

Easter Day, April 16, 2017

Christ Episcopal Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin

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Acts 10:34-43, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20: 1-8

The Scandal of the Resurrection: Jesus Has Risen

Rome did what it needed to do to kill the Messiah and bury his body in the tomb. Shut it down with a large stone with official seal on the top.

The High Priest and ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem were satisfied that they had gotten rid of Jesus of Nazareth.

Then something unexpected happened on early Easter morning. The tomb was empty, and news was twittering that Jesus had indeed been bodily raised from the dead. It seems to require the suspension of all our normal language about how we know things are told about dead people. Dead men are dead men. In the early Christian understanding of Easter this sort of thing was always likely to happen sooner or later, and finally it did. It was not thought that a particular human being happened to possess even more powers than anyone had imagined before.¹

When they said that Jesus had been raised from the dead, early Christians were not saying, as many critics have supposed, that the God in whom they believed had simply decided to perform a rather spectacular miracle, an even greater 'supernatural' power, than they had expected. They knew the fact that dead people do not ordinarily rise is itself part of early Christian belief.² The early Christians as eyewitnesses insisted that what had happened on Easter morning was precisely something new, scandalous; was, indeed, the start of a whole new mode of existence, a new creation.

¹ De Chardin in 1965, seeing Christ as the 'Omega-point' in human and cosmic development.

² N. T. Wright. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Fortress Press, 2003. 719-738.

In the whole story of Jesus Christ, the most important event is the resurrection. Christian faith depends on this. It is encouraging to know that it is explicitly given by all four evangelists and told, also, by Paul. The names of those who saw Jesus after His triumph over death are recorded, and it may be said that the historical evidence for the resurrection is stronger than for any other miracle anywhere narrated.³ The appearances of the Resurrected Jesus to eyewitnesses changed history, as it demonstrated to them Jesus was truly alive again. These events opened apostles' eyes to what God had promised and foretold in the Scriptures. (Few examples of the eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus)⁴ For as Paul said:

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain (1 Corinthian 15: 14).

The scandal of Resurrection of Jesus Christ started with a small band of disciples. They, themselves, struggled with this new fact of new life their Master offered:

I am the resurrection. I am the life. (John 11: 25b)

They were not anymore afraid to talk about Jesus and risk their own lives. Those who had been behind closed doors because of the fear of Romans and Jewish authorities now were in the public square proclaiming this good news: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Virtually all the apostles and early Christian leaders died for their faith, and it is hard to believe

³ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Thomas Nelson, 1999, Pp.205-215.

⁴ 1. Our resurrected Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20: 11-18). 2. "the women" on the way to tell the disciples about empty tomb (Matthew 28: 8-10). 3. Cleopas and companion on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).. The disciples, minus Thomas (John 20: 19-25, Luke 24: 36-43). Eight days after Easter Jesus appeared to the disciples plus Thomas (John 20: 26-29). Jesus appeared to 7 disciples at the Seas of Galilee (John 21: 1-23). Some 500 disciples at a large gathering (1 Cor. 15:76). The disciples in Galilee (Matt. 28: 16-18). To James (1 Cor. 15:7). And on the 40th day after Easter, he appeared to "all the apostles" at the Ascension (Luke 24: 29-53; Acts 1:3-11).

that this kind of powerful self-sacrifice would be done to support a hoax.⁵

As for me as a believer living in the 21st century, I give witness to the resurrection that the power of sin and death that has tyrannized the human family has been broken, defeated, overthrown. God's kingdom is now launched in power and glory, on earth as in heaven. The bonds of death and hell are broken and Jesus has risen victoriously from the grave. This is the power of faith early Christians received after the resurrection of Jesus. The same power is made available to you and me to have resurrected lives, to believe Jesus is alive, and he dwells and abides as a living Christ within us. St. Paul describes it like this:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20).

On this Easter morning it is my prayer we raise our shout of victory with famous words of Easter sermon of fourth century St. Chrysostom:

Christ is risen, and death you are cast down!
Christ is risen, and demons are fallen!
Christ is risen, and life is set free from the bondage of sin!
Christ is risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead.

For Christ, having risen from the dead,
Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Christ be glory and power forever and ever. Amen!⁶

Alleluia, Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, P. 210

⁶ John Chrysostom (347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople.

The sources quoted directly and used to prepare this sermon:

N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

Eugene Peterson, *Living the Resurrection*

N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus*

Pope Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two*

Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Communicator's Commentary, John*

William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*