

“It Ain’t Over ‘til it’s Over!”
John 21:1 – 17

Some years ago a pastor was given an Easter book – an children’s booklet – produced by a Christian organisation to tell the Easter story to read. It was given to him by a children’s pastor because the children’s pastor wanted feedback before it was handed out.

And it was colourful and laid out well and creative. It was contemporary. It was a great little book. Kid’s would love it.

So the pastor went through it and it laid out the Easter story.

He got to the last page, and on the very last page there was Jesus on the cross. So this pastor thought, hang on, this can’t be the last page – but it was!

So he thought to himself, for one, it was really negative place to end, and two, there was nothing about “Jesus is risen!”

Half the story was missing.

And so whenever we tell the Gospel story and share about Jesus’ death on the cross, at some point, we have of speak of Jesus’ resurrection.

We don’t minimise or rush past the cross – the cross and resurrection go together.

Even so, some people do ask, why even have the Cross at all?

Well you see, the human race, if we’re really honest and truthful about ourselves, has a problem and that problem is called ‘sin’.

And sin isn’t simply flouting a set rules or breaking a list of laws.

Sin at its heart is about disloyalty, that we have been so disloyal to the Creator God at the centre of the universe.

And you see this Creator God is a God of justice and there is right and wrong, good and bad and true and false, and if people have been disloyal to their Creator God, then this God of justice demands that there be a penalty.

But then in his love and mercy He took that penalty on Himself instead of laying it on you and me, and he did it on the Cross.

Amazing...

And it wasn't about Jesus persuading an angry God to be merciful; it was God's mercy displayed in Jesus.

It wasn't so that Jesus could convince God to love us; it's was love willing to die on our behalf.

So that means people like you and me can be pardoned and forgiven for being so disloyal to our Creator God.

He did it on the Cross.

He died an actual physical death - no one survived a Roman crucifixion.

But that was then something most preposterous and earth-shattering happened – Jesus rose from the dead.

The greatest moment in all of history.

The resurrection says, that in Christ, it isn't over 'til God it's over.

In other words, because Jesus has risen from the dead, there is always *hope*.

I working definition of hope is this: hope is the possibility of a different future.

No matter how desperate and dark the situation, because of who Jesus is, you and I can always have hope.

It's not hope grounded in good intentions or positive thinking but it's hope grounded in the reality that God entered this world, endured its worst and rose victorious over it.

It's a hope for this life and a hope that transcends this life and into the life to come.

And in this life this hope.

When I was around four or five my heart on one thing: I wanted to be a jet fighter pilot.

I knew we had air force and would build model jet fighter planes.

As time progressed in quickly became apparent that I didn't have the aptitude to be a jet fighter pilot. My grades were *nowhere* good enough. There was no chance that my childhood dream would be reached.

(Now we don't have jet fighters either...)
The dream was over.

So what happens when the dreams we have die?

Our reading this morning is at least a week after Jesus' resurrection and appearance to the disciples in the locked room (so it's an appropriate reading for this morning).¹

We're also told it's the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples.

Jesus greets them from the shore and they share a meal.

And as they do so they become aware there is a big elephant in the room (or on the beach in this case).

There are unspoken words.

I mean, leading up to the crucifixion, Peter made some bold claims around never forsaking Jesus and never denying him.

"Even if all the other disciples take to the hills, I'll be there to the end", were in effect Peter's words.

But when push came to shove, things went pear shaped, as Jesus predicted Peter denied Jesus not once but three times.

So what's happening here?

Peter is being reconciled.

Peter is being reinstated as one of the apostles.

Jesus is restoring Peter relationship and restoring him to a position that he had though he had lost for good.

What's interesting here is that Peter is a believer.

Scripture tells us this is the second time Peter has met with the Risen Jesus.

But he thought the bigger picture, the bigger dream was over.

I think Peter thought he had gone too far and his denial of Jesus was a hope killer; a dream killer.

He should have been there for Jesus but he wasn't.

He made big claims but when it came to the crunch his legs turned to jelly.

¹ See John 20:26

Peter no doubt had great dreams of declaring that in Jesus God's kingdom had come,
that the age of peace had arrived,
that God had reconciled those who trust in him to Himself,
that sin and Satan and ultimately death had been defeated.

But it wasn't to be...

What Peter didn't anticipate was what Jesus can do with fallen, broken down people.

For people who think they've gone too far, whose lives are sad or bad.
People for whom life hasn't gone as they had hoped.

Three times Jesus asks about Peter's love for him.

Three times he responds in the affirmative.

Three time for each denial.

Jesus comes to Peter and is in effect saying, it ain't over.

For every denial there is a new expression of love.

And for every new expression of love there is a new calling.

And with this new calling comes new hopes and new dreams for Peter.

It's not surprising then that on the day of Pentecost when the first Christian sermon is preached, it's preached by... Peter.

And it's not surprising that the first person sent to the off-limit non-Jews was... Peter.

In Jesus, it isn't over 'til it's over.

The Jesus of this story, the Jesus of the Bible is the same Jesus we worship and meet with this morning.

Sometimes Jesus comes and restores our lost dreams, like in the case of Peter.

But sometimes He gives us new dreams, different hopes and aspirations that we wouldn't expect, but will satisfy more than we can possibly hope.

Soon after my dream died I meet with this Risen Jesus.

Before long new hope began to seeded into me, hopes and dreams I wouldn't have contemplated.

A shy, easily embarrassed, wouldn't say boo to a fly teenager felt a strong call to preaching and teaching and pastoring.
I had a new dream of standing before groups of people and speaking about this Jesus who had died and had risen, beating death, Satan and sin.

In Jesus, it ain't over 'til it's over!

There is also a hope that is for now, that is for today.

I mean, Jesus meet with the first believers *on this planet*.
And did so in a body that was physical and yet... different.

And so this Jesus who has risen continues to be at work in the world by his Spirit today

There is hope because our risen Lord is still at work in our world.

He is still seeking and saving the lost, he's still drawing people to himself.

He hasn't stopped neither this broken rebellious world, nor sin, nor Satan nor death can't stop him.

In 1966 Time magazine asked, "Is God Dead?" At the time a number of theological professors were denying the existence of God and teaching the salvation of the world depended on human beings.

The narrative was the world would increasingly secular and the Christian faith would need to leave behind it's supernatural frills including the resurrection or die.

However, did you know that in 1970 there was an estimated 11.4 million Christians in East Asia (that is China, Korea and Japan), making up 1.2 percent of the population.

10 years ago there were 171 million Christians, which is 10.5 percent of the population.

Today it's an estimated 383 million people are Christians.

In 1910 only 12 million or 9 percent of the population in Africa were Christians; today they number 630 million, which 49 percent of the populace.

Last Sunday *in each* of the *individual* nations of Nigerian, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa there were more Anglicans in church than there are Anglicans in all of Britain and the United States combined.

There are now 644 million Pentecostals worldwide which represents 1 in 4 Christians. By 2050 there will be more Pentecostals than Hindus.

The fastest growing church today is in Iran.

Sometimes though we face circumstances and situations we'd never have contemplated.

Situations that seem too tough, where hopes and dreams are dead with no hope of new life.

Some years ago a couple told their story about their struggles with their daughter.

Their daughter had been very difficult, especially as a teenager.

And not normal teenage angst but rebelling against everything they believed and tried to teach her.

She became part of an alternative culture – Mohawk, black clothes, depressing angry music – that kind of stuff.

Worse than that – what cut her parents to the heart – was her behaviour towards them was just toxic and awful.

She treated their Christian faith and lifestyle with absolute contempt and became belligerent and hostile as a person.

So she left home.

Her parents prayed and prayed for her salvation, until one day they received some devastating news: as their daughter attempted to cross a highway she was hit and killed by a tractor.

As you can imagine, as parents were absolutely devastated.

The father and mother buried their daughter, convinced their prayers had been in vain.

Then, two days later after the funeral a letter arrived, written by their daughter. Somehow their daughter had ended up studying at a Christian college and part of being at the college meant having to attend chapel every week. On one particular day the speaker articulated a very specific evangelistic message and when an invitation was given, she received Jesus as her King and Forgiver.

After chapel she went straight back to her dormitory and wrote a loving letter to her parents, begging for forgiveness for all the hurt she had inflicted on them, and promising that, because Jesus was now in her life, things were going to be different.

The following weekend she promised to come home, just so they could be together and have a face-to-face reconciliation. It was a well written and beautiful letter, and she mailed it the same day. The next day she was killed.

Although their hearts were seared with grief they had comfort and hope; the hope that one day, because of Jesus, they would see her again, face-to-face.

In Jesus it ain't over until it's over.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to prominence in Germany during Hitler's terrible rise to power.

As he watched the systematic and growing degradation of the Jewish people Bonhoeffer knew that something must be done about it.

As a pastor and theologian he began to publish and speak openly about the evil Nazism was perpetuating. He criticised the vast bulk of the church who sat idly by as this was happening. In response to his actions Bonhoeffer was forbidden by the Nazis from teaching.

Bonhoeffer also was no armchair theologian. He aided the escape of Jewish people and finally became involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler.

Bonhoeffer had a dream – to see Hitler fall from power, to be part of Germany's reconstruction after the war and see Jesus glorified in all of this. But it wasn't to be.

Arrested on charges of aiding and abetting undesirables Bonhoeffer was imprisoned.

There his involvement in the conspiracy to kill Hitler was discovered, and his immediate execution was ordered.

This was to be particularly brutal. He would be stripped naked and killed by strangulation as he hung in a gallows.

As he went out he spoke some last words to a fellow prisoner.

Does anyone happen to know what Bonhoeffer's last words were?

"This is the end, but for me the beginning of life."

You see the hope of the resurrection is not only will we see Jesus – which will be glorious, I mean the reason heaven is heaven is because Jesus will be there – there will also be a reunion.
We will loved ones and friends again.

So to finish for those with a bruised and fragile faith there is hope.
Life can be tough on our faith at times.
Sometimes it feels like it's just one hit after another.
And the disciples experienced this.
I mean, when Jesus died their trust in God took a real hit.
They went into hiding and they bewildered and broken.
But Jesus was gentle and gracious with them – and if you're in that place today he will be gracious and gentle with you too.

There is hope for unsaved spouses.

There is hope for prodigal children who are yet to come home.

Because of Jesus we always have hope for this life and the life to come.

And this Jesus that we read and hear and talk about is a Jesus who keeps coming to us even when we think it's over.

Perhaps this morning a hope or a dream you've had has died.
Maybe a dream for ourselves, or a dream for a loved one. Maybe both.

This morning, it ain't over and I encourage you to take that broken, lost hope or dream and place in Jesus' nailed scarred and glorified hands.

In Him, in His resurrection, in His risen life, it ain't over 'til He says it's over.