

## High St Uniting Frankston

### Empowered and sent

### Luke 24:36b – 48



How do we interpret and understand the resurrection? Is it just a matter of theology, or head language? The One who was condemned to die on the cross is now the Risen, Exalted Lord. In Jesus, God has conquered even death itself. The resurrection shows that even the worst we can do, cannot stop God. Those are the usual words and terms and ideas that we talk about in the Easter season. And we make the purpose of the season to be about ‘who is Jesus?’ From the centurion at the foot of the cross saying, “Surely this man was the Son of God” through to

Thomas’ great cry, “My Lord and my God!” So, maybe we don’t register the mission statement in today’s story of Jesus resurrection appearance in that house in Jerusalem; ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.’ More than theology about the identity of Jesus or the nature of God, the resurrection is an action statement; the mission of Jesus didn’t stop at the cross. His first words in preaching, recorded in Mark, are, “The kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe the good news.” And here, newly risen from death, we have the command to continue that mission.

This, quite arbitrary, division between theology and mission has been a part of the church for almost all its life. We can get so busy worshipping God that we lose sight of what God is calling us to do. Years ago, I would like to say how many, but COVID has made counting years difficult, someone commented that he didn’t like the creeds of the church because they are all about what to believe, with no word about what to do. And he’s right! Each clause of the Creed has an unspoken, ‘So what’ at the end. Leaving the resurrection as an issue for theology leaves the same ‘so what.’ So, I tried to write an Action Creed. Taking each of the clauses of the Apostles Creed and adding in an action statement.

*We believe in God, the Father Almighty, who created the world,  
so, we will care for the world, and work for sustainability.*

*We believe in Jesus as God’s son,  
who came to inaugurate God’s kingdom of love and justice,  
so, we will treat all people with love,  
and work for all people to be treated with equal care.*

And so on. The resurrection is more than theology, if we believe it, then we should live it, and carry on Jesus’ mission of bringing God’s love to the whole world.

“What’s in it for me?” The cry of the individual confronted by something to be understood or undertaken. But without realising it, that’s all too often how we interpret and share the story of Jesus’ resurrection, personal salvation. Christ’s new life means new life for me. Christ’s death on the cross means my sins are forgiven. “When Christ hung on the cross, he thought of only me”. A line from a recent Christian song. And, as much as that may be true, it is far too limiting and small compared to the description of the cross and the resurrection in scripture. Even when we expand that out from the individual - Christ’s new life means new life for us – it still sounds as if we have been invited into the inner sanctum of disciples. And that’s often how it sounds to the world. Like we are inviting people into an exclusive club of

those who believe, rather than extending the kingdom of God's grace. Imagine the power of what Jesus was saying to those disciples gathered in fear and worry; 'proclaim to all nations!' Not just the Jerusalem and Judea, where they already know they'll meet violent opposition, but the nations!? What do they know of God. Aren't they pagans and enemies? But that is the point of extending God's grace. It's not about me, or us, it's about the great, gracious love of God reaching out to all.

Our faith is more than worshipping God who sent Jesus and brought him to life after the crucifixion. And it is more than 'I am saved through faith'. Love is a verb, not just an emotion. It was the love of God that brought Jesus alive again, and that love can't just stop with us. A further clause in the Action Creed:

*We believe in God's gracious forgiveness and acceptance  
so, we will live with forgiveness and compassion  
and release God's love and life into the world.*

Forgiveness of sins is not just a church ritual or part of baptism and believing, it is an attitude; a recognition that we are all faulty and frail and need relationships of forgiveness and acceptance. We need to forgive if we are to be honest to our faith in Jesus the crucified, risen Lord. And people need to hear that they are forgiven to return to wholeness. That is the reality of the grace of God and the reality of who we are as humans.

Theology is an important starting point, knowing that God is, who God is, and who Jesus is. But if it stops there, or stops with what that theology means for you, then it loses relevance for the world. For the disciples in that house in Jerusalem, the resurrection was more than theology. It was a new reality – God is life - that empowered them to continue the mission of Jesus to bring God's love alive in forgiveness and compassion. They would soon become apostles and travel as far as Italy, Spain, India, and Egypt, no longer just witnesses – those who had witnessed the resurrected Jesus – they were now witnesses proclaiming to all that God had entered the world in Jesus Christ and offers acceptance and inclusion in the kingdom of grace. And we are now the carriers of that role as witnesses. We are those who know God as the source of grace, who know that grace cannot be stopped, and in that knowledge, are sent to continue the mission of bringing forgiveness to life in the world.