

Text: Luke 24.1-9
St Stephen's

April 8, 2007
Easter Sunday

Resurrection Facts

There is a story about **Albert Einstein**. The great man was getting on in his years, and taking a trip on a train. He discovered after the train started that he had **lost his ticket**, but when the conductor came around, he recognized the great man and told him not to worry about it. When the conductor next came through the car, the elderly professor was on the floor looking for the ticket. The conductor said, "Sir, please don't worry about it, I am sure you purchased one." Einstein looked up at him and said, "You don't understand, son. I have to find that ticket. **I can't remember where I am going!**"

It is important to **stay on track** in life, and I want to offer you a thought today about staying on track. I don't have anything so helpful as a road map, or a plan or a strategy - just **a simple thought** from the vantage of Easter Sunday.

My thought is this, that on the ticket that we dare not lose, is a little diagram. Two little pictures, **actually**. **One is** a cross. **The other is an** empty tomb. Those two little pictures are like the rails that the train runs on.

The more you think about the cross and the resurrection you see that they spell out some **very important facts** about life. Winston Churchill said "*facts are stubborn things*". They are indeed. I want to mention four of those 'stubborn things' this morning.

Fact #1: He Was Dead

Let me start with **a thought about the cross**. Friday was devastating for the disciples. They had no illusions about the cross. It was a total, devastating, heart breaking. There was no good news at all for them on that Friday. Just disaster. The death of Jesus meant an end to all their plans. And **he was dead**. No one had any illusions about that. Beaten

within an inch of his life, he was dispatched in three hours by the most brutal form of execution mankind has ever invented. Before they took him down, the Romans – and they were pros – jammed a spear up into his chest, piercing his heart. But he had already died.

The disciples had hitched their wagon to Jesus, they were moving **up the ladder** of success, ready to take over the reins of power when Jesus was made king. Again and again they had argued about which one of them would be **the greatest** and have the best positions of power. When he was killed, they just scattered. Ran off. Hid out. It was over. It was really over. **All their plans for greatness come to an end at the cross.**

3 days later they came to see that this fact wasn't the end of the story, even though **it is a true** fact. Actually, since that resurrection Sunday no death ever has to be the end of the story.

Fact #2: He Is Alive

That is what changed everything. And no one expected it. But not everyone believes it, and many of us have never taken the time to think it through. Let's just walk through it...

- Start with this. He was **dead and buried**. No doubt about it. The Romans made sure.
- His **grave was sealed and a guard posted**. No one would steal this body. Again, the Romans made sure.
- Early in the morning, the women found **the tomb was empty**. His body was gone, with the burial clothes laid neatly in place. No one has ever found his bones.
- They heard **this message** from some strangers: "He is not here, he has risen..." but they hardly knew what to do with it.
- Then the **women saw him** and talked with him. Later **the rest saw him**. He appeared behind locked doors, and they spoke with him, touched him, put their fingers in his wounds.
- Over the **next 40 days** hundreds of people saw him. People walked with him and ate with him and listened to him teach. One time some 500 people saw him at the same time.
- Within weeks, **thousands** of people came to believe he was alive...

people who had nothing in their experience or culture to prepare them for this. Overnight they changed their world view.

- And the last piece of evidence was the **changed lives** of these thousands of believers. Once convinced these early Christians instantaneously changed. Half hearted deserters who were earlier cowering behind locked doors days became believers, and burst upon the Jewish and Roman worlds, met unbelief and opposition, hardship and deprivation, imprisonment and violent death with a peace and a steadiness and a conviction and a joy that people had never seen before. Not even one of them broke down under pressure. **Would they do that for a lie? For a hoax? For a hallucination? Could they?**

The evidence was overwhelming. **What do you do with that?** Don't just blow it off. And Dan Brown's 'DaVinci Code' won't do! I'd like to ask you to **deal with the evidence**. Don't just put it aside. Facts matter. You have to come up with **a plausible alternative** to explain this movement that swept the world. What is the explanation of the character change of those early Christians, of their courage and joy and boundless hope in the midst of great peril and danger? If you don't believe that Jesus was raised, **how do you explain these things?**

If you won't deal with that, then let me tell you what you are doing. You are swallowing a framework of thought that goes back to the European enlightenment and has **a bias about life**; it says **supernatural events are not possible**. They don't happen. Not now, not then, not ever. **Tolstoy** in his Confession summed it up with this bumper sticker: "**particles and progress**" that's all there is. Impersonal chemical matter and mindless evolutionary progress. No God. No meaning. No purpose. No God given dignity and value to life. No love. No spirit. Just '*particles and progress*'.

Many people believe that without thinking about it, just because you live in **a culture that believes it**. But you **can't be mindless** about these things. It is important to **think it through**. To be honest, many people believe the 'particles and progress' line without thinking too much about it because it **cuts me loose to do anything I want** with my life. And a

lot of us want to just do anything we want with life.

So we just don't look at things like 'stubborn facts'. But we call attitude **narrow-mindedness**. And narrow-mindedness can be **dangerous**. When the President of Iran says the holocaust never happened, we worry. When you won't deal with events in history, your train isn't going to run down the tracks of life very well. There is overwhelming evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. This evidence is stubborn, solid, compelling. What do you think about it?

Fact #3: You Are Beloved

On Good Friday, Becca quoted a couple poems by **Raymond Carver**, a 20th C American poet. Talking about the fragility of life, we writes,

*Before long, before anyone realizes,
I'll be gone from here.*

Easy to sympathize. He died at the age of 50, and before he died, he wrote a poem called 'The Last Fragment' in which he asked:

*And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.*

And what did you want?

To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.

Carver was not a believer, but what he wants, all of us want. The very **deepest longing of the heart** is to *feel myself beloved on the earth*. Much of our life is a search for just that love. A lot of us grow up with this idea that **if we could find the one person** who would really love us, then our life would be complete. Maybe you see a character in a movie... you see yourself alongside him or her... you dream, you fanaticize, you hope, and **you look**. You look everywhere. But now you are **in trouble**, because no human being could possibly bear the weight of your expectations. Maybe **love fails** you again and again along the way. Still you look.

When you read **the resurrection stories**, you can't help but be touched by the **tenderness** of Jesus for his followers.

- He greets **Mary** with a sweet, personal word in the garden. She

knows him right away and rushes to his feet!

- He sends special word to thrice-denying **Peter** to come to him. Forgiveness flows.
- He walks for hours with a **couple of disciples** on the road, taking much time for a long conversation with them. By the end of the walk, their hearts are burning within them.
- **Thomas**, caught in his doubts, has a special moment with Jesus, and the doubter becomes a believer.
- More than once, he breaks bread with them, prepares a meal for them, sits at table with them – probably the greatest expression of intimacy in ancient culture.

The moment they know that he is alive, they understand the word “**failure**” is not the last word on any life. Again and again the risen Jesus speaks a deeper word over every failed and fallen life. He **holds up his hands with their wounds** and looks straight at you and He says, ‘**beloved**’. He calls us, ‘**friends**’. He **doesn’t** fold his arms, **sit back** and wait for people to come crawling to him. He doesn’t leave us to take on life’s challenges alone. **The shepherd** goes after the sheep that wanders off, **the father** wraps his arms around the lost son and whispers in his ear. ‘Beloved.’ ‘Welcome home.’ And you come to *feel yourself beloved on the earth*.

That is a fact you can build your life upon. Stubborn. Solid. A true thing.

Fact #4: The Future Is In Sight

The Greek Philosopher **Epicurus** wrote... *“I could die happy if I was sure death was the end. But because no one can be sure death is the end, no one can die happy.”* Do you understand what he was saying? He is saying, if it is only ‘*particles and progress*’, and if I knew that, then I could die happy, knowing this life is all I have. But **maybe it is not all** there is. Maybe there is a **judgment** to come. God to come. Life to come. Eternity to come. Because I am not sure death is the end, I do not rest easy.

Well, we know what he means.

The resurrection of Jesus gives us a **clear view of our future**. The

future is not an extension of our natural life, not a vague existence in some spiritual nether-world. **The future is the resurrection of Jesus.**

His **resurrection** shall be our resurrection.

His **destiny** shall be our destiny.

We shall be **like him**. That is the promise, nothing less.

Our body shall be like his body.

His family shall be our family.

A new heaven and a **new earth** are within sight.

His life shall be our life, **starting now**. Not starting then and there, but here and now.

And what lies ahead is rushing towards us. Sometimes I think I can hear the sound.

Joni Erickson Tata.. a paraplegic at the age of 18 because of a tragic swimming accident, recalls shortly after that accident when she was in a prayer meeting and a leader invited... *"let's kneel to pray..."* She writes, *"I burst into tears. Then I remembered the resurrection. The first thing I will do in heaven is to fall on my knees, and pray..."*

So often we worry about our losses in this life. We think of opportunities missed, because of circumstance or disability, "I never learned to dance" – you will. "I always wanted to sing" – you will. Christ is risen. Eternity has started. You are not going to miss out on anything, not on any good thing.

So often we worry that we have learned life's lessons too late. "If only I knew then what I know now." But Christ is risen. Eternity is at hand. No good thing will be wasted.

We face difficulties and dangers. 'Lumps and lions', we might call them. Fear of disease that stalks in the night. Fear of terrors that we face in the day – But Christ is risen and he says

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death..."

Revelation 1:17-19 (NIV)

That is a fact you can build your life upon. Stubborn. Solid. A true thing.

Have you got your ticket for life in hand? Or is it lost on the floor, and you've forgotten your destination? Does your ticket have on it the cross and resurrection of Jesus? Do you understand what I mean by that? I mean have you taken your life and yielded it to him and asked him to stamp it with his cross and his resurrection? He will if you do. Perhaps you would like to do that today? When you do, as you do, he will build your life on facts, stubborn things, solid and true, that wash your failures, fill your heart and secure your future. Because Christ is risen. And that is a true thing.