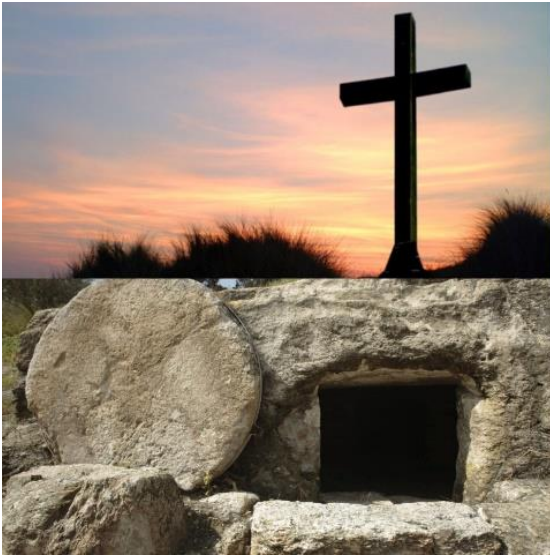


High St Uniting Church Frankston

Something happened, and life comes new.

John 20:1 - 18



Something happened! The oldest of the Gospels tells of the women going to the tomb in the dawn light and finding the sealing stone rolled back and a heavenly messenger telling them that Jesus is not there, he has been raised.

Later gospels, built on the stories of the apostles, and earlier writings of Paul, talk of Jesus appearing to people. It's not just an empty tomb, with all the questions about where the body is, but a living Lord! However, it is still in the realm of 'something happened'. None of the scriptures tell us clearly what happened other than the faith statement – God raised Jesus from death to life.

We have a story about Jesus' temptations even though the story says he was on his own, with no witnesses. We have a story about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane praying earnestly to God, even though the story says he was on his own, the disciples were at a distance sleeping. But we have no account of the resurrection. We don't know what happened or even exactly when. We have the witness of an empty tomb and some stories of appearances. And we are left with; something happened.

The Apostle Paul wrote about the difficulty of preaching about Jesus' crucifixion in the first century; it was a scandal to the Jews because it was so deeply offensive to talk about a person hanging on a tree, and a nonsense to the Greeks because why would you be offering us a god who died on a cross. In the religious atmosphere of the first century, neither Jews nor Greeks had strong problems with the idea of resurrection, although it required explanation. In our time and culture, the issues in preaching our faith are completely turned around. Now, in the light of the atrocious treatment of prisoners in so many places and cultures, people don't have a particular problem with the idea of Jesus being crucified, but when it comes to the resurrection, modern minds find it both offensive, that we would insult their intelligence, and nonsense, something that belongs in myth, fairy tale, or magic.

But, you see, something happened! Our language and theology might seem strange and unbelievable, but something happened. Something that changed lives. Something that turned fishermen into preachers. Something that inspired men and women to abandon a lifetime of following religious laws and sacrifice, and rest in faith. Something that allowed women to be leaders. Something that changed the tragedy of Friday into the joy of worship. Something happened! And it was not just a dawning realisation that their charismatic leader was still influencing their lives and words. The infant church was not carrying on the mission of Jesus and preaching what Jesus preached; they were preaching Jesus, crucified and risen! Not Jesus the teacher, Jesus the Lord!

And I think it is wonderful that the core of our faith lives in the realm of mystery, the realm of the unknowable, as a faith statement. We don't know what happened, but something

happened, and through it we have life with God. And because the details of what happened are lost in mystery, we are free of that trap and free to talk about life. Instead of getting bogged down in details of the how and when of whatever happened to Jesus, we are free to talk about what happened to the disciples. Free to talk about new life and newness of life, newfound strength and confidence and ability. Free to talk about life in all its varieties and stages being held in God. Not because that is more progressive than talking about resurrection, but because life and newness are the consequences of the something that happened to Jesus.

We live in a vibrant culture that thrives on people having the freedom to live out their lives, and our average life span has increased so much in the last 80 years, and yet, scratch the surface and the great fear is death. Not just in people seeking longer life or eternal youth, but in the fear that grips us when we face medical treatment or diagnosis, and the inability to know what to say and what to do when a loved one is facing their mortality. Even those within the church have difficulty knowing what to say and what to think. "Don't offer me glib platitudes like 'death is a mystery we can only face with faith', or 'we are all in the care of God', help me to know what's happening and give me hope", they say. And you might think that me saying, "Something happened and so we have hope in life beyond this life", is another one of those glib platitudes. What happened? how do we know? what can we hold onto for hope? But the wonder of resurrection is that what some may pass off as glib platitudes is that it lives as a faith statement. Sure, there is circumstantial evidence in the lives of the disciples, and the growth of the church, and the lack of any other answer, but at the heart of the resurrection is an empty tomb and some witness statements and the glowing hearts of those who believe. We can say that we are all in the care of our loving God because the care of our loving God is what raised Jesus to life. We can say that there is hope after death because God raised Jesus to new life. These are not glib platitudes; they are statements of faith. And they are powerful statements of hope in the face of death. That is what comes from what looks like a tenuous explanation; something happened.

Talking of new life, new possibilities, and hope in the face of death is not avoiding the term resurrection, it's making the consequences of something that happened 2000 years ago real in our lives, here and now. Because God brought Jesus to new life, we can know that new life, real and all its fulness now. Because God brought Jesus to new life, we can trust God to hold and care for our life, even in the face of death. Something happened in that tomb outside Jerusalem, and life flows from it.