**Sermon Easter Sunday – Luke 24:1-12 – 2013**

**Videolink:** [**https://youtu.be/YWMD5JaiX0s**](https://youtu.be/YWMD5JaiX0s)

Do you like surprises? I guess if it is a good surprise then it is OK isn’t it. Like the surprise visit of a close friend or family member who lives interstate or overseas. The surprise when the doctor tells you the illness that was killing you has gone into remission. The surprise when you have tried everything even IVF, given up on having children and then find you are pregnant. Surprises like that are great. They make our day and we remember them for a long time.

In the life of Jesus there were many good surprises.

What a surprise it is that God would decide to become one of us and be born as a little baby. What a surprise that the king of the universe chose an ordinary young woman to carry him inside her and give birth to him. What about the surprising way he was born. Not in the comfort and safety of Mary and Joseph’s home but in a stable in a distant town.

Then when Jesus finally began his ministry, he was a surprising kind of Rabbi. Instead of waiting for people to ‘make a decision’, to follow him like all the other Rabbi’s of his time, he called people to follow him. Surprising people like fishermen, zealots, and tax collectors. People who were obviously sinners and didn’t deserve his attention.

There were other surprising things about Jesus. He didn’t exclude anyone. He ate with pharisees, and he ate with tax collectors. He healed the sick, exorcised demons, and even raised people from the dead. He forgave sins, something that only God could do, and changed people’s lives.

Jesus turned the whole idea of leadership and the use of power on its head. Instead of using his leadership and power to lord it over people and demand their service, Jesus surprises us by using his power and his position to serve us. He served his disciples by washing their feet and he served the whole of humanity by giving up his life.

Now that was a surprise wasn’t it. No one would have thought that after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday a mere five days later Jesus would be hanging on a cross. Good Friday certainly is a surprise for anyone who knows who Jesus really is. How can it be possible that God would hang on a cross? How can it be possible for God to die?

God dying a cruel and painful death on a cross, now that is surprising.

The biggest surprise of all. The surprise that no one expected. The surprise that is the hardest of all of Jesus’ surprises to wrap our minds around, is the surprise that occurred on Easter morning. The women who went to the tomb and they were surprised to find the tomb empty. Then they were surprised and frightened by two men who suddenly appeared. Then we discover that these messengers, these angels from God are surprised as they say, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6He is not here; he has risen! (24:5b-6).* The angels are surprised because Jesus had told his disciples,‘*The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’* (24:7).

How could the women have forgotten what Jesus had told them? Has anyone ever told you something so incredible, so far out of your experience that it didn’t make any sense to you? Maybe when Jesus told them about his resurrection it was so far removed from their experience that it made no sense and they put it out of their minds.

Having seen the empty tomb and heard the messengers from God, the women go back to the apostles and all the others grieving Jesus’ death. When they heard what the women saw, they thought it was all nonsense. Even after running to the tomb and finding it empty, Peter was so surprised that he wondered what had really happened.

What happened on Easter morning was so surprising that is took some of the disciples over a week to believe it was true. Thomas had to see Jesus and touch his wounds to believe it. And who can blame him? We don’t expect dead people to come back to life. We don’t expect to go to our loved one’s grave and find that person alive and well standing next to the open grave. If it ever happened to you, wouldn’t you be surprised?

A few years later Peter is preaching to the family of the centurion Cornelius. To make his point about the resurrection, Peter says he didn’t merely see the resurrected Jesus, but Jesus ate and drank with him and the other disciples. Surprise, surprise, the resurrection wasn’t merely spiritual it was physical.

The apostle Paul realises how hard it is to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He reminds the Corinthians that the resurrection is not an idle tale. He names the people who saw the resurrected Jesus. There was Cephas, whom we know as Peter, there were the apostles, there were over 500 disciples who saw the resurrected Jesus at the same time, most of them still living. Paul writes as if to say, “If you don’t believe me, ask Peter, ask the apostles, ask the hundreds still alive who saw him. By the way Paul himself saw the risen Jesus and it changed his life forever. This isn’t some made up story. This isn’t wishful thinking. Yes, it is a surprise, it does seem impossible, but it is true.

That is what Jesus is like, that is what God is like. He loves to surprise us. He loves to surprise us by always being with us even when we don’t realise it. He loves to surprise us by choosing us to be his dearly beloved children before we have ever had a chance to do the least thing to deserve his love. When we repent and turn back he surprises us by always waiting for us with his arms wide open. He comes into our broken and messed up lives before we even recognise that they are broken and messed up and he offers us life to the full. The biggest surprise of all, he has an eternal life waiting for us. We too will one day rise! Surprise, surprise, death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?'

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

*Pastor Rolf Lungwitz*