

The Surprise of Easter

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you for that lovely introduction, Adrian. It's lovely to be here, and I must send greetings from the Reformed Church in Haute Bay, where I worship.

I've been there only a couple of years, and Nick was sure to send your greetings to us last week, and so I'm happy to return a favor from our side. You may know some of the people there, many of them have come from a Caesar, or back in the day, Caesar background, or REACH SA background.

I myself have done so, and it's lovely to be back in kind of like my home church, my home denomination. Well, this morning, I thought we'd continue the series that Frank started looking at Easter.

Easter is coming up. It is the highlight of the Christian year. I know that many of us will think that Christmas is the highlight of the Christian year. So, in some sense, it's definitely the highlight of the holiday season, and lucky for us it's in summer.

Easter, theologically speaking, is the highlight of the Christian year, going to a church point of view, because, of course, it reminds us of the cross, but, of course, the resurrection as well.

[1 : 13] Well, I'm mainly going to be looking at the resurrection, and so the sermon is the surprise of Easter, and I guess I'll have to give away the secret.

The surprise is that Jesus comes back from the dead. Okay, now you all know that, but the Christian church has managed to put a little bit of a spin, a little bit of a twist on Jesus coming back from the dead, and there's very many different ways of understanding.

Well, there's really only one way to understand how Jesus came back from the dead, but Christians have managed to put little twists on how they understand it, and I'm hoping that we will, basically my idea today is to help us understand how the Bible sees Jesus Christ's resurrection.

Does that make sense? Okay, so the surprise of Easter is Jesus came back from the dead. That doesn't mean you can now switch off, oh, you got the sermon, that was a great sermon. By the way, when Nick comes back, that was a great sermon, you know?

Okay? You need to understand some very important things about the resurrection. Now, I know Nick fairly well, and we have very many discussions about almost this exact topic, so I'm fairly sure you'll have been taught well from Nick's side.

[2 : 29] Just on that point. Right, quick introduction then. I often ask Christians where they think Jesus is now. I often teach on the subject, on the resurrection, and I often start with, where do they think Jesus is now?

Many Christians will say, well, he's in heaven, obviously, and he is. Okay, what's he doing there? Okay, I haven't thought that far. They know he's in heaven, what's he doing there?

Okay, many will say he's our advocate. Good, he is our advocate. He is advocating for us with the Father at the moment. That's true.

Others will say that he's preparing a place for us. You know, that's another common theme. That is true, except that the place that he's preparing for us is not in heaven.

But more of that a little bit later. I've yet to be given the answer from Christians that Jesus is sitting at God's right hand, ruling the nations and making his enemies into his footstool.

[3 : 28] That's not the normal answer that you get about where Jesus is and what is he busy doing. But that is the fact of the matter, is that that is the truth.

So today's sermon is hopefully going to help us align our thinking and theology with the scriptures when it comes to the centrality and meaning of the resurrection. Now, it's interesting to look at the various symbols that Christianity uses as a means of interpreting its various kind of theological positions.

So, okay, you've got the Ten Commandments. You don't have a cross. Is there a cross in the pulpit? You don't have any crosses? Okay. Is there a reason for that?

There's no real reason, right? Okay, because many Caesar churches will have crosses. Many Protestant churches will have crosses. The crucifix. Well, no, sorry, not a crucifix. A cross. An empty cross. Catholic churches have a crucifix.

They've got a cross with Jesus still on it. Many see in this an incomplete atonement theology. What that means is the Catholics have got an idea that, yes, Christ has died for us, but because he's still on the cross, there's a sense where the full atonement hasn't actually been paid for.

[4 : 42] Now, they won't say that, but it works out in their practical theology because you still have to do many, many, many things from your side in order to get that atonement, to get that redemption from Christ. One of the most important things is to go to a Catholic church and have your sins forgiven and confess your sins to a Catholic priest.

You've got to do that once a year, by the way. And if you don't do that once a year, it's kind of tickets for you. You have to go at least once a year. You have to for your salvation in the Catholic church.

So, for them, the atonement price has not fully been paid. Hence, there's still a need in the Catholic church to somehow make up the remainder of Christ's forgiveness to complete it somehow, something which the Catholics still exploit, or they've exploited it fully in the past.

Hence, the Reformation. Hence, our churches, the Protestant churches. In some ways, it still does today. Now, we've got an empty cross, which, of course, shows a better theological understanding of the atonement.

Jesus is dead and has paid the price for man's sin. Complete forgiveness is now available in Christ, and that's all true. However, the problem with this is that all we have, very often, is an empty cross.

[5 : 59] Yes, we believe that Jesus died for our sins, but there's much in our theology that reflects the fact that we think Jesus is still dead. Having thought about the resurrection for a long time, I've always wondered if we shouldn't have had, as a symbol of Christianity, the empty tomb.

Of course, it's kind of a strange thing to hang around your neck, so maybe the cross is better. The early Christian symbol, of course, was the symbol of the fish. You can imagine they didn't use the cross as a symbol.

The Romans were still using the cross to kill people, so that wouldn't have gone down well. I'm just giving a brief introduction to help us think through where does the resurrection sit in our theological thinking?

For many people, the resurrection is there, and it is important, but I think it's fair to say if I have to draw like a big circle, and where you put all your Christian theology about God, Jesus, and all these various things, on the one hand, I'm just going to move away from that, is that the cross takes up a huge circle.

And of course, that's obviously right. It must take up a huge space in our Christian thinking. The resurrection is there, but I find that it's often a small little circle in this huge, big circle of the cross.

[7 : 20] I'm hoping to make the small little circle of the resurrection a little bit bigger in our talk today. Now, I'm sure you've had some of this teaching from Nick, and of course, when you come to Easter, you can't not miss the resurrection.

But again, people have got various ideas about the resurrection that correspond sometimes closely to the scriptures and sometimes depart quite far away from the scriptures.

Okay, so how do we understand? Let's go to the passage before us, the Luke 24 passage. So if you've got your scriptures, please turn it there. I'm just going to spend some time trying to show us from the scriptures some various things about the resurrection that will help us in our understanding today.

Okay, Luke 24. Now, before we get stuck into the text that we're looking at from verse 35 or 36, just to make the point that Luke, the whole resurrection narrative runs from, or the whole story really, the crucifixion starts in chapter 23, 22 even.

The resurrection story runs from chapter 24. Obviously, it ends at the end of that chapter. But if you really want to get a grasp as to the meaning of the resurrection and what it means for Jesus and therefore what it means for our Christianity, you've got to read Acts chapter 1 and 2 as well.

[8 : 49] So we don't have time to go too deep into Acts, although I'll touch on it a little bit later. But to get the full grasp and the full flow of the meaning of the resurrection, read Luke 23, 24, and then Acts chapter 1 and 2 as well.

You'll remember that Acts 1 and 2 is Peter's sermon at Pentecost and explaining very important things about Jesus and the resurrection. Now, just to make... Okay, so let's have a look at the text before us and make some initial points.

One thing to notice about the resurrection is that it was unexpected. The surprise of Easter was that there is and was a resurrection. Now, as a Jew, your thoughts about life after death really do tend towards resurrection.

In other words, that dead people come back to life. It's only the pagans that had other ideas about life after death. Now, in the modern world, because of Christianity that's been around for so many years, we all naturally think there is life after death.

Just about everyone thinks that there's life after death. Even non-Christians, when you go to their funeral, oh, they've gone to a better place, blah, blah, blah. They're up in heaven. You know, they've gone with the angels. Even non-Christians think this.

[10:04] Okay, everyone just about thinks that in the Western world. That's because of Christianity. Christianity, in the pagan world, before Christianity came along, people knew that when you were dead, you were dead, and that was it.

The best you could hope for was a long-lasting name and fame. That's really what they were looking for, which is why the Romans and the Greeks and the Vikings all went around with swords and shields and taking as much land as they can.

They all wanted to build a name for themselves so that when they were dead, someone would remember them. But they really didn't have the idea of, the idea or hope that you can come back from the dead.

That's a distinctly Christian and Jewish idea. Now, even the Jews themselves were taken by surprise when dead people came back from the dead because it's such a major break with what we know about the world around us.

Have a look at how the apostles, the disciples, I guess, at that point, responded to when Jesus appeared to them. In Luke 24, before we get to our section, you'll notice that there's the account of the resurrection in the first sort of 10, 12 verses.

[11:13] And Mary and the various ladies ran to the tomb to find, well, they went to go and tend to Jesus' body. But just have a look at verse 3, Luke 24, verse 3, or verse 2.

They found the stone, rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And so what were they expecting? They were obviously expecting to see the body of Christ lying there. They weren't expecting his body not to be there.

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright, the woman bowed down with their face to the ground. And then the angels tell them that Jesus has actually risen.

They ran from the tomb, the ladies, in fright. I mean, you can imagine. It's not every day, even if you're a Jew, it's not every day that you see angels and an empty tomb. They ran back to the disciples to tell them what had happened.

Verse 11, the disciples did not believe the woman because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb.

[12:23] And he wants to see what's going on. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. Peter's got an idea, but you can imagine him asking himself what's going on.

Now, just to put that into sort of stark, not contrast, but context. Okay, we all know people that have passed away in our family and from our friends. None of us have got this far in life without being to a funeral.

It would be the weirdest thing if your friends that have gone to a funeral recently came back and said, hey, I saw some angels, by the way. They went to go visit their tomb, not the tomb, you know, the grave.

Okay, you saw some angels. Okay. And the grave was empty. Well, we would also find it very difficult to believe what they're saying is true.

And we believe in God and miracles and things like that. And that's why the apostles themselves were saying, well, hang on, okay, just to see if this is really true. Jesus then appears to the two disciples walking on the road to a maze.

[13:26] They themselves were confused and didn't understand until Jesus opened their eyes and said, hey, this is who I am. Remember, I've been telling you about these things the whole time.

So, just to make the point that even for the Jews, resurrection wasn't something that happened on a daily basis. It's not like their aunt who died last week would come back from the dead.

Oh, hello, aunt, uh, Avi. Avi is a guy's name, I guess. Uncle Avi. Hello, Uncle Avi. Hello, my child. Back from the dead again. Yes. Okay.

How was it? Oh, a little bit stiff neck, you know. People don't just come back from the dead. Death is a major problem in the scriptures. It's not a doorway to a new life or a new mode of existence. I'll explain that if I've got the time. In a short while. Just to move on to our text from verse 36. Now the disciples are meeting again together.

[14 : 25] While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said, peace be with you. And now notice, they were startled and frightened thinking they'd seen a ghost or that they saw a ghost. And he says, why are you troubled?

Why do doubts rise in your mind? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I, myself, touch me and see a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

Now just to make some points about our ideas of resurrection and life after death. So, essentially, many Christians have the idea about the resurrection that Jesus came back in a kind of a spiritual kind of a body.

The linen stuff was still lying there in the tomb and the resurrection body sort of somehow passed from, well, Jesus' body passed from normal flesh and blood, this stuff that you see, into some sort of metaphysical spiritual reality and sort of floated through the clothes and the clothes was left lying there.

This account where Jesus meets the disciples in the upper room, it's accounted, I think, in Mark as well. Many times, I don't know if you've heard this, I've heard this many times, Jesus would have passed through the door because the door was locked, you know, he passed through the door almost like a, basically like a ghost.

[15 : 38] There's no way in the scriptures that actually say that Jesus went through a door, he just appeared in front of them just like he was taken away when he was talking to the disciples that he made, he just disappeared.

But that's not to say he doesn't have a physical body. Here's the point that Jesus is making. I'm back from the dead in the same body that I had before I died. It's the same body.

It's not a different body, it's not a spiritual body, it's the same physical body that I've got that now is standing in front of you. Here, touch me and that, you know, that would have, I would have, I don't know what you guys would have done.

I'd be like, well, you probably would have done, you touch him. I'm not going to touch him, you go touch him. Just to say, we often hear about doubting Thomas, he says, unless I see him and I touch him, I put my hands in where they nailed him and his side where they stabbed him.

The fact is, all the apostles, all the disciples were doubting and the reason they were doubting look, they're all frightened you, they don't know what's going on. Dead people don't come back from the dead.

[16 : 44] Death is a finality that we cannot cross, we don't really, we can't cross over from side to side. Many people think that that's possible today, it's just not possible in the Jewish mindset.

Now, just to make a point about that, about death and the script, the biblical understanding of death, I guess what you've got to do is go all the way back to Genesis to understand where death comes from and what it does and what it is.

Now, for many people today, death is a doorway. It's nothing but a doorway. You just walk through and you're in another mode of existence. What that means is that death is not actually death, it's just, you're just changing from one level of life to another level of life.

Scripturally, that's not quite the case. scripturally, death is the end of life. There's nothing that continues on after death. And the place where it all started was Genesis.

You'll remember the story, Adam and Eve. Now, it's important to realize that one of the things Adam and Eve was given was life. Now, it's obvious because Adam is standing there and Eve is standing there.

[17 : 53] But the thing that they were given was life. And the thing that God wanted them to enjoy was life. here on earth because that's where he put them. And the command to go and develop the garden and to enhance the garden and to sort of take the garden of Eden and plant it all over the world so that God's rule would carry all over the whole planet.

There was one thing that they weren't meant to do, you'll know the story, is eat from the forbidden fruit. And the threat, the threat from God is that if you eat of it, the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.

You know those words. Now, many Christians will say, oh, yes, okay, well, we all know that the day that they ate of it, they didn't die, so it's kind of like a spiritual death and then Jesus came to give us spiritual life. That's not quite true.

When God says, you're going to, the Hebrew expression is really, it's an idiomatic expression saying, if you do this, this is definitely going to happen. You know when your parents get angry? Kids, we've got a couple of kids here, okay, we were all kids once. I'm going to, you're going to get it now. I've had it up to here and you're going to get it now. Now, now could be now, but it can be just now, wait until your father gets home.

[19 : 13] Okay. What that means is that whatever is going to happen is definitely going to happen whether it's right then and then and there or it's going to happen a little bit later. The day that you eat of it, you will surely die.

It doesn't mean that they were going to die on the spot and drop down dead like that. It's a promise from God that they are going to die. The Hebrew construct is dying, you will die.

You will begin to die on the day that you eat of it and eventually you will die. And when you read the accounts, the genealogies in Genesis, is it Genesis 10?

All those long lives. Adam lived for 900 years. Noah as well, 800. You know, all those long living patriarchs of the Old Testament.

But after each section where it tells us how long they lived, and he died. Death in the scriptures is not a doorway to another existence.

[20 : 10] It's the ending of your existence here and now and the stopping of your relationship with God and your relationship with everything and everyone around you. it's a major existential problem.

You can't survive death. The antidote to death in the scriptures is not in a sense to go to heaven when you die.

The antidote to death is life. And so that when you get to the New Testament by the time of Jesus and this account of the resurrection, that's the thing that the scriptures want us to get about Jesus. He's the conqueror of death because he's alive. That's the point that this text in Luke is making again and again. Have a look at verse 40.

He's trying to convince him that he's not dead. Ghosts are dead things. Ghosts aren't living things just by the way. It doesn't really help you to come back as a ghost or to stay as a ghost.

[21 : 14] You weren't created as a ghost. You were created as a flesh and blood human being. Verse 40. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it, because of joy and amazement, he asked them, do you have anything here to eat?

They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence. So there's so many things that Jesus is doing again and again to convince us that the same body that went into the tomb on Friday is the same body that is now standing in front of them.

Okay. I'm sure you've got that by now. You're happy with that. And I'm sure Nick has taught you this. Yes? About the fact that Jesus came back in the flesh. It's not a different body.

It's not a spiritual body. It's the same body. Yes, it's a resurrected body. It's not actually a glorified body. People will say, oh yes, it's a glorified body. Well, it really wasn't glorified because he's standing there in front of them and they all recognize him.

Later on, he's glorified once he's seated up in heaven. And even then, not quite yet. He'll come back in a much more glorious manner. Okay, so he's eating fish.

[22 : 23] He's actually digesting food, making the point again and again that it's the same physical body that is standing in front of them that was in the tomb on Friday. This is what I told you, he says, while I was still with you.

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Okay, well, what's he talking about there? Well, it's a reference to the whole story of scripture about how Christ or how the promise of God is to deal with this problem of death way back in Genesis.

And that the promise of God is that I will bring you back to life. I will give you resurrection. Just by the way, the word resurrection, the English word resurrection, well, I guess it's a translation of the

Greek word anastasis.

It literally means to stand up again. Because, of course, when you die, you don't have the power to keep yourself upright. You just go down and then you come back again. Okay, so what is Jesus talking about here?

The law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Well, it's a reference to the scriptures that continually say the same thing. The hope of Christianity is in resurrection, coming back from the dead and living life on planet earth under God's rule and under God's reign.

[23 : 40] One of the best, how can I say, summaries of the Christian story of the Bible is under four headings. The story of creation, which we've chatted about just a few minutes ago.

The story of the fall of the world crumbling under sin and being laid under God's curse, the curse of death. The story that God doesn't actually want to keep it there.

I mean, he's the creator God. When you make something, you don't want it to suffer. You want it to enjoy its life. And so God had to redeem the world. And then the story of recreation. Creation, fall, redemption, recreation.

Now that recreation book, we sometimes don't have too clear in our Christian minds. We think of fall, we don't often think of creation, we think the world is broken, and it is.

And then we go straight to our salvation, we talk about redemption, but then our salvation is going to heaven. That's not our ultimate, that's not the ultimate goal of salvation in the Christian world, in the Christian, in the scriptures and in Christianity.

[24 : 44] Christianity. The ultimate goal of our salvation in Christianity is to come back from the dead, just like Jesus did, and to live on planet Earth. Now I've been told that I throw theological hand grenades, and I'm hoping that's not true in this case, but we're rapidly running out of time.

just have a quick look at Psalm 16. That's one of the Psalms that Jesus is referencing, obviously. And, in fact, don't go back to Psalm 16.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 2 because that's where Psalm 16 gets explained, and we'll probably have to draw to a close there. So I mentioned earlier that Acts 1 and 2 is the complementary ending to this story of the resurrection and the ascension of Christ.

This is Peter's first sermon. He now understands what Jesus was talking about when he said, let's now explain these things to you, that I was going to die and come back from the dead.

Peter's making the point, I'm in verse, let's pick it up, verse 32. Oh, now I'll have to start earlier than that because that's the other Psalm. Sorry, we'll start earlier than verse 32.

[25 : 59] verse 24. It's a long sermon, but it's a good sermon. But, God raised him, Jesus, from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

David said about him, I saw the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand. I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. my body also will live in hope because you will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence. Brothers, I can tell you confidently, now this is what the Psalm means. Peter's giving us the explanation of Psalm 16.

I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne and seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ that he was not abandoned to the grave nor did his body see decay.

God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact. Now this is what this resurrection means now for Jesus. He's exalted to the right hand of God.

[27 : 26] He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. And he continues. Now notice that's a fulfillment already of what we've just read in Luke at the end of that passage in Luke where Jesus says wait in Jerusalem to the disciples wait until I give you the Holy Spirit.

Okay, our time is up. I'm just going to make a small little application to us or some thoughts on applications. Notice what the resurrection means for Jesus.

It means that he's the Christ. He's the Lord. He's the one that the Bible has always been speaking about. David promised it in Psalm 16 or prophesied about it in Psalm 16 but it comes all the way back from Genesis where God is looking for the person that can undo the problem of death.

And the only way to undo the problem of death is to be given life. Now, we're all going to die one day hopefully long far into the distance.

Our hope is that one day what will happen what happened to Jesus will happen to us. So Jesus is lying in the tomb and on Sunday morning I wonder I'm not quite sure how the which went first but basically at some point his eyes would have opened deep breath.

[28 : 44] his lungs filled with air his blood started circulating well okay his heart started beating then his blood started circulating his brain would have refired all those neurons sending all the signals to all the parts of his body I'm back boys I'm back now one of the things about the Christian religion is it really is about a fight we sang some of those songs some of those words today and when you're in a fight and you're trying to take someone down and they don't stay down you know that they're the stronger one okay guys we've all been in fights in our lives hopefully they look worse than you after the fight you know that that happened to me once okay never mind we don't have time for that but the worst thing that God's enemies Satan and everyone and all those things could have done to Jesus was to take his life and obviously that's what they tried to do at the cross and then three days later he's back well if you kill someone and they come back from life you must know there's nothing you can do to stop whatever they want to do they have the power and you don't and that is exactly the point that

Jesus makes here in Luke I've got the power now and you Christians are going to receive that power the same power that brought me back from the dead you're going to get and what do I want you to do with it I want you to go be my witnesses and tell people about this but also live a good life and change the world now just to end with that particular point how did the Christian church respond at that time what do individual okay well let's start with what individual Christians do I'll literally just be one or two minutes and then we'll be done have a look at verse 38 in Acts chapter 2 Peter replied repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that's not a small promise that's a major promise because where the Holy Spirit is there's life and this promise is not just for you it's for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call now what was the response of the Christian church at that time well at the end of Acts chapter 2 you'll see the response well they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching notice that as Christians one of the things we do is listen to the word of God because it contains life and to the fellowship that's meeting together I take it you guys do that well here to the breaking of bread and to prayer everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles all the believers were together and had everything in common selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who are being saved we are in a sense at the forefront of God's mission not in a sense we are the Christian church is at the forefront of God's mission to bring life back to the world we do that by telling people about

Jesus but we also do that by living a good Christian life having your home open and inviting people to come and eat with you and pray for them one of the best ways of opening a conversation or helping people is to say look I see you're struggling would you mind if I prayed for you you can pray for them by yourself and I've never met anyone who said no I don't want you to pray for me there's one or two hardline people that won't want that but if you pray with them it's a really good opportunity to start sharing Jesus with them share your home share your bread share your life right so just to make the last point so when we come towards Easter it's the resurrection that is one of the big things that are explained over and over again in the scriptures it's the main thing that they got about Jesus the Easter yes there's the cross they wouldn't have had a full understanding of what that meant for them at the time what they were really interested in is like hang on Jesus came back from the dead now what that means is his resurrection unlocks the whole promise of scripture the Holy Spirit the forgiveness of sins fellowship what we just read in Acts chapter 2 all those things that God wanted people to have right at the beginning where did I start in Genesis this side so right at the beginning that thing where God created humans to live together and to enjoy the world around them we can do that again because of the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ's resurrection okay well I'm hoping that I've explained a little bit about the resurrection and its importance and its role for Jesus and what it means for him I've really only done a small little bit

time goes way too quickly we're done so Adrian I'm going to pray and then we've got one or two things left to do Heavenly Father thank you for a lovely reminder of the power of the resurrection of your power to bring back Jesus from the dead and to raise him up as our Lord and Savior thank you for pouring out the

[34 : 13] Holy Spirit and for making the Christian life possible for having our sins forgiven of having fellowship with you and having fellowship with our fellow man thank you that we've got a chance to speak about Jesus and to follow him and to know him and to let that power take resident in our lives and to change us and shape us and mold us Lord God part us with your blessing help us to believe these things and to hang on to them and to make them part of our lives in Jesus name amen