

Text: 1 Cor 15.7
St Stephen's:

Date: 5/9/2010
Sun AM

Resurrection Appearances: To James!

Our resurrection passage today comes not from the gospel accounts of Jesus appearances, but from a letter written some 20+ years later by St Paul. Paul is working to **stabilize and strengthen** a troubled congregation (think 'Vegas') and he is reminding them about the '**first things**', the essentials of the faith. '**Keep First things First**', he says to them, and then he lists the 'first things'...

*I passed on to you what was most important... Christ died for our sins... he was buried... he was raised from the dead... he was seen by Peter and then... [Paul lists most of the resurrection appearances]
Last of all... I also saw him.*

1 Corinthians 15:3–8

Paul says, 'this is important!' Remember this! Everything stands on top of this! **Why?** Partly **because it actually happened**. This is not a made up story. It is not a myth. It is actual human history. It really happened. And when it happened **the world changed**. From that moment on people could be forgiven, people could get a new life, people could get an eternal life, people could know God personally. The world changed when Jesus was raised.

It is also important because these appearances **set a pattern** for your life of faith; the ways he met his disciples are **the ways he meets us** today...

- **Jesus meets with all kinds of people...** well known disciples who would become world famous – and little known disciples who we never hear from again. He meets with doubting disciples and fearful disciples and even with enemies of his disciples.
- He seems willing to appear to his disciples **in any place** – at a graveside, or in a locked room, or at their workplace, or walking on a road, he is suddenly there. There is no place in life where he will not go.

- He meets his disciples **in special places**. I call these places **'thin places'** between our natural world and the supernatural world of Jesus. They are like **intersections** between the world we know and the eternal world he is bringing. Places like bible study and fellowship and prayer and Holy communion. He meets us there. And the broken places of life are thin places.
- **When Jesus comes, lives make a sudden change** –Saul, becomes Paul. Sad disciples are caught in a 'too good to be true and too great to be missed' kind of joy. Fearful and timid disciples suddenly fear nothing. And certainly not their own deaths!! Unforgiven and forsaken disciples suddenly know they are forgiven, and know they will never be forsaken.

We have looked at many of these appearances over the past weeks, but today I want to dig one out that is mentioned only here in the New Testament, in the middle of the paragraph written by Paul. It's a special one for us on Mother's Day.

He was seen by James

1 Cor 15.7

Jesus appeared to James. You might not remember **who this James is** – let me remind you. He was **Jesus' brother**. The New Testament tells us that Jesus had at least **6 siblings** that we know about. Mark lists them when he tells us **the skeptical comments people made** about Jesus during his first ministry effort in his own hometown:

*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and **brother of James** and **Joses** and **Judas** and **Simon**, and are not his sisters here with us?"*

Mark 6:3

4 brothers and at least 2 sisters! Most likely they were born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus' birth. And most likely after Jesus, James was the **oldest** of those siblings, because the speaker in this story would have listed them in birth order, males first.

We know more about James. We know that he was **not a believer** in Jesus before his resurrection. In fact, his whole family had concerns

about Jesus early in his ministry. Mark tells us that one time when crowds were flocking to Jesus:

his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself."

Mark 3:20-21

Some people were saying that Jesus out of his mind... so his family hatches a plot... They call him outside and grab him... by force, if necessary...

John's summary of these years is even more to the point:

For not even his own brothers believed in him.

John 7:5

That's James. All the way through the day of Jesus death, we have no indication that he was any different. When Jesus walked out of his family to launch his ministry, **James** in all likelihood **became the head** of this family. Joseph, his father was almost certainly dead by these days. The responsibility for the family would have fallen to the oldest son. And Jesus was gone. James thought his brother had gone **over the edge**. Maybe he thought he'd **abandoned** his mother and siblings, walked out on his responsibilities, become some kind of **religious nut**. Just think of the **heartbreak** this would have been to James – and to Mary. Maybe it got so bad that James wouldn't even put up with any talk about Jesus any more around the house. **That's James.**

We have **a second set of data on James**. We meet him again in Acts 12 in the early days of the new Christian church. Peter has been arrested, and then miraculously released from prison, and Luke continues the story:

Peter said, "Tell James and the brothers these things," and then he left and went to another place.

Acts 12:17

Again, this James is Jesus' unbelieving brother. But now Peter refers to him as **a believer** in Jesus and a **leader** in the church. 'Tell James...', he says. Later, St. Paul came to Jerusalem and met with him and called him an **apostle**. We think he was the **author of the letter** in the NT that has his

name. That letter starts with this sentence:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
James 1:1

This is James, too! That's quite a change. **Q: What changed James? What Made the Difference?**

We have no data except **five words** in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that we started with:

Then he appeared to James...
1 Cor 15.7

What **a meeting** that would have been **between these brothers...** what a moment! **Try and picture it:** like the other disciples, James would have known his brother immediately. Except he thought he was dead. Actually, he knew he was dead. But here he is, very much alive.

I have no idea where they were when that meeting happened, but James was probably not with the other disciples in that moment. Maybe he was alone. Then **suddenly he was not alone.** I imagine Jesus looked at him and **called him by name, softly, clearly,** '*James..*' No condemnation in his eyes, eyes that James had known for years, but eyes that he had never quite seen before – flashing with Life. '*James..*'

In a flash the disbelief, the disappointment and the worry of the past years was **swept away** from James. In a moment he knew it was all true. His own anger at God dissolved. His fractured family is pieced together... In a moment his world is turned right side up and a new life opens up. James is now reconciled to his earthly brother, who is immediately so much more than his earthly brother... From that day on he would call himself '*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*'

Well, what can we say? A couple brief thoughts we ought not to miss today.

Jesus cares about lost sons and daughters.

It must have **seemed** to James that when Jesus left his family for his years of ministry that he had **renounced his family**. That he **didn't care** about his family. That he had **rejected** his family. There were moments when it seemed exactly like that. He said things like, *'Unless you hate your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, you cannot be my disciple.'* Words like this would have been **a sharp pain to Mary**, especially after she lost Joseph. Jesus departure for years of ministry must have **seemed like the death of her family**.

But **his family was never far from his heart**. Not during the years of his ministry. Not during the hours on his cross. Not since the moment of his resurrection. *'He appeared to James.'* To his brother he came.

It is **not just his family that was on his heart. Yours is, too**. That is unspeakable comfort to Moms and Dads, to brothers and sisters. There is no son, no daughter **beloved to you** that he does not **love more deeply**, more profoundly than you could ever love. There is **no lost** son or daughter that is too far gone. Not one that is beyond his reach.

'He appeared to James.'

This faith has been the strength of God's moms since the day Jesus was raised.

We were celebrating Sus's graduation from RMU last night. A wonderful moment for us (as Suz walked across the stage I leaned over to Bec and whispered, our youngest has just graduated – she looked back at me and gave me a big 'high five') Lots of her friends were over for the evening. One of them said to me that it was **her own mother who first told her about the resurrection of Jesus when she was a little girl**. She said that as a grown young woman, **her mom was her rock**. Many of our mom's have been the rocks of our lives, the women who introduced us to the Lord, rised us in the Lord, prayed us back to the Lord. Mom's quickly learn that had learned that no mom has to raise her children by herself. Not again, not ever again.

'He appeared to James.'

John Newton author of "Amazing grace" "wretch like me" was honest. Born in Liverpool. Dad ran away when John was an infant, his Mom died when he was 7 years old. He became a **slave trader**. Brought slaves from Africa – kidnapped families – often losing half of his human cargo on the way, selling those who survived into a lifetime of slavery. He was a drunk, a profane man, once harpooned by his men when he fell overboard, drunk. His mom was a godly woman. He remembered how his mother **prayed for him every day** when he was a young boy. One night in Liverpool he was drunk again, heard George Whitfield preach, the Spirit fell on him, and instantly transformed him. He became among the foremost preachers and hymn writers of his day. His epitaph: "once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, by the rich mercy of Jesus Christ, preserve I was, restored I was, pardoned I was, appointed to preach the faith I once tried to destroy" Do you know **what he placed high on the list of critical influences** that led to his conversion? **The prayers of his Mom.** Who passed away 30 years earlier.

But she had raised her prayers to someone who had never lost sight of the son she loved, someone who loved her son even more deeply than she herself did, someone who had her son on his heart. Someone who sometime back went after his own lost brother.

'He appeared to James.'