**Sunday 20th November – Resurrection**

Welcome, opening prayer

Family News – Winner of quiz!

* Bible studies have been talking about mission – we read that in order to accomplish anything for God, we must abide in him. This week we start the ‘be still’ course, which should take us through until Christmas – like prayer course.

3-part service this week

**Remembering** – we touched on this last week. But specifically – look back – what has God done for you in the past?

* 2 central truths of the Bible for Christians where we see God at work in history: Incarnation (Christmas) – God himself identifies with humanity
* Crucifixion (Easter) – Jesus died on the cross to save humanity – a humanity which was broken, had turned away from God, done its own thing, messed up; which wasn’t what it was meant to be. And I’m sure we can all identify with that.
* Reading – Phil 2:6-11

Sing:

1310 I danced in the morning

829 I stand amazed

**Encounter** – we come to the present. What is God doing in your life right now?

* How do we encounter God?
* Reading – Psalm 23
* One way we encounter him is through communion. We sometimes call it the Lord’s table. A place where we sit down and eat with him; where we remember his death, where we symbolically take him into ourselves through bread and wine, physical symbols of a spiritual acceptance, and where we look forward.

So as we prepare for our communion time, let us just take a few moments to centre ourselves again on God, as we listen to this music.

Oceans

Read Matt 26:20-29

As we come to communion, I would remind you that we come to remember and to celebrate Jesus’ love shown to us in his death; that we come to meet with him in a special way. So we ask the question, for each to consider for themselves – are you able to meet with him? Are there things in your life you would prefer to keep hidden from him, to keep him out of? Are there things you have thought, or said, or done, that keep you from God? And we come to him in a time of silence and confession, before we join him at his table, asking for his forgiveness, cleansing, healing – which he freely offers to us.

…

Lord, we lift to you those things we know of that are part of our lives but are against what you want from us. Make us clean, make real to us the forgiveness of Jesus, make us whole. May the way be clear for us to come to you, because Jesus died to make it so.

This time is a time for those who believe and love the Lord to join him at his table, to be fed and nourished. It is open to any who profess a faith in Christ as their saviour. If you are not sure, or don’t want to be included, that is absolutely fine; what I do have here is a gift of blessing which will come round with the bread. These cards contain a Bible verse and I invite you to take one and just take these couple of minutes to read and think about it while we have the bread and wine.

GFW Re-membering and reconciling – to ‘the sharing’.

GFW acclamation

**Children out???**

Let us continue in prayer for our congregation and the things and people on our hearts. Any prayer requests?

Lord, we think of that ‘encounter’ with you; that ‘God-in-the-present’. Be present with us, and with those we love. Touch hearts, heal lives; bless, comfort, encourage. May those we have mentioned, and those we have not, know you at work in their lives to restore them to wholeness and hope, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sing: 1187 Before the throne

**Hope** – Paul, writing about the institution of the Lord’s Supper, or communion as we call it, says this ‘whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death **until he comes**.’

Jesus didn’t just die – he was raised from death.

1 Cor 15:3-23

What is your hope?

Can you picture a future? Or is it just words, a mystery that we won’t know until the time?

Jesus’ resurrection assures us of our own resurrection. In him, we **will** be raised.

We can think of resurrection in three parts. First, the resurrection of Jesus. The ‘remembering’ bit. We remember that Jesus was raised, that the tomb was empty. We remember that he was seen by the disciples, that they touched his nail-scarred hands and feet; that he ate with them and spoke with them. This is what the Bible tells us. History tells us that this is what the disciples themselves believed – some of them were tortured, and killed, for proclaiming this very fact. Jesus was raised from death.

Then we have our own resurrection. In our reading this morning, and our sermon last week, we heard about our being united with Christ in his death in the here-and-now; putting to death our old nature and being resurrected in a new nature. We live as resurrected beings in a new spiritual life even in our old bodies. And that is a call to live **in the right way,** to live in tune with the new life we have been given.

And finally we have the future resurrection. The promise that when we die we will be given new bodies which will never die.

Paul continues: vv35-44

He isn’t denying a bodily resurrection, he is as aware as anyone that Christ’s body was raised – that the tomb was empty – that the disciples touched his nail-scarred hands and feet. What he is saying is that the body in which we are raised will be different.

He uses the analogy of seeds; a seed that is sown, that produces a plant. If I can run with that analogy – the plant is quite different from the seed, isn’t it. You know, if you plant a black-and-white striped seed, you will not get a black-and-white striped plant. But you also know that you will not get an apple tree. There is an association, a continuity, between the seed you plant and the plant you get. If I plant a sunflower seed, I get a sunflower plant. And likewise, if I plant a Helen-body, God will raise a Helen-body. I might not know what that will look like, and we have to be very careful about being too dogmatic about that, but there will be a Helen-ness to it! There will be a continuity.

We can go further. But I say this even more carefully, because we don’t absolutely know. When we look at Jesus’ risen body, we see the scars of his crucifixion. Does that show us that even our own scars will be somehow integrated into our resurrected bodies? That those things in our lives that have shaped us and made us who we are, even those that have been incredibly difficult and painful, are somehow kept in the future? Healed, and painless, but not wiped away?

We don’t know. We can speculate, but we cannot know for sure. What we do know, is that God made us, and God loves us. As we were initially created; as we are now; as we will be in the future. Our experiences and choices now shape us, sometimes in the way God chooses to shape us, sometimes in the way we choose to shape ourselves. And God respects our choices. You know, God wants me to be fit and healthy. Why wouldn’t he? But if I choose to only eat McDonalds, he is not going to keep me fit and healthy against my own decision! And there is no reason why that respect would not continue in eternity. Who we are, who we will be in this life, will shape who we are and who we will be when he raises us after death.

So what will our resurrection look like? We will be recreated, restored, perfected. But somehow retaining who we are; somehow continuous with what we are now. That might mean that we have to rethink our view of perfection. I don’t believe we are going to get “**the**” perfect body! But I am going to be perfectly **me**. We can trust God when the Bible says that in his kingdom there will be no more death, or mourning, or pain. Whatever our resurrected bodies are like, these things will not be part of them.

There is a lot we don’t know. We never know the details of the future. But we do know that we can trust God with it.

We do know that because Christ came to earth, as a baby, he identifies himself with us. He joins us in our humanity and comes alongside us. We know that because he chose to die on the cross, when we join ourselves to him it is as though we too have died on the cross – all those things in our lives that claim power over us; wrong thoughts, wrong actions, temptations… these are put to death on the cross with him. Nothing stands between us and God any longer. And we know that as Christ was raised, we too are raised. We are given new life in the here-and-now, a new life in relationship with God, as we said last week. And we are promised that when our bodies die, they too will be raised to new life. That death is not the end.

I guess the question is, then: so what?

This is all very well. It’s all great to think that there is some kind of life after death. What difference does that make to me, now, today?

Well firstly, I think, it gives us hope. In our earlier reading Paul said, ‘If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.’ The Christian life is not always easy; believing that one day we will have our reward with God should give us strength and courage to walk with him now.

Secondly, and linked to that, it reminds us of the reality I spoke of last week, the reality of judgement. On the day when we see him face to face, will he acknowledge us as those who have trusted in him? What we do now, matters. Are we growing closer to God, or further from him?

And finally, who we are today, who we are becoming, will affect who we are and who we become in eternity. The scars we bear – physical and emotional – will endure. The choices we make determine whether we are becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful etc; or whether we are becoming more bitter, selfish, hateful. What are you going to look like?

Let us pray.

Lord God, today we have remembered you; what you have done in the world and in our lives. We have encountered you, in a shared meal, in worship and in your word. And we have heard about the hope we have in you. Help us to not forget; help us to remain in constant fellowship with you; and help us to live in that hope. May our lives today make us into the people you would have us be for eternity. Would you help us to grow ever closer to you, day by day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1346 In Christ Alone

May the memory of God sustain you, the presence of God strengthen you, and the hope of God draw you on. May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.