A Day to Change Every Day
Luke 24:13-36

I don't know if you saw the little storm in the Easter egg cup the week before last, but in the UK, a charity called the National Trust, which runs many of the great stately homes, dropped the use of the word *Easter* from the Easter egg hunts it organises at its properties. And a great uproar ensued, all the way to the top, with Theresa May, the Prime Minister, branding the decision 'absolutely ridiculous'!

Well, whatever you think of all that, this morning I want you to see why airbrushing Easter out of your life would be a real mistake. And the reason I say that is that when you consider the central claim of Easter, indeed of the Christian faith, that a man in 1st century Palestine physically rose from the dead, and that this has world changing implications, it would be easy to think that it's simply too fanciful to believe any more, that primitive people might have believed this, but we need to move on. Or, you may not think that so directly, but you have this nagging doubt as to whether the atheists might be right and you might be stupid to believe this.

Well, this morning, I want you to see from the experience of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus, why the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, rather than being something intellectually embarrassing, should be and can be the thing that brings meaning and richness and depth to your life, and can even define your life.

An Unexpected Day
Now, what were you doing yesterday? Maybe you went for a walk, or maybe you did some sport? The one thing you didn't do is come here to church, because yesterday was Saturday and today is Sunday and church happens on Sunday.

But why? I mean think about it. If Christianity arose from Judaism, and the Jewish people have gathered to worship on Saturdays, the Sabbath, for thousands of years; and if for a first century Jew to break the Sabbath was unthinkable, and you just didn't do it, then why didn't the early Christians, who were almost exclusively Jewish, do the same? Why didn't they carry on worshipping on Saturday? Because from the very beginning they changed their day of worship to Sunday, the first day of the week. So, what happened 2000 years ago to explain that social shift? Shifts like that don't come out of nowhere. Something must have happened!

Well, Luke 24:1 tells us: 'But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [on Sunday morning], they went to the tomb.' And something happened at that tomb that forever changed the lives of those who experienced it and it left them so convinced that they began worshipping as God the man whose body that tomb had contained. And just think about that as well. Because for a Jew to change the day of their worship was one thing, but to start worshipping a man, that was something else. They were, are, strict monotheists. Their whole identity is tied up in worshipping the one true God, and nothing else. That's what it meant to be them. As one writer (Keller) puts it, 'first century Jews were… radically non-disposed to believe that any human being could be divine'. If you followed an eastern religion, or if you worshipped the Greek gods, then sure you could

believe a man could somehow share in the divine – but never if you were a Jew. It was burned into your mind never to worship any created thing. Their theology and their culture, was completely resistant to the idea of God becoming human.

So what happened to overcome that resistance? What happened that Sunday morning, 2000 years ago, to do with this man Jesus, and this tomb, that could explain why they changed the day of their worship, and identified the object of their worship, God, as a man they had spent the last three years eating and drinking and talking and walking with?

Well, to answer that question, ask yourself, why did these ladies come to the tomb on Sunday morning anyway? What were they doing there? Verse 1: 'They went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.' Were they going there to have a spice party, and sprinkle the spice around the tomb they knew would be empty, in celebration of Jesus' resurrection? No, they're going to anoint Jesus' dead body. They're going to honour and embalm the corpse of the man they loved.

What does that tell you? It tells you they were expecting to find a dead body, not an empty tomb. And yet, verse 2, 'they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.' And interestingly their response was not, 'yippee, he's risen from the dead, just like we all expected!' No, v4, 'they were perplexed.'

Now, are you surprised by that? Probably not, because you know what they knew, that the dead don't go taking early morning walks. And they had seen Jesus die. They had seen him flogged and crucified. They had seen him struggle to breathe, and then breathe his last. They had seen a Roman soldier shove a spear in his side. They had seen blood and fluid flow out. They knew he was dead. And they had seen his dead body carried to this tomb. And yet, here they stand, on Sunday morning, and the tomb is empty.

And who was standing there? Who were these first witnesses on the scene? Luke tells us, v10, 'It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them.' Women, all of them. The problem is that in that culture at that time the evidence of women was not admissible in court, because they were not considered trustworthy witnesses. So if the gospel writers were making this up, they would have airbrushed the women out of the story and added in some men. It's for the same reason that when they go back and tell the apostles about the empty tomb, the men's response is, v11, 'These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.' Empty tomb?! Women's talk, you've been sniffing too many spices.

You know, one of the most convincing arguments for the authenticity of the gospel accounts of the resurrection is that the first disciples do not come out of them smelling of roses. They make no attempt to cover over the faults and the failings of the disciples – they just tell it as it is, without a spin-doctor in sight.

You see, it wasn't just the women for whom the empty tomb was unexpected. The apostles, the future leaders of the church too, greeted this news with at best disbelief, and at worse outright incredulity. None of them were expecting this.

And that is why Luke tells us in v17, that these two disciples on the road to Emmaus were 'looking sad.' You see, if you think you're on the verge of the greatest turn around in the history of the world, if you're expecting a triumphant resurrection and reappearance at any moment, you don't stand there looking sad, do you?

Instead, they tell this man who walks alongside them, v21, 'we had hoped that he [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel.' We *had* hoped. But no longer. We had hoped he would bring national renewal and deliverance and liberation. But those hopes have died with him. And history gives us countless examples of supposedly messianic figures whose followers and ideas drift away into nothing once their leader is no more. So why have those of Jesus multiplied? What happened to explain that?

You see, it's clear, isn't it, that neither the women, nor the apostles, nor these two on the road, none of them were expecting Jesus to rise. Because they know what you and I know, that death is death. It's final. And neither the surrounding Greek, nor their own Jewish culture, gave them any hope of resurrection. For the Greeks and Romans, Hades, the place of the dead, was a place of shadowy half-existence, or, if you were really lucky and were a god, you got to be translated into a star. But no-one thought about a bodily resurrection. In fact they would never have wanted that – their philosophers wanted to get rid of their bodies, not re-inhabit them.

And for the Jews, resurrection was what happened for all the righteous Jews, on the last day, at the end of time, it was never something for one-off individuals now.

So what did happen, what did they witness that first Easter Sunday that set off this cultural, social, religious, moral earthquake called Christianity? Well, as Luke tells us, the women found an empty tomb. And Peter ran to the tomb and, v12, 'stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marvelling.' And then these two on the road encounter this man who opens the Bible to them, and as he broke bread with them, maybe as they saw his nail pierced hands, v31, 'Their eyes were opened and they recognised him.' And returning to the disciples in Jerusalem they were told, v34, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

And the New Testament tells us, that despite all their scepticism, multiple different people, in multiple different settings saw Jesus alive again in ways that left them totally convinced that the unthinkable had happened. And these broken and dispirited men and women were transformed, and they never deviated from their story. They were unshakeable in their message, even to the point of death – we have seen the empty tomb and we have seen Jesus alive.

But the fact that they weren't expecting it doesn't mean they weren't longing for it. It's just they didn't know that this was what they were longing for. And maybe you don't either.

A Longed for Day

Look what Jesus spoke about with these two on the road to Emmaus: v27, 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.' So, beginning with Genesis, and working through the Old Testament, Jesus showed them how, v26, it was necessary 'that the Christ [the Messiah] should suffer these things and enter into his glory.'

So, as he walks with them Jesus takes these two disciples, and their hopes of what the Messiah would do, and he turns their understanding on its head. And he shows them how everything they were longing for, all the promises in the Old Testament that they longed for God to fulfil, far from them being blown away by his crucifixion, were at that moment being fulfilled.

So God's promise in the garden, after the catastrophe of the Fall, that an offspring of woman would come who would bruise the serpent's head, but in the process he would himself be harmed. God's promise to Abraham, that from his offspring would come one who would bring blessing to the whole world. God's promise to David, that he would have a son, whose reign of justice and righteousness would never end. Job's remarkable statement that he knows his Redeemer lives and even though his body might be destroyed by death, yet in his body he would see him. God's promises through Isaiah that to us a child will be born, to us a Son will be given, who will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, whose kingdom will never end; that the virgin will conceive and bear a son – Immanuel, God with us; that a Servant of God would come who would be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who would be pierced for our transgressions and be crushed for our iniquities, that the Lord would lay on him the iniquity of us all – yet the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. Daniel's vision of the Son of Man, one like us, the one perfect representative of humanity, the one man who hasn't blown it, coming on the clouds of heaven, to receive a never-ending kingdom and to execute justice. God's promise through Zechariah that Israel would look upon God, the one they have pierced.

And as he did it, these guys experienced something, didn't they? Verse 32, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Why did their hearts burn? Why did Jesus showing them all that do that to them on the inside? Was it just because they were theology geeks? And they liked nothing more than to parse a few Hebrew verbs, or look up some obscure prophetic texts? No – it was as the truth of all the God had done through Messiah's death, and through his resurrection, dawned on them, as what the cross and the empty tomb meant for them, and for the world, that the touch paper in their hearts was light, and the fire began to burn. It was as they realised that far from the cross and the empty tomb being a defeat, it was the fulfilment of all their deepest longings, and more.

A Day to Change Every Day
As these two arrived back in Jerusalem, and walked up the steps to the upper room where the disciples were gathered, what do you think the atmosphere was like as they opened the door? What sounds hit them, what was the look on the faces that they saw as they walked in? As someone in the group told them, v34, "The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon." And how many other hearts were burning in that room after they had told the group all that Jesus had told them?

And then, v36, 'As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"

And when Jesus, risen from the dead, enters the upper room of your life, that is what he gives you. It's what this day-to-change-every-day can bring you. Peace. Because it answers your deepest longings.

You see, there are days when you look at your life, and you see what you're really like, and you feel guilt and you feel shame. And sometimes you'll try to ignore it, and squash those thoughts down. But you can't. And your heart's troubled. You want a heart that's light, and carefree in a right way, but you're unable to manufacture it. Well, the apostle Paul writes that Jesus 'was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Romans 4:25). And to be justified means to be declared not guilty. The very thing you want to be. It means for God to look at you and say, 'I know what you're really like, I see behind the mask, but I accept you, and I love you, because my Son gave his life for you.' And so the resurrection of Jesus from the dead tells you that God the Father welcomes you, that he has accepted Christ's sacrifice for you, and when that sinks in, it calms the storm in your heart. And in place of shame and guilt, there's peace.

But this day to change all days doesn't just make it possible for our sins to be forgiven, it also makes it possible for us to forgive those who sin against us, because it answers your longing for revenge. You see, when someone sins against you, it can leave you feeling hurt and angry, and over time that hot anger can cool into a hardened bitterness. And you want this person to pay. Something inside you wants to get your own back. And as a result something inside you dies. Love, hope, forgiveness, all struggle to grow in the darkness. But the cross of Jesus tells you that this sin committed against you does matter. It matters so much that the Son of God had to die for it. So you can forgive knowing that either Christ has paid the highest price for this sin, or the person will if they have not repented and trusted in Jesus dying for their sin. But the empty tomb also tells you that the strangle hold of death that this sin against you can have on your life has been broken. And in place of the death it brings, Jesus brings life, and now this sin has no power to drag you down into the grave of bitterness. And when you know that Jesus' resurrection power for good in your life is greater than the power of sin to harm you, you'll find the inner strength to forgive. And with that, comes peace.

And so Jesus crushes the serpent's head. You see, the serpent, that picture of the devil, does two things. Just as in the garden, he brings separation from God and relational breakdown with others, through our sin, through us believing his lies. But in giving his life for us, and in rising again, Jesus crushes his head – he pays the price for our sins, so we might be forgiven and be restored to God, but he also breaks the power of sin and revenge, so that we might forgive each other. And so he gives us the longings of our hearts – to be at one with God and at peace with each other.

But the resurrection of Jesus also tells you that God is the God of the greatest ever reversal. He is the God who takes what the enemy means for evil and turns it for good. And if he does that for the crucifixion of the Son of God, the Bible promises that he does the same for you. It's why Peter writes: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Peter 1:3). And he is the God who brings life from the dead, life from the wreckage of our lives. The one who can turn our lives around and, in place of despair, gives us an eternal hope. A hope that answers our longing for significance. A hope that when we have it, brings peace.

But there are also times when you wish the world was not as it is. You wish that this life was not marked by relationships broken by death. You wish that you did not have to say goodbye to those whom you love. You long for the days of goodbyes to end. Well, the resurrection of Jesus tells you that one day, that longing will be fulfilled. And this day to change every day is just the foretaste of that great day when the dead in Christ will be raised. The day when every tear shall be wiped away, when relationships will be reunited, and the love we have known in this life will be but a pale shadow of that to come.

And finally, maybe you look out on a world marred by injustice and oppression, and you long for justice to be done, and for every wrong to be righted. Well, Christ's death and resurrection tell you that justice will be served. Paul writes of Jesus, 'He disarmed the rulers and authorities [the dark powers of this world] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in the cross' (Col 2:15). And when Jesus rose on the first day of the week, it was the start of a new week, the start of the new creation, as his rule as the Son of David and the Son of Man begins. A rule that will ensure that justice will roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. And when you know that, it doesn't just give you a sense of peace for the future, it also gives you courage to stand for truth and justice in the now.

So, this day really is the day to change every day. It tells you that your sins are forgiven and God accepts you; that the sins committed against you have no power to further imprison you; that God is the God of resurrection reversals and can turn even our failures around; and that in Christ the new world we long for has begun. So no wonder their hearts burned within them.