

I believe in new life

1 John 1:5-2:11; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11

This year marks a significant golden jubilee:

It's 50 years since the Apollo 11 mission to the moon.

I recently watched a great three-part documentary on SBS

called *Chasing the Moon*. It includes incredible footage of an incredible story.

It traces the space race that really started right after the end of WWII.

But things really sped up in the 1960s when President Kennedy said,
we're putting someone on the moon, and then we're going to bring them back.

He set the goal, it was up to NASA to work out how to do it!

So how do you take an astronaut to the moon and bring them back safely to earth?

The answer is that you *do it in stages*.

You've seen the massive Saturn V rocket that was used in the Apollo missions.

That rocket was made up of stages.

The big fuel tank that was used only for a few minutes to get into orbit,

To the secondary booster to get out of orbit and start to the moon

To the command module that orbited to the moon,

Then the landing module

Then finally the re-entry capsule that splashed down in the ocean,

which was tiny compared to what they started with.

Like many long journeys this was a trip completed stage by stage.

Now when Jesus was meeting with his friends before his death and resurrection,
he spoke about a journey that he was organizing for his friends.

In John 14:2-3 Jesus told his disciples My Father's house has many rooms; if that
were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I
go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also
may be where I am.

The journey that he has in mind is a journey to his Father's house.

And like any far reaching expedition, it involves a few stages.

It's these stages that we've been exploring

as we've been thinking about the Apostle's Creed.

God the Son journeys to us and is conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary.

He dies and descends to the dead,

he is raised to life again and ascends to the Father's side.

And all for what? Well, it's all for us,

that we might join with him and enjoy life in the Father's house forever.

And so this week we come to the final two stages in this great project.

Coming at the end of the creed they do run the risk of being overlooked,

But its important that we give them our attention
because like any journey
there's always the temptation to pull over
before we get to our final destination;
to become bored or disillusioned with the ride,
and therefore miss out on where it is that we are going.

And our destination is pretty good! I've summarized it with the words *new life*—
new life in two stages: first new *spiritual* life, and then new *physical* life.
First of all the spiritual renewal that we are brought into;
we say we believe in 'the forgiveness of sins'.

Our first reading was from the first letter of John.
During this series I've tried to find passages from all over the NT
as a way of demonstrating that what we say in the creed is a genuine NT faith,
it really is the summary of what Jesus and his apostles taught.
And it's in 1 John we find one of the best-known passages about forgiveness.

John wants us to get a couple of different things straight
First of all, were kidding ourselves if we think sin is not a problem for us.
1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
And again in v10 If we claim we have not sinned,
we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

I think it's a very rare thing in our culture for someone to think they are perfect.
Australians like to think we are humble enough to know we're not perfect.
In fact, being a little bit sinful is a point of pride for lots of people.
Perhaps a bigger blindspot for us is a failure to realize the depths of our sin.
We're not perfect, but we're not *that bad*—this is what we tell ourselves.

But with God it's never been a case of near enough is good enough.
God is light we are told in verse 5, in him there is no darkness at all
We might think that a little bit of darkness adds interest or excitement,
Yet we're told that God and darkness do not mix.

One of the areas of life where our sin runs deeper than we think
is in the area of our wealth and possessions.
We love a bargain, don't we?
And we might feel that we are being prudent with our money
by purchasing cheap clothes, and cheap food,
by eating at a restaurants on cheap days.

But have you ever stopped to think about
why retailers can make some things very cheap?
Usually it's because the cost is being absorbed unfairly by someone else;
either a worker is not being paid proper wages

or a producer is using unjust methods.
 It's why it's a good idea to work out
 where you favourite foods or clothing items come from,
 and there are multiple website that can help you do that very easily.

But the point is this, we are more implicated in sin that perhaps we realize.
 There's a famous story about G.K. Chesterton,
 the English writer from last century,
 who responded famously to an article in an English newspaper.
 The article surveyed all the news and asked "What is wrong with the world?"
 Chesterton wrote in with an answer "Dear Sirs", he began.
 "What is wrong with the world? I am! Sincerley G.K. Chetseron"
 If we say we are without sin we deceive ourselves.

But John's aim in writing his letter is to underscore an even greater truth,
 The blood of Jesus, he writes in verse 7, purifies us from all sin.
 Again in verse 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just
 and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
 And Ch 2 verse 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
 and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
 If it's a shock to realize the reality and depth of our own sinfulness,
 then its just as mind-blowing to grasp the purifying power of Christ's death.

Every year in the summer months our church hires one of those steam cleaners
 that you find chained up near the supermarket check out.
 At least they used to always have one there,
 near the statue of the guide-dog that you can donate money into.
 Throughout the year our carpets pick up all sorts of stains,
 and so we give it a good clean, we *purify* our floors and our seats.
 Those machines do a pretty good job of it,
 the place looks pretty good afterwards.

One time Ian Carpenter showed me the bucket of dirty water
 that the machine spat out as it went.
 I was shocked at how dirty the place actually was.
 I knew we needed a clean but I had no idea the place was *that* dirty.
 And so it is with our own sinfulness (its much deeper than we think)
 and so it is with the atonement that Christ provides
 (it's much more effective than we think).

But please don't think that the purification of sins is a mere mechanical action,
 it's a purification that results in *forgiveness*.
 That's a very personal thing, isn't it?
 When we wrong someone else
 we may be able to pay for the damage,
 or we may be able to cop some sort of fine or retribution,

but receiving forgiveness is on another level.
 Forgiveness enables the relationship to be restored,
 Forgiveness is what truly allows all parties to move on.

This week in my personal Bible reading I was reading about Peter's betrayal of Jesus.
 Three times Peter denies knowing Jesus as Jesus is undergoing trial;
 it's a tremendous betrayal by a best friend when a friend is needed most.
 But one of the Bible's themes as it tells the story of the resurrection
 is the forgiveness of Peter by Jesus and Peter's restoration as an Apostle.
 He's the first person after Christ's death to receive the benefits of that death,
 a new start with the forgiveness of sins.

So with the forgiveness of sins we have a new status before God: *purified from sin*.
 And with this new status comes a new aim for our behaviour,
 Ch 2 v6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.
 In particular, our new lives are marked by love instead of hate, Ch 2 v 9
 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.
¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light.

John is making a similar point to one that Jesus made,
 that is, we should extend to others the same love and forgiveness
 that we ourselves have received.

Now when I became a minister, I was following in a family tradition;
 my father was a minister before me.
 I remember as a teenager in one parish
 there was a group of men with whom he clashed.
 They had competing visions of ministry, and it got quite nasty at times.

A couple of years ago I receive an email from one of their sons,
 telling me that his father was on his death bed,
 and asking whether my father could drop everything
 and minister to this man before he died.
 I'll be honest—had to resist the temptation to hit delete, let me tell you.
 But, I passed it on to let Dad make the decision, secretly hoping he'd say *NO!*
 But of course what did he do?
 He went and he conducted the bedside ministry.
 He understands forgiveness, you see. Love, and not hate.

And so this is the new life we have in Christ: forgiven people who forgive others.

But the life of forgiveness that we have now is only the second last stage,
 because we also believe in the *resurrection of the body and the life everlasting*
 Shift with me to our second reading from 1 Thessalonians,
 From ch 4 v16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command,
 with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will

rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

In these verses, Paul describes the final stage in our journey.

The final stage begins with the resurrection of our bodies.
One of the basic Christian facts is that death is not the end,
there is still an embodied life for us to enjoy in the age to come.

Now there are many people who have a much poorer view of life after death.

A good friend of my wife says
that before she was born she experienced nothing,
and so that's what she expects after she dies.
My year 7 history teacher said that the only way we live after death
is in the memories of those who love us.
(for a man who knows a lot about history
he had a very poor vision of the future, if that's all we can hope for).
Hindhus say that the aim is to somehow rejoin Brahman,
the great life force behind all things.

Lots of different ideas,

none of which are as attractive as the one we find in the Bible,
that once more our bodies will live again.
But know this, we aren't just talking about *resuscitation*,
we're talking about *resurrection*. There's a difference.

In our household, it's my job to clean the shower.

Showers can get soiled and stained, and so it's my task to *purify the cubicle*.
I can do a pretty good job; I can get rid of the mold,
I can get rid of the soap scum, I can really freshen it up.
But then we renovated our bathroom,
and it looks a million times better
than what I could achieve with some Jif on a sponge.
Cleansing and purification is one thing, but renovation is next level,
and that's the difference between these last two stages of our journey.
Yes, we are cleansed now, but when Christ returns
we we'll be raised from the dead, and that's more like a renovation.
It's still the same person, but a brand new version.

And the version of us will live forever. We will be with the Lord forever, Paul writes.

Or, as we say in the Creed, we believe in life everlasting.
It's hard to imagine eternal life but the Bible has some clues.
Revelation famously describes a place built with precious metals and stones.
Whether that's a literal description of building materials
is hard to say with a book like Revelation.
But it does indicate a place of good things in abundance.

Isaiah speaks of living forever: Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years.

Interestingly Isaiah also speaks of a place of forgetfulness:

former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

There are plenty of people in this day and age
who are in torment because of their minds—

dark thoughts, recurrent thoughts.

When the Bible speaks of the New Heavens and the New Earth,

it often speaks of the *mood* that we'll enjoy there:

of tears being wiped away, of joy and delight, of rejoicing and gladness,
of being able to forget *former things*.

It's a perfection not only of the body but of our inner being as well.

Friends that's a vision of the future that's worth celebrating, isn't it?

It's a destination that's worth us seeing the journey through.

Now, well before the 50th anniversary of the lunar landing,

the American Journalist Tom Wolfe wrote a book on the space programme,
where he asked the question

"What did it take to be one of the select few sent into orbit?"

His answer was that you couldn't just send anyone,
you had to have *the right stuff*.

And so that was the name of the book, *The Right Stuff*.

Friends our journey is very different, in that it's not up to us to have 'the right stuff',

Christ is the one who has that stuff,

and it's because of his stuff that we can make the ride.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 He died for us so that,

whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

That's how we make the journey, we rely on Christ's death for us.

Stepping on board is as simple as trusting him

to pilot us through and land us safely.

So trust in him, but don't step off rocket before it's time!

I'll lead us in prayer

Heavenly Father we rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, and we rejoice in the
promise of new life: Spiritual renewal now, renewal of our whole person
later on. And so we do turn to Jesus as the one who died for us, as the one
who purifies us and forgives us. We pray that your Holy Spirit will enable us
to bless others with that same grace of forgiveness, and we ask that the Holy
Spirit will always remind us of the hope of eternal life. May that hope
motivate us to stand firm in what we believe. In Jesus name Amen.