

Sunday 19th April 2020

John 20:24-29

“Encountering the risen Jesus changes everything”

This is the theme and I hope that we will all experience that today.

What have you missed during this enforced “lockdown”?

Me – all sport, not just football and Chelsea! Cricket, golf, tennis and squash.

Encountering people is important to us

- How many different encounters have you had this week
- Not many in current climate?
- Some significant - some less significant
- Some stay in our minds for a long time

Chelsea match surprise encounter– courtesy of my great friend Pete

- **Meeting Frank Lampard and his parents**

There is an encounter

- Which is totally life transforming
- Encounter with Jesus

My conviction

- And my personal experience is this
- That an encounter with the risen Jesus changes everything
- It’s a complete game changer

One of the most compelling evidences

- for the truth of Jesus’ resurrection
- is the number of encounters people have had with the risen Jesus since then

The Bible tells us that he was seen by

- The women at the tomb
- His first disciples
- Even a group of 500 people at the same time
- Can’t relegate that evidence to an hallucination

Those encounters changed people

- First disciples from scared fishermen, tax collectors etc
- To fearless leaders of a global movement
- Proclaiming the reality of Jesus
- Even though it cost most of them their lives

Those encounters with Jesus have continued through the centuries

- And those encounters with Jesus have continued to change people’s lives

Story of John Wesley’s conversion. (the great preacher)

"That evening he reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans. About 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

John Wesley had an encounter with Jesus by his Holy Spirit

- That changed the shape of his life
- That changed the course of his life

Many of us can point to an encounter with Jesus

- At the point of our conversion

For me it was at a Crusader Sportsman's Holiday on the Isle of Man in 1969

- **I was 15...**

Conversion provides a pattern for the rest of our lives

- We encounter Jesus in conversion
- And we're meant to keep encountering him throughout our lives
- Because encountering Jesus changes us
- But it also changes the situations that we face

Look at three encounters this morning

- That Jesus had with his first disciples
- Speak into difficulties
- That many of us may be facing at the moment

When we're facing difficult circumstances

- Or challenging situations
- What we most need
- Is an encounter with Jesus

1. Encounter in face of doubt – Thomas

Thomas is often known as doubting Thomas

- He was the one disciple not present at the first appearance of the risen Jesus
- Imagine how gutted you'd have been to have missed that!
- Thomas gets a pretty bad press because of it

It's not really fair is it!

- If you were in Thomas' shoes – would you have believed?

A survey reported on BBC website

- **Only 17% of people believe 'word-for word' the biblical resurrection account**

- **Of 'active Christians' (church once a month) – only 57% believe in the resurrection account**

Seems like Thomas isn't alone in his doubts

Not just doubts about the resurrection

- We doubt God's existence
- We doubt his character
- We doubt his love
- We doubt his activity

Doubt can be positive

- But doubt is only positive
- When it leads us on a journey to a place of deeper faith

Doubt is a very negative thing

- When we don't travel through it
- And come out stronger the other side

If we don't travel through doubt to faith

- Doubt leads us to a place of unbelief
- Opposite of faith = unbelief

If you're struggling with doubt today

- Or even find yourself in a place of unbelief
- Concerning the existence of God
- Or a certain aspect of his character
- Or activity
- Then you need an encounter with Jesus

Thomas meets the risen Jesus

- He encounters Jesus
- He sees him and his doubts disappear

What we need is an encounter with Jesus

- Because encountering Jesus
- Is the place of revelation

Something is revealed to us in that moment of encounter

- Which wipes away our doubts

Need to partner with that revelation

- Own it
- Make it your own revelation
- Feed on it!

2. Encounter in the face of failure – Peter

I love the character of Peter...

- So impulsive
- When he doesn't know what to do
- He talks – jumps straight on in there with the first thing that springs to mind
- When he doesn't understand what's going on
- That doesn't stop him from jumping straight on in there
- BUT I love his heart – he's so for Jesus
- And he's brave

But it's his bravery

- And his unwillingness to leave Jesus
- That leads him to the greatest failure of his life

'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'

Famous last words....

We know how the story unfolds

- Jesus is arrested
- The disciples scatter
- But Peter follows at a distance

He's sitting in the courtyard and is spotted

- Named as being with Jesus
- Peter denies Jesus
- Again he's spotted as Jesus' follower
- He swears that he doesn't know Jesus
- Again he's seen
- This time he calls down curses
- 'I don't know the man!'

The rooster crows

- Peter gets out and gets on his own
- And weeps

Weeping tears of bitter regret

- Weeping tears of frustration at his own guilt
- His own failure
- His own weakness
- His own fearfulness

Have you been there?

Danger for us

- The knowledge of our failures
- Produces guilt and shame in our lives
- Extreme – lead us to abandon Jesus

Sports psychologist newspaper article

- **What is it that distinguishes the truly great sportsmen and women**
- **Their ability to bounce back from their failures**

Great athletes have learnt

- To embrace failure
- To learn from it
- To allow it to spur them on to greater things

One of the truly great Basketball players, Michael Jordan...

"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Enemy's plan in our lives works like this

- Failure
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- That's exactly where the enemy wants us to be
- Keep us in that place of guilt and shame
- Unable to embrace grace and forgiveness

Renders us powerless in the Kingdom

- We deny what Jesus has done for us
- Deny the effectiveness of the cross
- Where Jesus died to take all of our guilt
- And all of our shame

God's plan for us is restoration

See this in Peter's story

- After his failure and Jesus' death
- Peter goes back to fishing

There on the lake of Galilee that Peter sees Jesus on the shore

- Jesus instigates a miraculous catch of fish
- Peter recognises Jesus and jumps out of the boat
- There on the sea shore
- Jesus reinstates Peter
- Asking him 'do you love me?' three times

No time to go in-depth into that part of John 21

- Point I want to make is this
- Jesus said 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church'

In his failure

- He returned to fishing

In his encounter with Jesus

- His guilt and shame are washed away
- And he is restored to his destiny
- God's purpose for his life

God's heart for each one of us is restoration!

- So that each one of us
- Regardless of how badly we've failed
- In an encounter with Jesus
- Can be restored to our destiny
- Free from condemnation
- Free from guilt and shame

3. Encounter in the face of uncertainty – Disciples on the Emmaus Road

- Find in Luke 24:13-35 (read later at home?)

Two unnamed disciples

- Are walking along the road
- Talking about everything that had happened
- They were in a place of shock – they'd seen Jesus die
- They were in a place of uncertainty

They'd followed Jesus

- And look where it had got them
- They'd given up many things to follow him
- Now they were returning home
- Not understanding
- Uncertain
- Insecure

Into the midst of their uncertainty

- Comes Jesus

They don't recognise him

- But this encounter will change them forever

Jesus explains from the scriptures

- Everything that had happened to him
- God's bigger sovereign plan
- That they had witnessed
- But not understood

In their uncertainty

- Jesus came and brought understanding
- He came and brought clarity

Many of us face uncertainty at the moment

- Whether it's the Coronavirus pandemic
- Whether it's in our jobs
- Whether it's the economy
- Whether it's our finances
- Whether it's in our relationships
- Whether it's in our health

In the face of uncertainty

- We need an encounter with Jesus
- Because Jesus can speak a word
- That transforms how we feel

Sometimes Jesus will speak a word that brings peace

- A word that helps us to trust
- In the face of uncertainty

Other times

- He speaks a word of destiny
- A word of clarity and purpose
- Revelation into what he's doing
- Revelation into what he's calling us too

Keep pursuing him

- Receive the words of peace
- Until we get to the word of destiny, clarity or purpose

Conclusion

Whatever your circumstances today – doubt, failure or uncertainty

- An encounter with Jesus changes everything...

Amen.