

**St. Brandon's 10.15am
4 April 2021**

Easter Day

SERMON

It is said that, in the great port of Lisbon in Portugal in the early fifteenth century there was a sign at the harbour mouth, which read **BEYOND HERE THERE IS NOTHING.**

As the good people of Lisbon looked out across the great ocean, known to us as the Atlantic, they could see miles and miles of sea stretching away to the horizon.

In those days the common belief was that the earth was flat and that beyond the horizon there was an abyss- nothing.

Then a young Italian sailor named **Christopher Columbus** set sail in 1492 and travelled west. He was going to the edge of the known world...

He eventually made landfall on the Bahamas, and this led to his reaching what we now know as America.

Columbus wrote of his findings in his journal, but there was no means of sending word ahead, and it was not until he came back himself that anyone believed that there really was land beyond the western horizon.

And so, eventually, legend has it, the sign at Lisbon harbour was changed to read: BEYOND HERE THERE IS MORE!

When Jesus returned from death it was to demonstrate, without a shadow of doubt, that beyond death there is more!

Death is not the end because, since Jesus went through it and returned alive, we have proof that God's power is stronger than death itself.

He has not only given his life to atone for our sins,
he has conquered death for us, In other words:
BEYOND HERE THERE IS MORE!

For many people today, belief in the physical
bodily resurrection of Jesus is a real sticking point
to faith. We naturally prefer to cling to what we
know, not to put our trust in anything we can't
prove. We have tremendous sympathy with the
disciple Thomas who demanded to see and touch
Jesus for himself before he could believe that
Jesus was really alive again.

We have sympathy too with the three women in
Mark's account of Easter morning which we just
heard, were so amazed and terrified that they ran
away and said nothing, despite the angel's
instruction to tell Jesus' friends that he was alive...

All the other gospels tell of Jesus, risen and alive, appearing to Mary, or to Peter and John, but not so Mark. Many Bible scholars, including Tom Wright, the former bishop of Durham, believe that the final pages of Mark's gospel were lost- which is why the passage we heard just now stopped so abruptly, the ending still hanging in the balance.... Yet this year, it seems strangely appropriate to end with fear and amazement, with a question mark ... because life and death questions have become part of everyday life as never before for most of us.

And this question, *Did Jesus rise from death?* is probably the most vital one we will ever need to answer. Belief in the resurrection is not an optional extra to our faith, it is the heart of it. We don't follow a religion made up of rules and

regulations or good works, in order to earn our way into heaven.: as Christians we follow a person and live in relationship with him, and through trust in him, with God, because this person Jesus Christ is still alive today.

The early Christians in Corinth, living in the competitive, sceptical and philosophical culture of ancient Greece, found belief in the resurrection pretty impossible, as most people do today.

St Paul wrote this to them:

(1 Corinthians 15: 12-19 in new living translation)

12 But tell me this – since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? 13 For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. 14 And if Christ was not raised, then all our

preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless. ... 19 And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world.

20 But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again.

This fact, that Christ was raised from the dead, motivated his disciples to go out and tell the world about him. The women overcame their fear, the others came back with them to view the evidence, the empty tomb, the folded graveclothes.

And then they saw Jesus, alive, they talked with him, ate with him, spent time with him until finally, after Jesus left the earth and sent his Spirit to them, they were empowered by him to take the good news across the Roman Empire, with such

conviction that some died rather than deny their faith in Christ and his resurrection.

But they died, as all Christians are able to, knowing and believing that death is not the end:

BEYOND HERE THERE IS MORE

Like the people of Europe when Columbus returned, the world changed for Jesus' followers at the first Easter, It wasn't just emotions, though indeed despair gave way to hope, sadness to joy, darkness to light. It was about their entire worldview.

Nor was it simply about their personal future and those of their loved ones- although the certainty transformed their lives, that their relationship with God was utterly secure and unbreakable, for this life and eternity,

But the resurrection meant, and means, that the power of death and decay in this world will not have the last word. Creation itself is dying- not least due to human greed and selfishness, but one day, when God's kingdom comes and Jesus returns to earth as judge and king, the earth will be restored, renewed and redeemed. There will be new, resurrected life, for the whole creation,

BEYOND HERE THERE IS MORE

– more than we can begin to grasp, imagine or comprehend.

For when we know that Jesus is alive, everything is different. Alleluia!