

Crazy Talk or a New Creation in Christ?
By Dorothy Whiston ~ New Song Episcopal Church
Easter C ~ April 20, 2025

All the gospel stories about Jesus's resurrection from the dead are a little different. Which is of course totally normal for something first passed on orally. According to the gospel writers, the discovery of the empty tomb always comes in the early morning on the first day of the week. And Mary Magdalene is always among the first to get to the tomb. Depending on who's telling the story, she's either by herself or with one or more other women. There's always at least one angel present; sometimes two. In Mark, the women are so terrified they don't say anything to anyone, but in the other accounts they immediately rush off to tell what they've seen.

Only in Luke's gospel do the women encounter almost complete dismissal of their story. Our sanitized translation says the disciples thought their talk was "idle", but the Greek word means more like delirious or disturbed. Crazy talk!

In none of the gospels does seeing or hearing of the empty tomb elicit a response like "Praise God!" or "Hallelujah!" And not once, do the disciples say anything like, "I knew it! Just like he told us!" In fact, it's always either an angel or Jesus himself who reminds his followers what he'd said about his coming crucifixion and resurrection on the third day. And in only one story, do the first people to see Jesus in person even recognize who he is!

None of the resurrection stories are told in a way that suggests the responses of Jesus's followers should have been somehow different. Shock, terror, amazement, confusion, and sorrow in response to the empty tomb are all seen as perfectly understandable. Even decades later, when the stories were written down, the unbelievability of Jesus's bodily resurrection was still seen as a completely normal response.

So one thing we can say for sure is that if you have doubts about what actually happened in the resurrection of Jesus, or even that it happened, you're in good company.

But....but.... There is a life-changing "but" to the story of Jesus' rising from the grave! All the disciples had their minds changed! They didn't change their own minds. God, in the risen Christ and in the Holy Spirit, changed their minds, and their hearts, for them. This is what metanoia means. We translate it as "repent," but the metanoia Jesus calls us to actually means "to change one's mind." Jesus asks us to let our minds be expanded, to move beyond what we think we know. (And, yes, to do good.)

Jesus's disciples all did come to believe in – to entrust themselves to – the resurrected Christ. Not as a metaphor, not as a myth, not as a new philosophical category. But as a rationally incomprehensible reality they all experienced in their own lives.

Either that, or they were bald-faced liars and our faith is founded on fraud. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching has been in vain and your faith has been in vain . . . and is futile and to be pitied.”

So there really is no mistaking that the disciples truly believed, and those who came after them also trusted, that Jesus had been bodily raised from the dead. And that this reality changed everything.

I admit that in my intellectual skepticism I’ve explored all kinds of perspectives on the resurrection. Yet, I’ve never found metaphor, myth, or philosophical category to be ultimately satisfying in understanding Christ’s rising from the dead. No intellectual construct can ever do justice to the very real and transformational encounters I’ve had with the risen Christ. I still remember exactly where we were and will never forget the look on John’s face when, some decades ago, I declared the presence of Christ was as real to me as he was standing there. And so it is to this day.

I imagine you all know I’m not a creationist. I believe the theory of evolution is the best model we have for how the various species, including ours, came into being. The Big Bang theory outlined by modern physics continues to help us learn more and more about how matter itself came to be. While not very scientifically inclined myself, I appreciate that for many who are, there is absolutely no need to choose between science or faith in God. Evolution and the Big Bang are intelligent, even elegant descriptions of how God works in the natural world.

In that same way, great religious thinkers articulate what many believe to be true about how God works in and through humanity. People’s understandings of God have always relied on their personal experiences of God in dialogue with religious teachings handed down to them. This is certainly how Christ came to know his Abba God. A God who Jesus believed could, and who he trusted would, raise him to new life after death.

The early Christian movement took off because of people’s claim that God entered into human history in a singular way in the resurrection of Christ. In a way that changed their lives and all created reality for all time. Things were – and are – no longer just what they might seem, as unsettling as that may be.

Christians also take as truth the prophet Isaiah’s words from thousands of years ago that God was about to create new heavens and a new earth. With “about” being an evolutionary term. Just as we can’t see physical evolution as it happens, so God’s work unfolds in deep time, largely hidden from our eyes.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, said much the same thing as Isaiah in contemporary terms. In his book *Tokens of Trust*, Williams said that at Easter, “we are really standing in the middle of a second ‘Big Bang,’ a tumultuous surge of divine energy as fiery and intense as the very beginning of the universe.” He says the resurrection is, at least in part, about the sheer toughness and persistence of God’s love at the heart of evolution.

Just as God's self-giving love brought all creation into being in the beginning, so in the resurrection of Christ, God's love is transforming all creation into new heavens and a new earth.

And a new humanity is coming into being as the loving heart of that new creation in Christ. This is something being done unto us – on a personal and a cultural level – by God. We can willingly and consciously participate in what the risen Christ is doing, or we can deny it as idle talk. Or even resist or fight against it, knowingly or not. What we do with God's gift is entirely up to each of us.

Today's reading from Acts helps us remember the essential social dimension of Easter, and the personal contemplative consciousness that makes true unity possible. The call for Peter to visit the household of Cornelius comes during Cornelius' immersion in prayer. And Peter's willingness to break all the religious and cultural norms he cherished to serve gentiles came through a vision given him by God while at prayer.

Many, if not most Christians living today are tempted to set aside the "this world" aspect of resurrection life. Brian McLaren brings us back down to earth in his new book *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*, with these provocative words: "The real horizon in biblical literature is not the end of an individual life at death. Nor is it the end of the space-time universe. It is the end of whatever shortsighted and small-hearted civilization currently dominates the world." So, perhaps our 2025 Easter call is pretty clear. And God knows our world can use our help.

My Easter prayer is that God will touch each one of us in such a way that we come to know in the depths of our being – again or for the first time – that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is utterly real. And it's transforming our world and our lives each and every day, hidden as that transformation may sometimes be.

On Easter, it is our privilege as Christians to echo the good news of the women who encountered the empty tomb in disbelief that early dawn so long ago. And to allow God to propel us into a leap of faith that takes us beyond what we can know solely through our intellect. A leap of faith into new life in the risen Christ. A new life that is propelled entirely by God's love.

Resurrection faith is not something we can muster for ourselves. It is pure grace. A gift handed down by our ancestors in faith and given by God anew in each moment. A gift to every single person and to all of us together as one human family. We accept this gift by surrendering ourselves to divine Love. We participate in this grace by allowing God's Love to be the source and goal of our being.

Resurrection faith is God's work in and for us until that time when, as Teilhard de Chardin said, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God

the energies of love. And then, for the second time in the history of the world, [humanity] will have discovered fire.”

And then, for the second time, the resurrected Christ will walk among us as our new creation in Christ is fully realized right here on earth. God’s peace in our hearts and peace among all peoples and all creation.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!