

Explanation? Sorry, no. Affirmation? YES! **The resurrection is totally consistent with the whole Jesus happening, in line with the unreasonable debonair nature of the Gospel.**

Easter is truly about that glorious implausibility of the holy saving nonsensical love of God who will never, never, never let us go.

So let us live, from this day on, as Easter people!! Let us be confident of our eternal future and passionate about sharing what we've found with those around us.

To the praise of the Name that is timeless and the Love that is boundless. Amen!!

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A Message from Mark!

Holy Saving Nonsense

4 April 2010 - Easter Day

Scripture: Luke 24: 1-12

'Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them, who told the apostles; but they thought the story seemed nonsense, and they did not believe them. Luke 24:10-11

The men thought the women's report that Jesus had risen was nonsense. I cannot think of a more reasonable reaction to the story.

It's common sense, isn't it? Jesus was dead. Brutally put to death. Rigour mortis had won. The corpse had been placed in a tomb; left right through Friday night and the following Sabbath day. Now on Sunday morning the women come running with a garbled story about angels telling them that the corpse had been raised to new life.

The male disciples knew far better than to believe fairy tales. Such talk had to be hysterical nonsense. It was far more sensible to face the terrible fact: **the enemies of Jesus had nailed him!** Crucified dead and buried. Dead, dead, dead! This was no time for wishful thinking, by women who could not cope with the disaster. Face facts. Jesus was dead and with him were buried all their great hopes for a bright new world.

As I read this story I can only applaud Luke's courage in telling the Easter account this way. Much later in the first century, when Luke was writing, the apostles were the great heroes, many of them were now the holy martyrs of the faith; a glorious company of those who had been faithful to Christ Jesus unto death. But Luke tells it warts and all. These glorious men were at first disbelievers. They had treated the reports of resurrection as nonsense.

Maybe it's because I am a male (as you may have noticed) that I see the reaction of the apostles as quite reasonable. It was common sense. In times of disaster, someone has to keep their feet on the ground. Jesus was dead; history. And no amount of their love for him or commitment to him could con them into believing hysterical stories.

And yet, it is the concerted witness of the New Testament that they were wrong. The women were right but the apostles were wrong. Common sense was wrong, being realistic was wrong. Jesus was alive! It does defy all our attempts to adequately explain it; our Easter faith may always look stupid in the eyes of many, but with one voice the witnesses cry out: Christ is risen! The crucified One is the risen One.

During the last fifty years there has been a tendency in Western Christianity to treat the resurrection as a metaphor; to see it as a great paradigm of success after failure, restoration after disgrace, hope after hopelessness. This, of course, has much validity. The resurrection of Jesus is indeed a mighty metaphor. However, it has been regrettable that sometimes the rising of Christ is taught **only** as a metaphor. Sometimes the very origin of the metaphor has been discarded; the event of Christ rising has been either played down or denied.

This is the heart of the Easter message. Unpredictable and prodigious. *Christ is raised to life - and death and all dead ends has been defeated!*

Perhaps not one of us here has ever been homeless, yet homelessness is an apt metaphor for how many people feel in this age of loss and dislocation. Modern people, having detached themselves from place, other people, tradition, and commitments feel uprooted, alienated, and alone.

Thus, our age is an age when we say we want freedom and independence, but at the same time, complain that we feel we're nobodies from nowhere. Yet, planted deep within each of us is a desire, a yearning for home. Christians call that desire Easter hope.

In the church we sometimes examine people as to their **“personal faith.”** Faith is personal, but it's never private. John Calvin wrote, *“the gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart . . . our religion will be unprofitable, if it does not change our heart, pervade our manners, and transform us into new creatures.”* (John Calvin, *Golden Book of the True Christian Life* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1952], p. 17.)

My very dear sisters and brothers in the faith, I have not got a clue about how to fully define the resurrected life of Christ, nor do I have any way of explaining what our resurrection reality - which has already commenced - will finally be like. Eternal life, unlimited in every direction, leaves me (as the lovable ex-host of the ABC's gardening programme is fond of saying) gobb-smacked!

That vibrant, impudent Christianity of the first century was founded on and inspired by something that really happened: **Christ is risen!**

This whole, improbable-yet-true, resurrection thing, is utterly consistent with the extravagant and slightly ridiculous God of the parables and deeds of Jesus. Again and again we're confronted with a loving God who "**goes over the top**" in parental generosity. A God who does not know when to stop, when enough is enough, when things are past redemption.

- Remember the ridiculous case of the first sign that Jesus did at the wedding in Cana? How he turned about 600 litres of water into wine? 600 litres!
- or that pivotal parable about the father who recklessly gives his second son half the value of the family farm and allows him to go off to the city and squander it; and when the young fool comes crawling home asking to be a slave, the father runs to meet him and throws a giant party in his honour?
- or Jesus' commendation of Mary (a woman who had truly caught the extravagant vision of God) who in her great love for Jesus anointed his feet with costly perfumed oil worth perhaps \$30,000?

It seems like nonsense? Of course it does. It is so foreign to our measured and sensible way of seeing and doing things. If the Gospel story has been telling us anything, it has proclaimed this:

Get ready for a God who does the unexpected and the ultra-extravagant thing. Don't try to confine God to our little human notions of what seems like common sense; break out from what seems reasonable. God is unreasonably extravagant, gloriously unpredictable. The holy, saving nonsense of God is mightily at work at Easter!

Not so in the New Testament. There the resurrection is at the forefront of the Christian movement. It was something that really happened. Remarkable, indescribable, and for many implausible, yet the Jesus who was crucified was known to be very much alive. Death had been transcended. The tomb did not hold the beautiful young Lord of glory.

Jesus, this same Jesus, was alive, and because he lives we too shall live. Death is not a cul-de-sac. It was not the end for Jesus or the New Testament Christians. Sometimes they talk about it as resurrection, sometimes they use the phrase, eternal life - the essence was not a metaphor but reality.

The earliest surviving biblical documents which we possess are the letters of the apostle Paul. He, like some of the Gospels, talks about the "**appearances of Jesus.**" Jesus **appeared** to disciples in various situations; to Peter and then the other disciples, and on one occasion he **appeared** to over five hundred people gathered together. Last of all, Paul says, "**he appeared even to me**". But not like a ghost. It was the same Jesus although his body had been radically transformed. These days we might try to express it by saying some kind of sub-atomic metamorphism had taken place. We're grasping for words; how can one adequately use words to describe a reality (the resurrected Christ) that is unlike anything else that is limited to this space/time matrix in which we now live?

Listen to Paul, and listen well. Here he is not talking about a paradigm or metaphor (although at other times he does his share of that).

If it is only for this present life that Christ has given us hope, then we are among all people to be pitied the most! But the truth is this: Christ was raised to life, the first fruits of the harvest of the dead. [1 Corinthians 15:18-20]