



## **Sermons at the Anglican Church of Basel**

**Preached Nigel Spencer** on Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2004 at the 11:15 am service

**Sermon title:** "Confessors of the Faith"

**Text:** John 20: 19-31

**That believing in Him, we might have eternal life.**

**Read text** - John 20: 19-31

### **Introduction:**

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"Peter, he's telling your story!" It was a Saturday evening in 1952. Lansdowne Baptist Church, Bournemouth was holding a guest service. A young man named Noel Stanton led the visiting team from All Nations' Christian College. Everybody was on the edges of their pews as Noel recounted to the gathering how he had come to a personal faith in Christ. It was a fascinating and moving story. The pastor of the church, Rev. Francis Dixon (d. 1985) was listening from the rear of the hall with a young leader from his congregation, a banker. As they listened to the story unfold, the pastor nudged the young man and whispered: "Peter, he's telling your story!"

As Peter and Noel exchanged stories after the service that night, it transpired that both had served in the Royal Navy during the War. Both had encountered the same evangelist on George Street, Sydney while on shore leave. The rather odd little man with the same question had confronted both: "Young man, I do hope you won't be offended, but I'd like to ask you a question. If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity? The Bible says it will either be in heaven or in hell. I'd like you to think about that. Bye!" Leaving them holding an invitation to a sailor's mission, the man disappeared into the crowds seeking another young sailor. Both Peter and Noel had dismissed the man as a fool, but neither had been able to shake the question, and both had later been converted to Christ.

(Noel Stanton was later to become a lecturer at All Nations College, one of Britain's premiere centres for the training of missionaries. During the 1980's, when we lived near Bath, Peter Culver was Pastor of Widcombe Baptist Church, where he confirmed the details of this story to me in person.)

**Was the little man a fool? Of course! But as the copywriters love to say, “Read on!”**

## **The Foolishness of the Message (v 18)**

If we are serious in our desire to communicate our faith to those with whom we brush shoulders every day, people who never darken the door of a church, we need to keep sight of or recapture their perspective. We need to comprehend that the message we bring often appears to them utter foolishness. Perhaps it will help to recapitulate 3 of the cornerstones of the gospel message in order to illustrate what I mean.

### ***The Incarnation of the Immortal.***

Inconceivable! We often forget that our message seems just that to the average person outside the family of God. Even if they can accept the notion of an infinite creator, the idea that God is personal and that He “became flesh and dwelt among us” seems frankly ludicrous, unless....

### ***The Crucifixion of the Creator.***

Unthinkable! Several years ago, I preached in Durban, the home of Sheikh Ahmed Deedat, probably the most aggressively anti-Christian Muslim theologian alive at that time, he was the President of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban. He argued, often vehemently, that Christians are pitiful, credulous people. The Muslim cannot conceive that God would ever allow Himself the utter degradation of being put to death by His creatures. Seen from their understanding of God, it has to be said that the idea seems unthinkable. Surely, either Jesus was not God, or He could not have died on the cross. God cannot die, it's that simple, unless....

### ***The Resurrection of the Rejected stone.***

Preposterous! Of all the aspects of the Christian message, this is surely the hardest to sell. It is contrary to human experience. After all, dead men don't bleed, nor do they rise from the dead, unless, unless ...

IF we put ourselves in the shoes of un-churched Mary or un-churched Harry, we can fairly easily recapture the sense of incredulity, of amused incomprehension that assaults their minds when Christians begin sincerely expounding such

information. And often, if we are honest, it is this knowledge that paralyses our witness and prevents us from taking the initiative to be light and salt in our world.

***So allow me to put to you a rhetorical question.***

The apostle Paul was a highly intelligent, educated man. He was also a sceptic.

If the message was foolish, why did Paul expect men to believe it? Why did he spend the better part of his life trying to convince men to listen? And that in the face of opposition, hostility and outright danger to life and limb!

Because the message he had burning in his heart was **TRUE!!**

Paul was willing to die a happy man for proclaiming a foolish message because he knew what many today would deny, because they deny the very existence of TRUTH. Paul knew that **only** TRUTH could change our nature and our destiny, both in the here- and-now and eternally. Nothing else will do. By TRUTH I mean not just FACT, but that which corresponds to what is **really** there and what men and women **really** need, rather than what we may **think or feel** we need.

**There is a kind of introduction to the gospel of John at the end! 20:30&31**

John 20:30-31 "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

In line with his purpose in writing the gospel, John included several important "confessions". Each of these confessions is deeply personal and reflects the character of the "confessor". Each of these people came to the point of making such a confession of faith in different ways and as a result of different circumstances. Let's review them and see what we can discover. Help me out here – how would you describe each of these people? Raise your hand up if you can identify with their type.

John 1:29     John the Baptist, the bold prophet with doubts.  
                  "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"  
                  Doubts - Luke 7:20 When the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptizer has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?'"

- 1:41 Andrew, the quiet people-person.  
"We have found the Messiah!"
- 1:44-45 Philip, the bookish, detail-oriented type.  
"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, about whom the prophets also wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."
- 1:49 Nathanael, the sincere sceptic, brought by Philip.  
"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."
- 4:29 The Woman of Samaria. The cultural & gender outsider.  
"Come & see, a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"
- 6:69 Peter, the impetuous natural-born leader, brought to Jesus by his quiet brother Andrew.  
"We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."  
Notice the use of 'we'. Peter looking for backup? Or referring to Andrew.
- 11:27 Martha. The simple, unquestioning type.  
"Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the World." Wonderfully quiet, confident words, aren't they?
- 20:28 Thomas. The practical, experimental type.  
'Unless I see and touch.'  
"My Lord and my God!"
- 20:29-31 All these except Thomas testified BEFORE Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead! How much more can we testify to! How about you? What type of person are you? Are you quiet and bookish, or loud and demonstrative, a gentle people person or an action-man? More importantly than *who you are* is the question; "Where are you, where do you stand?" Where are you in your journey? And in which direction are you headed? What is the story so far of your encounter with Jesus?  
Think for a moment about the circumstances of the confessions we have just read:  
Some took place walking on the dusty roads of Palestine, another after a funeral, some in public places, others in private. Some are set in everyday situations and others at extraordinary moments.

Have you confessed your faith in Jesus before men? You see **believing is one thing, confessing is another.**

Rom 10:9 ". . . that if you **confess** with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"

"God has raised this Jesus to life, & we are all witnesses of the fact." (Acts 2:32).

### ***Resurrection Appearances of Jesus:***

(This section was not included due to time taken for introductory activities in all-age context.)

In sharp contrast to the negative testimony of the spiritual leaders about Jesus' resurrection, is the positive testimony of the first Christians and the early Church of Jesus Christ. Do you know on how many different occasions Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples?

Do you have any idea how many people we are talking about?

### ***Let us list them!***

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:14, Mark 16:9)
2. The women at the tomb (Matthew 28:9,10)
3. Peter (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:4)
4. The men on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33)
5. All the apostles, except Thomas (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-24)
6. All the apostles, including Thomas (John 20:26-29)
7. Seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
8. Over 500 of the brothers at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6)
9. James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
10. The eleven disciples on different occasions (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:33-53, Acts 1:3)
11. Paul (Acts 9:3-6; 22:17-21; 23:11; 1 Corinthians 15:8)
11. Stephen (Acts 7:55)
12. John on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19)

In other words, at least 15 times Jesus appeared to His disciples and probably even more, because in Acts 1:3 it reads: "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." Over 500 people saw Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. What a testimony!

And how did these people deal with that?

They were on fire for their Lord. They preached the Gospel to everybody who wanted to hear it. Despite hardship, they travelled all over the world to preach the Good News about the risen Saviour. They were persecuted, stoned, tor-

tured, cut in two, killed by the sword (see Hebrews 11:36-38). Except for John, all the apostles died a martyr's death.

THAT REPRESENTS A PRETTY AMAZING TESTIMONY ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. A rhetorical question if I may – why were so many folk not only willing to speak up, but happy to face rejection, ridicule, persecution and death for their refusal to admit they were mistaken, could have been, might have been wrong about this? Think about it for a moment – this largely uneducated, raggle-taggle bunch of nobodies was suddenly and radically transformed into History's Handful, a band of world-changers. How come? Sceptics through the ages have sought to discredit the testimony of these "simple" believers, often with mixed motives. Some seek to promote their own agenda. They do so to this day.

### ***Application:***

Like all these brothers and sisters whose confessions we have revisited this morning, we too can personally testify to the risen Saviour only because we experience His presence in our life. Take a moment of silence to recall certain events in your life, which can only be attributed to Jesus Christ living in you. These are the foundation stones or the framework of your confession.

### ***Prayer:***

Risen Lord Jesus, thank you that You live and work in us. Help us to testify without shame or hesitation to the reality of Your life-giving death and resurrection in the power of Your Holy Spirit and to leave the results in Your hands. Amen.

P.S. If you would like to know the rest of the story which began at Lansdowne Baptist church in 1952, please send me an email and I will be happy to send you a copy.

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