People can change the world., or change parts of it.

Sometimes they have no idea what that change will mean or cause, other times they do.

I want to talk about two change people.

One I learned about in the Herald yesterday, and the other is celebrated in a Book Iona gave me for my birthday.

Just a few years ago it was considered that women were not strong enough to be able to run any race longer than about 1500 mtrs.

One of the most prestigious marathon races in the western world, the Boston Marathon, only men could race in it. This was 1967.

Kathrine Switzer, a young 19yr old, with the encouragement of her running coach at Syracuse University challenged that.

(ad lib)

What she did changed that part of the world, so now it is unthinkable not to have woman running marathons.

In a similar way, it is now unthinkable that buses should be segregated based on race. Yet that was the case in many states in the US in the 1950’s. African Americans sat at the pack, White people sat at the front. Not only that but the petty rules that enforced this segregation were designed to humiliate the African Americans.

Rosa Parks was one woman whose refusal to give up her seat became a symbol in the fight for change. Her stance took courage, conviction that she was in the right and grit and determination to see the cause through.

Two women, who in different ways brought change to the world, and who through their efforts have made the world a better place for all of us.

I link these two woman, Rosa Parks and Kathrine Switzer to the two Mary’s of our story this morning. The two Marys were also women of courage, who alone of the disciples went to the tomb to be close the body of their friend. What the saw there and witnessed there and the tale they told changed the world.

These are moments, pivotal moments in world history. Katheryn Switzer challenged long held ideas about the place of women in sport, and her story became a part of the story of change for women in the world, while Rosa parks was a part of the great struggle of African American People towards equality in the US.

The resurrection is one such pivotal moment.

The story that the two Marys brought changed the disciples.

Before this day, they were a small disorganized group of Jewish men, they didn’t have a lot in common, they were frightened by the death of Jesus, their dreams of the future inspired by what they understood of Jesus, they though he would do something radical politically, their dreams were gone.

The resurrection changed them.

They became a group with a mission, a purpose, they stopped being afraid, instead they became bold proclaimers of God, and of God’s son Jesus Christ. Eventually they became the church. The church was in effect founded in this pivotal moment.

What the disciples experienced the church is of course been debating ever since – and historically the church, theologians, people outside the church have argued about what actually happened.

Did Jesus come back to life in a physical body, was it the same one that he had before he died, was it new. Did Jesus appear to the disciples as a physical being or a spiritual being and so on. Such debates are of course endless – for some people, and I am not one of them, how you answer that question: did Jesus rise from the dead with a physical body or not, for some people that is a critical question, and can define faith.

I don’t belong to that school, but also, I am not of the school which declares that we all must understand this moment in the same way.

Rather for me the critical issue here is this – what ever happened, however the disciples experienced what happened changed them forever, changed the world, and lead to the founding of our faith and the church.

That to me is the most important thing.

The disciples came away convinced of the sovereignty of God, of the power of God in history, with a new appreciation of Gods activity in the world, and because of that they were compelled into the actions that lead to the founding of the church.

However, we understand the resurrection: it was disruptive of what was before – it shattered the understanding of faith held by the religious people of the day,

For me that moment proclaims to the world that death is not the final word to life, for me that moment proclaims to the world that violence, hate, evil have limits, are not in charge of this world, but that God is, for me the resurrection links us forever with a dynamic God who looks forward to a renewed world.

For me too, Easter is not the celebration of the status quo, it is not the celebration of something that is static or unchanging, how can it be – the resurrection put paid to that, it is the celebration of something that is dynamic, changing, open to the future, not locked in the past.

This is of course somewhat scary, especially if you are like me, I like to use a fountain pen, not a computer, I like to read actual books, not a screen, I like to spread a newspaper out on the couch, I like the past.

But Easter is never about the past, it is about God breaking in, changing, challenging, saying to the world this is the new thing I am doing. Join me.

Our particular faith tradition, that of the reformed faith has a Latin phrase that sums this idea up:

Ecclesia reformata sed simper reformanda

The church reformed, but always in the process of being reformed.

The meaning of this for the church is clear – the task of the church - be it theological, or in its worship, or in its mission to the world is not finished, no final word has been said.

In their own ways and in their own parts of the world Kathrine Switzer and Rosa parks believed that and glimpsed and strove for a changed world.

A great physicist, speaking in the year 1900, said that nothing new remained to be discovered in physics, all that could be done now was that physicists could measure things more accurately.

He obviously hadn’t told that to Albert Einstein, who just a few short years later turned the scientific world upside down.

Any great movement, any great faith tradition, be it Christianity, or Islam, or Hinduism, to its danger and its loss declares that all that can be known about God, or faith or science is known, and all we need to do know is measure God more accurately. This is a form of imprisonment. It’s a form of death.

When anyone says that about our faith, our church, our tradition, then they have forgotten the resurrection.

Scary, unpredictable, unknown, that it maybe, our faith is founded on change, founded on newness, founded not looking back, but looking forward.

This Easter, let’s look forward to the new things that can and will happen, here at Somervell, in our own lives and in the world of faith at large.