

### “Christ is Alive”

From Easter Day on our gospel readings have been about the resurrection appearances of Jesus. There are many different opinions about these appearances. There are some who mark them up to hallucinations that the disciples had. Wishful thinking on their part. Others see the resurrection as metaphorical. Not real or a dream but an attempt to tell us something about how the disciples felt in the days after the crucifixion. Of course, there are many of us who believe resolutely in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

For those who think these appearances were hallucinations it seems to me that they simply cannot believe in resurrection because it makes no sense. None of us have ever experienced a person who was dead and in the grave then rising to life again. We have experienced seeing someone in a crowd and for a moment thinking that they were our dead friend or family member until we realize we were mistaken. Our mind can do this because we want to see that person again. But this not what the gospels describe.

The other problem they have is that some of these resurrection appearances have aspects of phantasm. For example, in today’s reading from Luke’s Gospel Jesus appears in the room with the disciples without entering through a door or a window. It is like a first-century Scotty beamed him down from the teleport on the Starship Enterprise. It simply cannot be. Therefore, it must have been a group hallucination because the disciples were scared or maybe because they had not been sleeping. They hallucinated this because it made them feel better during their anguish over Jesus’ crucifixion.

Those who accept the resurrection only as a metaphor find it difficult to believe in a bodily resurrection for similar reasons as those above. However, they are not willing to dismiss it as a fantasy. I think they take their cue from the understanding that many writers in the Bible use metaphor. They see the resurrection as symbolic of how the disciples felt after the crucifixion. The disciples thought that when Jesus died on the cross, he was taken from them. But as they prayed and shared their feelings about Jesus in the days following the crucifixion they realized that he was not gone. He was a real presence with them. He might not be there physically, but it certainly felt that way. When they spoke with others outside of their circle, they wanted them to understand how it felt. They used the metaphor of Jesus’ resurrection to communicate that to their listeners and readers. The renowned New Testament scholar Marcus Borg was among those who believed the resurrection was a metaphor.

Then there are those of us who believe in the bodily resurrection. Some people believe it because they take everything in the Bible literally, they do not accept that sometimes the writers speak in metaphor. Others think that it is more than that. They think that the resurrection happened because without the resurrection there is nothing new in Jesus. Without the resurrection Jesus is just another teacher who spoke wise words but died like people have always died with their life over and done with.

The Resurrection more than anything about Jesus is the game changer. The Resurrection is the overcoming of death. The Resurrection of Jesus also changes everything about Jesus’ life. If God, the Father brings Jesus back from death then everything he said and did is not just wise and good. Everything he said and did is truly from God.

The last of these three understandings of the Resurrection is the most important to me. As crucial as all aspects of Jesus' life and ministry are, it is his resurrection that changes everything. Jesus' preaching and teaching are ways that help me live my life in a godly way. Jesus' miracles are an indication of the deep intertwining of his life with God. His martyrdom on the cross may have been to expiate all our sins. Yet, without the resurrection I do not think they are due the weight that we give them. The Resurrection is the sign that he was more than a shaman, rabbi, or great teacher. He was truly God's son.

His resurrection is also critical to me as an Episcopalian. We are a people of the Incarnation. Some Christians focus on the crucifix with the dead and bloodied body of Jesus. Some Christians focus on the empty cross. Episcopalians among others focus on the Incarnation. We focus on the fact that Christ came down at Christmas to be part of the human family. Christ affirms the words of Genesis that everything that God made is טוב (tov) good.

The creation is not a minefield full of temptations that will distract us from God and lead us on the pathway to hell. No! The creation is good because when God created it God said it was so. The God we believe in is on our side leading us on right pathways, to still waters, and green pastures just as in Psalm 23. We do not have to fear the creation because God made it. What's more, God chose to become incarnate from the Virgin Mary and become a human being with the same needs as us, the same trials as us, living and dying as us.

As written in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

“[Christ Jesus], though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
assuming human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a human,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus who is the incarnate Son of God was born entirely human just as we are. He lived as we do, needing parents, food, rest, friends, and all that is good in this life. Because he lived incarnate his resurrection must be incarnate, back to a body that is touchable and has the needs of a human. That is what the Gospels tell us. That is what the Resurrection means to me.

I will not castigate you if you look at Christ's Resurrection another way. God gave you a brain and the ability to discern for yourself. But no matter how you look at the Resurrection it is my prayer that in the words of the hymn you believe that “Christ is alive!” and you can say with your whole heart “Alleluia. Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!”