

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 24th April 2022
Services: Across the Diocese
Series: New beginnings
Title: Jesus ascends
Passage: Acts 1
Aim:
Outline: **Resurrection reality**
Holy Spirit power
Future hope
Constant prayer

The Lord has risen!! He has risen indeed! **Alleluia!**

That will be our cry over the coming weeks – right up to Pentecost.

Christ had **risen** – and it marked the **birth** of the **church**...

Scared, broken, grieving disciples, were turned into **courageous** and bold **eyewitnesses** to **Jesus** who was now **alive** and appearing to many.

Then when Jesus **ascended** – and the Spirit **descended** – so God's **people** become God's **church** – and the news of Jesus – now **risen** – changed **everything** for **thousands** of people. //

The book of the Acts of the Apostles, in which we'll spend the next few weeks, is **exciting** and **thrilling** as the early church gets **underway**.

We'll see the **ups and downs**, the **highs and lows** of the **new church**.

There were **new opportunities**, fresh **challenges** // ALONG WITH significant **push back** AND **outright persecution!** //

And we'll learn much about how **WE** ought to be the **church**; about **sharing** the **news** of **Jesus** – and the work of the **Holy Spirit** who transformed the new believers into a close-knit community of **God's people** and **empowered** them to **witness** to **Jesus**... //

Let me briefly put you in the picture regarding this book...

1. The two-part Luke-Acts volume makes up **¼ of the NT!** It can't – it shouldn't be easily ignored
2. We see the **gift of** and **empowering of** God's Holy Spirit and begin to understand his **work** in the **church** and in the **purposes of God**
3. It is the **only** book which fills in the gap between life of Jesus recorded in the **gospels** and what we discover in the **letters** of the churches in the **NT**
4. We see the **grace** of God **move** – as was always planned – from a focus on the **Jews as the chosen people of God**... radically NOW - to **include** and **welcome** **Gentiles!**

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5. We begin to see why **many** Jews were **opposed** to the **gospel**
6. We see the **founding** and **establishment** of **many** of the early churches to whom the **letters** of the **NT** were **written**
7. We see some **excellent summaries** of the earliest **Christian preaching**
8. we'll see in Ch 9, the **conversion** of **Paul** and understand the **beginning** of **his ministry** – arguably the most **influential** of the **early church leaders**.

So – plenty of great reasons to spend time in this book!

I hope you won't **miss** a **week** as the story **unfolds**... and as we see **God** at work **through normal** people to **establish** his **church** and see the message **proclaimed throughout** the **world**.

...because I think this account – even as we explore just the first nine chapters (in this series) - will help and inspire us as we attempt new things in our a diocese and long to see **revitalisation** - revival! - **here**.

So this morning – **chapter 1** - we'll see the church began with:

Resurrection **reality**

Holy Spirit **power**

Future **Hope**

Constant **prayer**

1. RESURRECTION REALITY

Right at the beginning of his second volume, Luke wants his readers to know that everything here is predicated on the **reality** of the **resurrection**.

Have a look with me at v3 – *After his suffering he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was live. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God*

In the next verse Luke tells us that he ate with them – showing he was no **ghost** or **illusion**!

Everything that unfolds in this book is because **Jesus** rose **again**. ///

You'll recall that when Jesus was **arrested**, then **crucified**, the disciples were **scared** for their **life**!

Their lives had been turned **upside down** after one **heady** week then **tragic weekend** in **Jerusalem**. ///

They were **crushed**... they felt **defeated** and **exhausted**.

All their **hopes** had been **shattered**.

All that they had dared to **dream** about had come to an **end**.

When **Jesus** died, **hope** itself died.

What did the future now hold for them?

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Would they return to being **fishermen** or **tax collectors**?

What about all that Jesus had **spoken** about...?

Was the last 3 years some sort of **dream**?

Had it been a waste of **time**...?

The Messiah was dead...!

What was the point? What had gone wrong? ///

Now wind the clock forward firstly **around 50 days**...

As we'll see in two **weeks' time**, Peter is now on his feet to thousands of people **gathered** in Jerusalem for the feast of **Pentecost**, and he is explaining with **great boldness** and **passion** that **Jesus** whom they crucified **has risen from the dead**, and that they should **repent** and **be baptised**.

This **scared, despairing** disciple who denied even **knowing** Jesus, has turned into a **powerful orator** making **amazing claims** about his master whom he **witnessed crucified!**

What has happened?

Wind the clock forward now **another** few **years**, and the number of believers has **grown**; they are considered a **sect** of the Jews, they are **persecuted**, but **growing**... and the news of Jesus – **crucified** yet now **alive** is spreading – outside **Jerusalem**, into **Judea and Samaria**... over to **North Africa**... and then eventually all the way to **Rome – the end of the known world!**

From people who had locked themselves **away** for fear of their **life**; to remarkable **leaders** of the **early church** whose message was now **widely known**... //

What has happened?

JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD AND APPEARED TO THEM!

He gave many convincing **proofs** that he was alive - Paul – 1 Cor 15 – he appeared to over **500** at the same time! ///

That is what happened...!! / It was real! /////

Friends with whatever we attempt to do in the Lord's name across our **diocese** – we must do it, absolutely **convinced** of the **resurrection** of **Jesus Christ!**

As the church itself began on the **reality** of the **resurrection**... so must we as God's church **here** – be **totally convinced** and then **excited** and motivated by the fact that **Jesus rose from the dead!** /

Why would we **bother otherwise**?

Why would we bother if this was a made-up **fairy tale**?

What would we **bother** if we didn't think that Jesus' resurrection could survive **historical scrutiny**?

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Why would we even be **interested** in our churches growing?

...why would we bother to reach our **missing generations** – if were not for the **reality** that **Christ** has **risen** from the **dead!** //

... the **only reason** – is because of **Easter!**

Because Jesus **died and rose for us** and for all of central and western NSW - indeed – **Australia** – and the **world!!** //

So our work in Jesus' name – **MUST** be built **entirely** on **resurrection reality!** ///

... not only resurrection reality...

...but

2. HOLY SPIRIT POWER

Have a look with me at v8 – *you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world*

Now – this was a direct word to the **first disciples**.

But the early church was powered by the gift of the Holy Spirit... who not only came upon those **first** disciples – but on **all** believers.

Notice what the power was for

Power to be **witnesses**

Now we are not **witnesses** in the same sense... it's clear that Jesus meant **literal** witnesses to seeing him **alive again**.

Later in ch 1 — but when they come to choose a replacement apostle for Judas who betrayed Jesus, the key factor was whoever was chosen had to be a witness to the resurrection. (In fact he had to have seen Jesus from the beginning of his ministry up to and including the resurrection so he could testify that it was indeed the same person!)

We **are** not and **cannot** be witnesses to the resurrection *in that sense!* /

However – **empowered** by the Holy Spirit – we can **certainly** testify to our **experience** of the **resurrected Jesus** in our **lives!**

We can testify to the **change** he has **brought** in our lives!

To the **transformation** we have undergone

To the **hope** we now have

To the **joy** which is ours

More on the Holy Spirit **next** week as we begin chapter 2! /

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But brothers and sisters – as we attempt to do great things for in the name of Jesus in the **Central west** – don't think we can do **any** of this in our own **strength!**

Don't think we **can** – and don't think we **have to!!** //

We must acknowledge that we can **only** do anything - **dependent** on the **Holy Spirit's power...**

He will **change** us, **challenge** us, fire **us up...!**

He will **enable** us to **hone** and **sharpen** the **gifts** he **himself** has **given** us //

He will use us to do what he **always** does – **point** people to **Jesus** and **glorify him!!**

So - resurrection reality... Holy Spirit power // and third -

3. FUTURE HOPE

Look with me at vv9-11 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Two things about Jesus' **return** spur us on our work for Jesus...

First – is that we are people of **hope** – we know from elsewhere in the New Testament that Jesus' **return**, will mean a **new heavens** and **new earth**

It will mean **perfected relationship** with our Father

It will mean the **end** of all **evil**

It will bring the **death** of **death**

It will bring ultimate **justice** in all the **world!!**

That is **fantastic** to know and great to celebrate on the backdrop of such a **very sad world...!**

We have an incomparable **perspective** on the **world** in which we **live**.

Second – because we know Jesus will return – we are people of **urgency**

We know there is an **amnesty** on at present – an open invitation for any to come **back** into relationship with God by turning to Jesus and finding **forgiveness** and **new life**

When Jesus **returns** – he will come as **Judge** – and the **amnesty** will be **over**

So **until** Jesus returns, we're on a **mission** – to see as many people as **possible** come into **relationship** with **God!** //

Jesus is **coming back** – there is ultimate **hope** for the world

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Jesus is **coming back** – and **everyone** will **bow the knee to him**

SO – we must get on and tell **others**... so **they** are ready to meet him....

This **future hope** must drive us to do **anything** to reach those we are currently not in relationship with **Jesus**...!

Take a look around church right now... or if you're at home – take a moment to consider your church...

What's the **average age**?

One day – the missing generations will stand face to face with Jesus... and if **they** don't know **him** – **he** won't know **them**! – nor **welcome** them to **eternity**.

We have **hope** for the world – and news of love – and **forgiveness**... and the **judge** will **return** – so we must have a **growing sense** of **urgency** to **share Jesus** – and see many **more** people – young **AND** old – **return** to our **heavenly Father**... ///

Resurrection **reality**

Holy Spirit **power**

Future **hope**, and finally

4. CONSTANT PRAYER

Have a look with me at v12 *Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.*

And to v **14** /

*¹⁴ **They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.***

What did they think to do as the **very first thing** once Jesus had ascended?

They all joined together constantly in prayer //

I'm sure of – and **thankful** for - your **prayer** for the work of the **gospel** across the **diocese**...

We mustn't **stop**

We must be **dependent** and **thankful**!

Two words stand out for me

Together and **constant**

I'm sure many of us have been praying for revival in our diocese as **individuals**...

But I also want to commend to you the opportunities to join **together** in prayer... **informally** – and at **agreed** and **set times**. ///

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We have so **much** for which to be **thankful!**

For the life changing, life-giving gospel of our crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus and the **message** we live to **proclaim**

And we have so much to **pray** about

That God would go before us by His Spirit – ensuring that we keep the **unity** of the **Spirit** by the **bond** of **peace**

That God would **prepare** the hearts of people across the diocese to **hear** the good news

That the Lord will raise up more **gospel workers** – and supply the **funds** to **support** them...

That through our ministry, **people** will become **Christians**... and find **life** through **Jesus Christ**...

We must be **together** and **constant** in prayer like those first disciples on the cusp of *their new beginnings*!!

Let me close /

ALL our work across the diocese, must be built on:

1. Resurrection **reality**
2. Holy Spirit **power**
3. Future **hope**... and
4. Constant **prayer**; SO....

Cling to the reality of the **risen Jesus**

Draw on the **Holy Spirit's power**

Live like Jesus will return **tomorrow**

And never give up **praying** for OUR new **beginnings**!