

So What? It changes everything

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Jesus Christ is Risen

He is risen indeed

Alleluia!

Easter C: Acts 10:34 – 43, Psalm 118.1-2,14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, John 20.1-18

There is a very familiar ad on TV. There is a person beside a car jumping high and punching the air. The catch phrase starts...Oh What a Feeling...How does the rest go? Toyota. I was trying to think of an image or word that captured the joy of this day. That ad image works for me except you substitute Toyota for this...Oh what a feeling, Resurrection. And then you jump in air. Say it with me!!

The Resurrection is way better than a new car – trust me I know. I've experienced both. The new car no so long ago! The resurrection is unbelievably good news. Jesus Christ Is Risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!

But what do we do with this good news? What do we do about Easter Sunday? How do we live like it makes any difference? It seems to me that popular Christianity does not know what to do with Easter Sunday at all. Gatherings like the recent Atheists convention in Melbourne re-enforce secular assumptions that God does not even exist let alone that he raised some one from the dead. Good on them I say - keep talking about the impossibility of a spiritual world – but it is an uphill battle being a Christian against that sort of onslaught let alone believing that a corpse came back to life. Some Christians have just given up trying and put it in the too hard basket preferring to believe it is metaphorical story, a myth if you like, artfully constructed by the first Christians. Some die-hard rationalists are deeply uncomfortable about it, preferring to concentrate on Jesus the “Good Man”, the “Guru”, and the “Wise Man”. Modern humanity is not in a good position to believe the resurrection. But neither were those first witnesses to the resurrection. The thing that got in their way was not popular notions of the way the world worked but the limits of their experience and minds.

When Mary, the first person to lay eyes on Jesus after the resurrection, turns and sees Jesus she does not realize it is him. And why would she recognize him? She is grief stricken, confused, some strange heavenly beings have spoken to her and then she is confronted by Jesus walking and talking. The very last thing she would be expecting or prepared for is Jesus alive. It is only when Jesus calls her by name that she recognizes him. It is only when the fact of their relationship is made apparent to her that she truly sees him. In that relationship Mary is seen and then she sees Jesus. He calls her name and all is revealed. It is as if she is awakened to a new reality and she comes to consciousness, a consciousness of Jesus Christ and indeed a consciousness of herself, Mary.

So often we see and hear what we think is in front of us, what our minds tell us, not what is really there. We live sometimes in a dream world full of preconceptions. As I was folding and stapling the service booklets yesterday afternoon I was listening to an old recording of Jascha Heifetz playing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. It was great stuff. There is a story about Heifetz (and I am not sure if it is true or not) that a concert was coming up where he was to play a Stradivarius violin. There was huge excitement and the concert was sold out immediately all because he was playing a strad. This irked Heifetz somewhat since it seemed that everyone was coming to here a strad and not him. The story goes that he played the

concert and at the end the audience jumped to their feet in thunderous applause. Heifetz then smashed the violin to pieces on the stage. The audience gasped and was appalled. But it was not a Stradivarius. The point Heifetz was making was that a master of the violin could make any violin sound brilliant, he did not need a million dollar instrument. The point I am making is that the audience thought they were listening to a strad and that is what they heard and responded to. Their preconceived ideas set up how they experienced reality.

Our mind is the part of us that sees and hears and we only perceive what our mind can comprehend. Mary could not comprehend a dead body coming back to life. But she could comprehend a relationship with her friend and teacher, Jesus. It is of course when Jesus touches us personally that he comes alive for us in our minds and hearts.

The way to understand what being a Christian is all about is not to read a lot of theology books, it is not to listen to sermons by inspiring preachers or monologues by the new atheists, and it is certainly not to pay much attention to what the media does with it all. The way to understand what Christianity is all about is to enter into a relationship with the Christ.

Believing that Jesus is alive is one thing, knowing Jesus as an intimate friend and brother is another, but believing that it really matters is something else again. I can imagine many people and even some Christians saying as they contemplate the resurrection, “So what?” So what? So WHAT? Are we kidding?

We are talking about the event that changed everything. Everything. What has not changed for the whole of humanity? The consequences are far reaching and potentially life changing. Had there been no resurrection, God may have loved us as the cross reveals but we never would have been able to tell the story that way. Jesus would have remained a small and insignificant footnote to Jewish history, if at all. Because of the resurrection, something is known. Something has occurred that is so extraordinary that it is the ‘shock and awe’ of history. Without the resurrection we would have no faith, no Christian community and no notions of individual responsibility and choice. We would not have had the idea of the betterment of life on this planet.

For the Resurrection is not only a miracle. It is a spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power that is superior to the violence at the heart of our cultures. One of the things we have been considering over Holy Week is how the crucifixion of Jesus reveals to us the violence within our humanity. But that violence is like a hallucination. It is like one of those preconceptions we carry. We think that by acting against others and for ourselves we are making own communities and ourselves safer. What an illusion! I mean what an illusion. Just think about where that illusion has taken us over the centuries. In contrast the power of the resurrection is not an illusion. Far from deceiving the disciples, it enables them to recognize what they had not recognized before. It opens their minds to cold, hard reality.

They acknowledge their own guilt in the violent process that murdered their friend and teacher. They see the whole violent illusion. The preconceptions fall away and then through the forgiveness and peace Jesus offers they are redeemed. And this is not some vague theological idea. This leads to healed relationships and whole people. It is a transformative power. The message of the resurrection is that God is not coming back to raise hell, but to destroy the roots of hell, our own violence. The message of the resurrection tells us forgiveness and peace are the new realities.

My prayer for us all is that that the power of the resurrection will go straight into our hearts. If we are willing to be transformed, if we are willing to let Jesus into our lives, if we are willing to let the love and forgiveness of God in Jesus guide our every thought and action how can it not lead us and the world into fullness of life, now and in eternity? Friends take up your cross but take up your resurrection as well. We have everything to gain and nothing to loose. Amen