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Easter is over! The cross and the tomb stand empty, challenging, daring us to think, *Do I really believe these events really happen?*

Three people went to the tomb Easter morning, and each responded differently to what they saw: Mary Magdalene saw the stone was rolled away, let her imagination run wild, panicked and ran to tell Simon Peter. Peter and John ran to the tomb with Mary following. John had arrived first, and peered in from the outside. Peter arrived next and ran straight into the tomb, but Mary remained outside, weeping. After the others had left, she moved gingerly towards the open tomb and peered in; she saw what the others didn't: two angels seated where Jesus body was!

Even today, people experience the resurrection of Jesus the Christ in different ways.

I am not able to verify this, but was told of a poll taken before Easter asking Church-goers: *Do you believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?*, to which **46% said NO!** Imagine! Almost half of those who attend Church, do not believe the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, as true!

This set me thinking: have we, as Shepherds of God's Church, failed to communicate clearly, the basic beliefs of our faith? And, are people, "the body of Christ", not inspired enough to study and discover for themselves, the basic principles of our faith?

Perhaps part of the problem is language itself, which is both, precise when describing factual matters which cannot be challenged or disputed: *"the sun rose at 5:45 am"*, *"an accident took place on the A34"*, but is imprecise when reporting information which challenges peoples' experience and expectation.

If I were to say, *"I saw a mermaid last night..."*, you intelligent people, who know mermaids don't exist, would challenge me. You might even question my sanity!

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If, however, I clarify my statement, "*I saw a mermaid last night... in my dreams!*", you might label me as one who has strange dreams, some men might question why they too don't dream of mermaids, but I suspect everyone would accept my declaration as being my unique experience, daft as it may be!

The resurrection of Jesus invites a similar response. I have heard people say, ***If you believe the Resurrection to be factual, go ahead, but I don't find it factual, therefore I don't believe it!***

We had fun last Thursday analysing the story of the **Ragman!** (sermon on previous Sunday). The first thing we noted was that the story would not have been possible, if the narrator had not chosen to follow, to pursue the Ragman all the way, through His many encounters, through to his death and resurrection, thus able to write a first-person account of what he saw!

In the same way, God invites us to follow the evidence and make a note of it; this evidence is our first person account! There will be times when we accept the evidence as true and trustworthy, because we relate it to our real life experience; but there are times when we accept the evidence as true and trustworthy, even when it contradicts what we believe, which is about living with mystery! Astronomers have just discovered a gigantic black hole billions of light years away and millions of light years across. God is much larger than His creation and cannot, therefore, be explained nor understood; so we must necessarily learn to accept and live with mystery.

Today we embark on a three-part series titled, "This is Love", an exploration of three things we associate with God's unique expression of love. Let's be very clear from the start, God does not love; God **IS** love. Everything He does is rooted in His love. Only because God **IS** love, He is uniquely able to forgive sin, conquer death and victorious over it, and

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makes all things new. Over the next three Sundays (including today) we shall explore each of these.

To many of us, the cross and Jesus' resurrection, are an unresolved mystery, and it will stay unresolved when we add standard phrases we use like, "Jesus died for our **"sin"**". Why did He **have** to die? Wasn't there another way to resolve the matter of sin?

We have explored the matter of sin several times over the past many years and found that **"sin"** is living outside of, or against the law of God, which He has given for our protection; God intends for us be safe and live well, and His law protects us. We may not have personal experience of being protected by God's law, but that does not mean, God's law doesn't protect us!

It's like questioning the fairness of the laws dispensed by our courts, when we have never been in court and experienced the protection of the law. e.g. we might question the fairness of the law about using a mobile phone whilst driving (we might argue the need to answer phone calls in case one might be an emergency), until we are taken to court for causing death and damage for using our phone while driving, and find the law protects those who live by it and are obedient to it!

So lets' start by recognising **sin**, as a state of brokenness; our relationship with God is broken, because we are governed by laws we have made, which are not perfect. We have national laws to help us live in peace and harmony, respectful of each other's differences, yet celebrating what we hold in common. Then there are laws which **we** have made in order to establish a "pecking order", or to establish what we consider to be proper behaviour, which sometimes has the undesired effect of bullying, coercing, intimidating, even *persecuting* people.

To fix the problem of **Sin** we have made laws about doing and not doing, eating or not eating, wearing or not wearing, but these do not fix the

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problem of **sin**, because **sin** is living by laws which are not God's law, which can lead us to believe, speak and behave in ways which damage us and hurt others.

Sin is an uncomfortable topic at the best of times, mostly because we because we have made a caricature of it and its truth makes us uneasy.

In its simplest definition, sin is **missing the mark** (e.g. target practice as in marksmanship sports).

What happened in "the garden" (Genesis 2-3) was not that the first couple ate the wrong fruit. What happened was that they missed the mark, the standard God set for them to live by - the woman chose to believe the serpent's deliberate offence of misrepresenting God, and the man, instead of abiding by God's specific instruction, chose to believe the woman's explanation. Its not a gender matter, it's not about "the woman" who led us into sin; it is a matter of the choices the man and woman made.

The choices we make, either builds or breaks our relationship with God! When the apostle Paul understood this, he declared, *"Everyone, the whole human race has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard"*¹

What happened in the upper room where the disciples were gathered on Easter Sunday helps us understand the significance and the power of the Jesus' Resurrection.

You can choose to lock all the doors and windows to your life and think you are safe, but God has a way making His presence known to you, to show what He has done for you through Christ. He is not interested pulling out a score card and taking stock of all you have done wrong. If that is your view of God, then you are looking at a caricature of Him.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a "reset button" for God's creation; computer wizards among you might remember the first generation of

¹ Romans 3:23

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computers, when pressing "ctrl-alt-delete" at the same time would "reboot" the computer! That is what the resurrection the Christ did: it reset God's creation.

In that room, Jesus pressed three buttons to reset God's creation: In Genesis, God commissioned the first couple to go and take charge of the world as His image bearers. In the upper room, Jesus **commissioned** the disciples to go into their world, armed with the Truth of Word of God, God promise achieved, that His son would break the barrier of death, through His own death and resurrection. The One who was sent to the world has accomplished His mission, now becomes the Sender, commissioning His followers to serve as His messengers, to represent Him in the world.

The second button Jesus pressed, released the power of the **Holy Spirit** to protect, preserve and guide them in the world, in the same way the Holy Spirit accompanied Jesus into the wilderness to protect and keep Him safe from harm and danger.

Finally, (fans of *Mission Impossible* might recognise this!) their mission, if they chose to accept it, was to forgive others their sin - to **forgive** which means, **not to hold their sins against them**; when others have missed the mark, not to hold it against them.

We need to grasp this very important Turth: if we don't forgive others their sin, they remain unforgiven, **in eternity!**

This may seem very strange to us! **Who am I to forgive anyone their sin, or Why should I forgive anyone their sin?**

When the Disciples asked Jesus to teach them a prayer, Jesus taught them, "pray like this": ... **forgive us OUR sins, as we forgive others, their sins against us.** This is the crux of the Resurrection.

We close with three important lessons from Jesus' first encounter with the Disciples, later in the day, after rHis resurrection:

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1. Having received God's gift of forgiveness, we have no option, no choice, but to forgive others when they "miss the mark".
2. If we do not forgive others, they remain unforgiven in eternity, and we are answerable to God why we did not forgive them.
3. Our God-given mission is to help others receive God's gift of forgiveness, which sets them free to be the person God made them to be.

The remedy for "missing the mark" (sin) is to allow Jesus to live His life in us, which is only possible through His resurrection: He has new, eternal life, and so do we when we choose to allow Him to live His life in us, and overflow through us into the lives of others.

This is the love that forgives sin - we forgive because we are forgiven; our sin is never held against us, so why should others' sin be held against them?

The decision is yours to make: will you accept God's incredible love which forgives sin, and show the world the life of Christ living in you, or will you postpone it for another day?

AMEN.

PRAYER: The apostle John observed, *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called "Children of God"; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us (as the Children of God), is that it did not know Him.*²

Father! I want to be seen and known as a "Child of God". As Jesus did for the Disciples in that upper room, commissioned them into Your service, released the Holy Spirit to guide and protect them, and made them instruments of Your forgiveness, release us into Your world once again, that we may live the life of Christ in us, and be a blessing to many. **AMEN.**

² 1 John 3:1