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This is the second week after Easter, and we are supposed to be living in its "afterglow". Christians affected by the super cyclone in the Bay of Bengal which has seen 15-20 foot storm surges may not be experiencing the "afterglow" of Easter; Christians affected by our politics may not be experiencing the "afterglow" of Easter; news of an imminent cure may not offer the "afterglow" experience of Easter for those in the final stages of the disease.

Easter, which is not about the crucifixion of Jesus, but the resurrection of the Christ (as Saviour), is supposed to be a time of incredible happiness and joy! This is the emotion felt by the Disciples when they saw, met and spent time with the risen Christ, and it is this exhilarating mood they try to convey in their writing.

This euphoria is evident today!

It is reflected in the vision statement of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC) reads, **"With Christ, there is no ordinary. With Christ, every encounter, every task, every situation brims with Divine possibility"**. This is what Easter is all about - that life, our lives, each of our lives, **"brims with Divine possibility"**. The question to us is: **Will we allow these Divine possibilities to be realised, so that the life of the Risen Christ in us, is seen by people around us?**

We are in the middle of a three week series titled *"This is love"*. Last week we examined, *love which forgives our sin*, and I hope it brought some clarity to the distortion and error in our thinking about "sin".

Now if you think that talking about "sin" is difficult, our topic today, is about "death" - **Love that Conquers Death.**

Benjamin Franklin wrote, **"... in this world nothing can be said to be certain or permanent, except death and taxes."**

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He was neither the first, nor the last, nor the only person, who intentionally or inadvertently refers to death as **"permanent"**.

There are many world-views which offer differing understanding of death:

One says, Death is final - there is nothing beyond death; the body goes from one organic state to another, to sustain other forms of life. Human life, therefore, cannot have meaning.

Another view is that Death is a transition from one state to another - from imperfection to perfection. If perfection eluded you in this life, there is a place where you can do penance, and then God will accept you in Heaven. A variation of this world view is, at death, you re-enter an eternal cycle of re-brith, trying to notch up credit for having been good, failing which you return as a lesser life form.

There is a view of Death as a reward or a punishment: those who were innocent or close to God, become stars or angels (even fairies!); those who have caused suffering, are driven to a place of interminable suffering.

Every view of death is determined by our view of God. Is God like us, a person with emotions, moods? Is he just a being who cannot be defined, a power who cannot be controlled, an intolerant authority, a demanding, absolute monarch who takes from us to maintain his lifestyle, ... each of these views of God, determines how we understand life, and how we make sense of death.

Each view of life also dictates the language we use to express our understanding of death. We refer to **end of life** care, **end of life** pathways, **end of life** medication; I also hear people afraid to use the word "death" and so they say **She/he has gone, is no more, has passed**. Some take it personally and say, **He/she has left US!**

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The Bible offers those who read it, a very different view of life and death, because it presents a very different portrait of God.

Those who focus on passages with violence, to them God is violent; those who read only the passages where God blesses people, then God is like Santa Claus dishing out presents, and so it goes - God the miracle maker, God the healer.

Reading the Bible with book club rules is useful: select a book, start with outlines, reviews and author biography, read, discuss, enlighten yourself, and finally celebrate your discovery and learning. I assure you, we would discover a very different God from our narrow, preconceived ideas about Him.

I tend to believe Paul's writings because, after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul tells the church in Galatia, *When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus. **Then three years later** I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days.*

Paul spent three years, first in the desert of Arabia, alone in the presence of God and the company of Christ, learning the Truth about God's plans and purposes, directly from Him!

So convinced is he about the purpose of God through Christ, he tells the Church in Corinth, *If Christ has **not** been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain¹*. In other words, without the resurrection of the Christ there is no Christian faith.

Then, to the Church at Philippi, Paul wrote: *"I want to know the power of the resurrection"*

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:14

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Writing to the Church at Philippi, Paul says, *I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!*² I don't think there are any here today who share Paul's desire to experience the power of the resurrection by submitting themselves to Jesus' death! But that is not his message.

Having encountered the living Christ on the road to Damascus, who asked him by name, ***Why are you persecuting ME?***, Paul is convinced that death is not a final destination, not a literal *graveyard* for all to Rest In Peace (R.I.P.)

Death is not the end; death is a beginning. We can appreciate this better, when we understand, ***Resurrection*** is a new beginning.

Resurrection is not "*having been bought back from the dead*" like Lazarus, nor is it a spooky kind of "*rising from the dead*" (the magician's levitation), nor is it *rising again, coming back to life*, which implies it has happened before.

Resurrection is NEW LIFE. The old life no longer exists; a new life has begun. This is what happened on Easter morning. Jesus' old life no longer existed; a new life had begun. When at the tomb-side, Mary wanted to embrace Jesus, His reply was, "*Don't touch me...*" i.e. I am no longer the former life Jesus you knew; I have new life in Me and must return to the Father.

Let me leave you with three important lessons about the Resurrection of the Christ:

1. Christ's resurrection is the defeat of death. We were not created to die, rather created to live forever in peace in the presence of God.

² Philippians 3:10

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2. The resurrection of Christ is God's new beginning. Removing the limitation imposed by death, God offers a new beginning. To Nicodemus, Jesus said, *You cannot hold onto your past - good, bad or indifferent. You need a new beginning (born again), and only God offers you a new beginning*
3. The Resurrection is a gift. We cannot earn it, cannot work for it, nor buy it. We must be open to receive it, and God gifts it.

Ever since disobedience to God, closed the gate to eternal life, Christ's resurrection opens the door to **New Life**.

Breaking the barrier of death, returns us into a new relationship with the Creator, and this is what Christ has done.

Lets' be clear: the power of the cross on which Jesus died, broke the chains of death.

The power of Christ's resurrection restores us into the relationship, God wants with us!

There is a love which conquers that which we fear most - death. It is a love which cancels all that is past, and gives a new life, in a new and perfect relationship with the Creator, the Father of all life - God Himself.

The question is, **are you ready for this new life?** If you are, God is waiting to give it to you!

AMEN.