do the good that you have the opportunity to do in this life secure in the knowledge that your

work will result in you being raised from the dead and passing to a new spiritual life with God in heaven. Amen.