

I suspect that you are used to this image progressing the other way, from green to decay. It's often an image associated with dementia and aging and dying. But what is so exciting about Easter Sunday is that we celebrate restoration not decay, we celebrate that God's victory over death and the upending of the normal order. We celebrate bodies and minds restored and renewed and God's final word HOPE.

I remember the day I asked Karen to marry me, I remember the day my Father died, I remember the day Jono was born, I remember the day the planes hit the twin towers, I remember the day I gave my life to Jesus, I remember the day of the mosque shooting. Some days and events are irremovably inscribed on our hearts and minds, and other things aren't. Life is a process of accumulating memories and then forgetting, we forget far more than we remember. But the scriptures tell us to remember some things. I want to take about remembering the resurrection today.

We remember trivial things and we forget important things, I remember getting the cane at school but I'm starting to forget my mother's laugh. We remember things that are seared into our brains by tragedy, and those thing which we actively remember, things we make a habit of routinely remembering.

As we celebrate the resurrection today I want to celebrate memory. What is your earliest memory?

We actively remember things by retelling the stories, by looking at photos because they bring back memories, scents are also very powerful at helping us to remember. When Jesus gathered his disciples for his last supper, he didn't just have a chat, he associated his death with a powerful festival, he gave them words to repeat, he gave them tastes and smells to help them remember.

He said every time you do this, remember me. I want to command you today, remember the resurrection.

(pause). You see I used a different word today – I command you. I bet that caused a reaction, and then reaction will cause you to remember.

We actively remember by reading the story, by talking about the story, by visiting places that connect with the story – like coming to church today – and by sharing special meals.

But we also forget, sometime we actively forget; the bible says forget the former things, don't continually revisit our sins once they are forgiven. Our prime minister has decided to actively forget the name of the shooter who killed 50 people in Christchurch last month. I've wondered about the wisdom of that but in the end I agree with her. However, I also think we should be careful to remember the cost of racial hatred, as George Santayana said "The one who does not remember history is bound to live through it again."

But alongside actively forgetting we also passively forget, we forget the things that we do not bring to mind, and so every Easter and everyday it is good to bring to mind the story of Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus was born of Mary, he grew up in Galilee, he gathered 12 disciples and he created a powerful movement, just when it looked like he was at the zenith of his influence he was arrested and tried on a trumped up charge, the crowds turned against him and he was crucified. They laid his dead body in a cold tomb and his enemies thought they had won.

What happened next is extra-ordinary. Early in the morning on the third day, 4 women went to care for Jesus' body and they found the tomb empty. – I reckon that was one of those searing moments that they would never have forgotten. Have you ever had something stolen and you to look for it and it's just not there! I reckon that was their experience and it really shocked them. Next they encountered some angels who told them that Jesus was not there but had risen. And then shortly afterwards Jesus started to appear to people.

Two events empty tomb, resurrection appearances for us to remember.

But why? Why should we remember, are these just interesting stories to tell our grandchildren? No. There are 3 great reasons to remember. Past, future and present.

Past, because Jesus was raised from the dead, this was a supernatural endorsement of all that he taught, it shows that he was not just a great talker, but that he had substance behind his words and that is most important because of the central claim that he made during his ministry. What was that central claim? He claimed to be able to forgive sins. That's an extra ordinary claim. To forgive things that only God should be able to forgive. Surely God should have struck him down for making such a claim, but he didn't – if the resurrection is true, then Jesus can forgive sins and you and I can be forgiven for all the things we have messed up in life. And I don't know about you, but I've messed up a few things and forgiveness has always sounded wonderful to me.

Future, Jesus said in my father's house there are many rooms and I go and prepare a place for you. If Jesus was resurrected as we believe then there is a real hope for us beyond the grave, not just a possibility, but a real hope.

One of our lovely members died last week, Christine Meredith was a kind woman and she had followed Jesus all her life. I believe that she has gone to be with God, not because of a nice story that someone told, but because Jesus rose from the dead. Because of an event in history that we are remembering today, because of an earth shattering event that should change our assumptions about the way that the world works. The resurrection of Jesus should mess with a materialist world view.

Present: And here's my favourite reason to remember the resurrection, it means that by God's holy spirit I have access to power that can change the world. When I am making a mess of things, I can change. When I encounter a culture of racism, or oppression or misogyny, or exploitation – I know there is a power at work in our world that can change things and I can share in that work.

And when I look at my own faults and think I could never change, I remember the resurrection and remember that God can change me, can change circumstances and can change outcomes! Hallelujah. Remember with me.

And I believe that the message of the cross and the resurrection are vitally linked, I see our world is full of pain, full of circumstances where things have gone horribly wrong, people with physical limitations, people encountering Mental illness, people where life is not working out. Now I believe one of the great call of God is to go and journey with people in pain, compassion literally means to suffer alongside people. The illustration that comes to me, is like our friend is on fire and that we can keep away, we can throw buckets of water, but often what they need is for us to grasp their hand and be with them in their pain, and grasping that hand burns. It is not taking on their pain in its entirety, and it's not avoiding it, it is standing with. In some ways this I think is a picture of the cross, Jesus took on all the pain in the world, he does more than hold the hand, he takes on all that pain. We are called to hold the hand of those in pain. Now this is where the resurrection is essential, it's only as we remember the resurrection that we can know there is hope beyond the pain. The resurrection says one day all pain will be overcome.

This morning I want come back to look again at the power of memory, that memory can be used to reframe our stories and our experience without doing violence to history. Often when we have something bad happen, we focus on the unpleasant memories, if we suffer from PTSD we repeat the bad memories, but memory is also fluid; we can choose to remember our successes even in the midst of pain. We can remember those who supported us rather than those who undermined us, and we can access the memories of others which can change our stories.

My dad was the youngest of 9 in his family, I think his brothers and sisters thought he was a bit spoilt, but dad was very loyal to his mum, even when I was small about once a month he would make the journey to see his mum for lunch, 5 hours each way, 10 hours return. Just a good son, but then you remember that he had 5 years in a prisoner of war camp when he never saw his family, and that for 6 months in 1941 all that gran knew was that dad was missing in action, before finally hearing that he had been taken prisoner and was in Austria. You can't change the facts but different memories change the story.

So often when we realise that God is not against us, but that he let Jesus suffer to redeem us, its changes the way we react to our story. And when we actively remember that Jesus rose from the dead, then he can find hope in some dark places.

Our memories are the chords of our relationships. What is most important in a person? Is it our physical body with it's strengths and weaknesses, or is it our memories and our ability to be in relationship. Are we ultimately defined by our composition, which changes from year to year molecules and dust; or is it our memories and our ability to relate to each other and to have an inner life that most makes us, us. I think it's a little of each, but probably more of the later.

Why am I asking? Because for some years I have been thinking about resurrection and thinking that the molecules are not the most important part. The most important part of us, is our memory, our character and our soul, the software rather than the hardware and that at the resurrection God put Jesus software into a new type of body. I don't believe the resurrection is just in the minds of the disciples. I think we need a body to be present, but perhaps our real life is in the intangibles. Perhaps our real life is written in the mind of God. Not as robots, but as autonomous thinking and moral agents.

Perhaps the most important thing is not us remembering the resurrection, but God remembering us? God loving us. God knowing us.

And let me return to the main point, the cross and the resurrection go together, because its only as we have real hope in God's power to restore that we can have the courage to grasp the fire, the fire, the pain in our neighbours' soul, and the pain in our own soul. A beautiful soul is one who can grasp the fire and yet not be consumed, our Jesus and Jesus through us.