

I wonder if you've heard this quote from Albert Einstein: Only two things are infinite: the Universe and human stupidity. And I'm not sure about the first one.

If you haven't, I'm sure you've heard of this one. Can you finish it for me? Only two things are constant: Death and taxes.

Now, you'll be glad to know I won't be talking about taxes this morning. But we do need to talk about death.

Australia is supposed to be an egalitarian country. Everyone is supposed to be equal. Whether you believe that's the case for Australians or not, one thing we can't deny is that death is the ultimate leveller because we all die. From the lowliest slum orphan to the loftiest King all will die. Unless the Lord Jesus returns in our lifetime, we will all be taken by death.

Now, death is awful. When people we know die, it hurts. And it hurts so much because it *robs* us of people. They are taken away from us and we don't get them back. We don't get to relate to them anymore, we can't run with them or eat with them or drink wine with them. They no longer bring us joy and their spot is now always empty at gatherings. You know what that's like. And when we've *recently* lost someone, there are so many emotions. There can be anger, grief, deep, deep sadness. And loss. Maybe confusion. And it hurts. And we don't know what to do. Or we feel numb. And other people are feeling different things, at different times and it's confusing. And they're gone, really gone. (Long pause)

And it's in this maelstrom of emotions that we find the disciples as we pick up the narrative this morning. But, something happens for them, that is going to change the world, forever.

Have a look with me at vv19-23

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut here the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Here, there are two actions, and two speeches from Jesus.

The first action: Jesus "came and stood among them". Now, normally this would be an 'everyday' kind of circumstance. Jesus standing in the midst of his friends, as the teacher speaks...

But not today.

This event is /extraordinary. This event is extraordinary not because the disciples feared for their lives and had locked the door. This event is extraordinary not because Jesus pulled some kind of magical trick to gain access. This event is extraordinary because it is the resurrected Jesus. It is the Jesus who had defeated death. This Jesus stood among them, or literally "stood in the middle". That's the first action.

Then the second action:

Jesus demonstrates his identity. Jesus demonstrates he is the risen Lord through highly sophisticated /hand and flesh recognition! v. 20 – He show them his hands and his side.

And after the both actions, Jesus speaks. Both speeches contain the same 4 words "Peace be with you" on one level – very simple – for the disciples were afraid for the lives

"Peace be with you" on another level – because the disciples had abandoned their Lord. Would he be angry at us? What would he say to the people who abandoned him when they needed him the most?

"Peace be with you" on a deeper level – because Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross. And we can know peace with God now.

Therefore Jesus brings peace to the disciples because the rebellion against God is over. Jesus brings peace because the just anger of God has been appeased. Jesus brings peace that would never have been imagined before. Jesus brings peace /with God.

I don't watch much television but one of the genres of TV that I watch from time to time is those house restoration shows. Do you watch them?

Some of them are cheesy and dramatic but some of them are really quite absorbing. I like the ones where they transform houses on tiny budgets. Maybe I enjoy them because I've lived in rented houses for nearly a decade and I never get to put a nail *in* the wall let alone knock a wall over. Whatever the reason, one of my favourite parts is the before and after shot. Right near the end of the episode, they remind you of how they started and then what it looks like now. Before and after.

Thomas, one of the disciples, goes through a similar transformation over the course of a week.

Let's have a look at it. From verse 24

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

The "before" picture of Thomas. v. 25. "Unless I see the marks, unless I place my finger in his side, unless I place my hand in his side. I will never believe."

Now that "never believe" is the emphatic: never, ever, EVER, not then, not now, no way, not ever statement. The technical term for this kind of statement is the emphatic future negative or emphatic prohibition.

And when we stop to think about it, we can understand a little of Thomas' difficulty here. Remember where they are: They are in a house in a city that none of them come from. They've left their families and their livelihoods and followed this man around for 3 and a bit years. They had hoped that perhaps this would be the man who might even overthrow those horrendous Romans.

But that's not how it happened at all. I mean, it's only been a few days since Jesus died. In fact, he didn't simply die but he was taken in the dead of night and nailed to a cross and left to hang, out in the open until he died.

Thomas, like the rest, saw it all. It was brutal. And Jesus is gone. And we don't know what to do. We're lost, we devastated. And then you come and tell me that he's come back to life!? How cruel! How thoughtless and twisted. What kind of sick joke are you trying to play? I SAW HIM DIE! I watched him.

Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will NEVER believe.

Thomas will never believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.  
Thomas will never ever believe Jesus' life after the grave.

However, the after picture of Thomas:  
- v. 28 "My Lord and My God"

Thomas's declaration is not just an intellectual assent, a mental recognition.

Thomas makes a confession from the depths of his soul, Thomas makes a radical change in perspective.

So what changes Thomas? What makes this change happen?

v. 27 Jesus appears and asks Thomas to do what Thomas wanted to do - Stick your finger in, check it out..

And yet, Thomas doesn't even do that – the mere encounter with the risen Jesus is enough!

“My Lord and my God.”

Application:

Now, many people want the physical evidence. Unless Jesus is right here right now, I will never believe. I have an old friend from school who is like this.

But there are two problems with this approach –

- i) you will always want more evidence.
- ii) You will fail to see the evidence in front of you.

But v. 29 – Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe!

That's for us, today. Who else is Jesus saying this about? Everyone in the room has seen the risen Lord Jesus. But our Lord knows that there will be disciples in the future who won't have seen him.

For us this Resurrection ought to change everything. This man came back from the dead. His disciples saw it, a sceptic saw it, there were witnesses.

Our Lord has defeated death! Not even death could keep him down; he is truly Lord of all. We follow a Lord who has power over even death.

(Pause)

In the history of the world there have been countless *powerful* people. Men who have ruled over thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of lives. Powerful people who have literally held the power of life and death in their hands. Folk who have literally changed the face of the earth. But they all died. All of them.

No one, no matter how rich, how powerful, how kind or good you are, no one can outlast death.

Pontius Pilate, a mere governor, not even Caesar, was so powerful that he could nail people to trees and no one would stop him.

He didn't even think Jesus was guilty of anything, he simply thought it was the quickest way to ensure the local population didn't riot. He had the power to sentence an innocent man to that most horrific of deaths and no one could say anything.

No one who saw that scene would have thought that *Jesus* was more powerful than *Pilate*. And yet, while Pilate died, the Lord Jesus came back to life. Pilate had the power to put to death. The Lord Jesus had the power to raise to life.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. Friends, this man came back to life, he is powerful enough to take up his own life. Not even death could master him.

People want signs all the time. Jesus gave them the sign they needed; he came back from the dead.

And John makes his final point along the same lines, but applies it to the rest of the book <v. 30-31>

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”

Signs have been performed. In fact, so many signs that they didn't record them all.

But the question is – do you only look for the sign, or do you look for what the sign is pointing towards? Do you see what the sign is pointing to?

I used to go 4WD-ing a lot as a child and we would always stop and the big... whatever. The Big Banana... the Big Pineapple... the Big Prawn. I remember the big prawn because (if I've got this right) you were able to climb to the top and look out of the eyeballs.

But imagine if our family had got 15kms out of town, piled out of the car in order to look at the sign: 15kms to the Big Prawn. “Wow, look at that! Righto, back in the car. Let's go home!” It's nonsense! The sign doesn't matter, it's what the sign points to!

So what do Jesus' signs mean? What do *they* point to?

v31 “...but these are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have *life* in his name.”

These are not interesting stories, works of fiction. Jesus is not just a good teacher, who led an impressively moral life and inspires others to live the same way.

He was a man who died and then came back to life, never to die again. Why?

So that we can have life and declare with Thomas –  
“My Lord and My God”