

Welcome to the week after the feast of the Hollow Chocolate Bunny who lays solid chocolate eggs! Almost all trace of St. Bunny seems to have disappeared. He has traces of fine chocolate crumbs (or its it flakes or specks?!) here and there, but it is safe to presume, most of the Hollow Chocolate Bunny and his solid chocolate eggs, have been siphoned off with glee, onto your eagerly waiting taste buds!

St. Bunny has left a lingering taste for more, not dissimilar to hunger and quest for detailed information experienced by the disciples after Jesus' resurrection. There are several incidents recorded after Jesus' resurrection, which help us appreciate how the Disciples felt. Last Sunday, we read two incidents, one early in the morning when a group of women rushed back from the tomb as discreetly as possible, to tell the disciples, Jesus was risen; the Disciples ran to the site of the tomb to see for themselves, returning quite perplexed as they had only seen the broken seal, the stone rolled away exposing an empty tomb, and displaying neatly folded grave clothes.

We also read of the encounter between Jesus and two disciples towards the end of the day, who recognised Jesus in their midst only when He broke bread during the evening meal. They were so excited having encountered the living Christ, oblivious of any danger, and there were many, they rushed back in the dead of night to tell the disciples, whom they found were huddled together, gripped with fear of retaliation from the Jews. Luke tells us, *While these two men were still talking about their encounter with the living Christ, He stood among them and greeted them, Shalom! Peace be with you!*"

John picks up the story with overlapping details. *In the evening of that same day, the day of resurrection, the Disciples were gathered together behind locked doors out of fear of the Jews, and Jesus came, stood in the middle and said, "Shalom! Peace be with you!" ...He showed them his hands and his side. The Disciples were overjoyed to see the Lord (**at long last!** everyone else had seen them, except the handpicked ten - Thomas was not present, and Judas was no more).*

*“Shalom! Peace be with you!” Jesus repeated, adding, “Just as the Father sent me, I myself am also sending you.” (The Father sent me from Heaven to this world; I am sending you from the security of this locked room, into the world.)*

*Then he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive someone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you hold back forgiveness, they are not forgiven.”*

The process of commissioning now begins; Adam was given life with the breath of God, and released into God’s creation to “subdue” it, bring all of it under God’s control; these ten disciples are given new life with the breath of the Holy Spirit, and released into the world to help restore it back into God’s Kingdom.

A week later, Thomas, who said he would never believe in the risen Christ unless he saw and touched His wounds, personally encounters Jesus and is commissioned (go to *those who have not seen, yet will believe; blessed are they!*); and impulsive, impetuous Peter, who three days prior, denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed, is commissioned by Jesus to take care and feed his those who will follow Jesus.

These early encounters between the Disciples and Jesus, describe **resurrection life**, which starts with the gift of the Holy Spirit, then being commissioned, and then released by God into the world.

The **resurrection life** is lived by allowing the Holy Spirit to exercise the love-driven power of God, to look after and nurture us and keep us safe until this earth is consumed back into God’s eternal kingdom, and God plans and purposes are completed .

This power is not for the favoured or chosen few, nor for those special ones who we are told, have lived an exemplary life; God’s love-driven power is ours to live by, here and now.

Over the next couple of months, we shall delve into Paul’s letters to Timothy. Paul met Timothy during his first missionary journey into central Turkey. Timothy was a well-educated young man, from a good, respectable family, but this was

not the reason why Paul chose him. He saw spiritual zeal in the young man and mentored him into a position of church leadership.

Over the next three months, before the next church meeting, we are tasked to prayerfully consider people who might serve as Deacons. Paul's first letter to Timothy will help us understand the role and responsibilities of Deacons.

**A note of caution:** In reading these two letters, we must exercise extreme caution. Paul addresses some issues specifically directed at the Church in Ephesus where Timothy was leader, who posed questions and wanted answers. The letter also contains instruction and counsel for churches in general, and we must carefully and diligently separate these.

"Letters" in the New Testament are a collection of responses to specific concerns brought to the attention of Paul, Peter, James and others. All their responses are **based on doctrine**, but are not all their responses should be taken as doctrine, as they address specific situations in the church.

These early evangelists faced an uphill battle most of their lives, as the Church from its very start, was plagued by false doctrine, beliefs which distort Truth.

The first three hundred years after Jesus' resurrection, there was a lot of debate and discussion about the nature of this **Christ-centred (focussed) faith which is to be lived**. Many false teachers tried to make Christ into the person **they** thought He should be, and ascribed to Him, things that were neither of Him, nor of God; and priests continued to impose rules and regulation, rituals and observances on the people, all in the name of God

In 325 AD, a Council met in Nicaea to hammer out a common **creed**, which everyone agreed, expressed correctly, the person of God, His purpose in and through Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's opening line in his letter to Timothy, is to remind him of his earlier advice, to *"remain in Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons, not to teach any different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies,*

*which promote speculations rather than stewardship (good order) from God, that is by faith.”<sup>1</sup>*

Last Sunday, we discovered two disciples discussing the output from the rumour-mill in Jerusalem, without reference to Scripture, until Jesus comes alongside, “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said **in the Scriptures** concerning Himself*”<sup>2</sup>.

Two disciples were making the serious mistake of discussing matters of God and His kingdom, without reference to the Word of God! This is where we make serious mistakes and end up misunderstanding God, His actions and plans. I wish I had a pound for the number of times I have heard it said, “The Holy Book says ...”, and the person quotes some nonsense or misinterprets, sometimes drawing a conclusion which is absurdly wrong! The only way God makes sense is when we spend time in His Word and ask Him to reveal Himself. Outside of this, we will end up frustrated, disappointed, misdirected, and journeying down the wrong path.

Paul, however, is not telling Timothy to go and wag his finger, to pontificate and lord it over those who teach false doctrine. *The purpose of my order, Paul tells Timothy, is to promote love from a clean heart, from a good conscience and from sincere trust.*

There are those, Paul says to Timothy, *who have wandered off into fruitless discussion. They want to be teachers of God’s law, but they understand neither their own words, nor the matters about which they make such emphatic pronouncements. We know that God’s law is good, provided one uses it in the way God’s law itself intends.*

*We are aware, Paul adds, the Torah (God’s Law) is not for a person who is righteous and making every attempt to follow God’s law, but for those who rebel and act contrary to the sound teaching that is in keeping with the Good News of the glorious and blessed God.*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 1:4

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:27

Next Sunday, Phil Vickery will pick up the theme from Paul's second letter to Timothy, the first seven verses of chapter 2, and help us understand what it means to have ***bold endurance***.

To call ourselves Christian, is to identify with Christ, identify with His birth, identify with His life, His suffering **AND** accept His resurrection. This is the crux of our faith. Every religion has a holy leader, but like the High Priests in the Temple at Jerusalem, they live and they die, and their followers are left at the mercy of the next incarnation of leader.

Only Christ dies, conquers and defeats death, to be resurrected and restored to God's kingdom, instructing the Holy Spirit to look after and care for us, until the Father calls time. This is the ***resurrection life***, living in the power of the Holy Spirit. Everything will not suddenly become perfect, but everything we do, will be in keeping with the plan of God as implemented by the Holy Spirit.

We have two questions facing us this morning:

1. If we are "christian", is Christ sovereign and supreme in our lives?
2. If Christ is sovereign and supreme in our lives, are we living the ***resurrection life***? Have we given full reign to the Holy Spirit, to direct our lives and accomplish God's plan on earth?

**AMEN**