



Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter sermon preached during the 8.10am service of Holy Communion at Canterbury Cathedral this morning. The service was broadcast on Radio 4 - [listen again here](#)

Readings: Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an event in history. An event that happened on a certain day. An event with monumental consequences for everything that has happened since. The resurrection changed the lives of those who were witnesses, the lives of those they told, the history of empires, the calendar, ethics, philosophy and human events. Within weeks it led to the start of a church, which now is in every country with over two billion people. The good news of the resurrection spread peacefully through the Roman Empire, long before the scandal of armies marching out in the name of the church.

But why should we believe this story, this unlikely story that caused mockery even in its own time? And so what if we do believe it?

We believe it first of all because the body of Jesus was never found. If it had been there, it could so easily have been used to disprove the claims of the disciples. If they had taken it away themselves someone would have talked. Look how hard it is for any secret to be kept in any organisation. Put that secret, that secret of the resurrection, in the hands of avowedly weak and frightened and powerless people and imagine how likely it would have been to remain secret. They were not brave. They would have told everyone of the plot as soon as they were under pressure. The main leaders were not good: one was bribed, 11 abandoned Jesus and there were hundreds of other witnesses.

And secondly because even when Christianity was legal there was never a tomb of Jesus to go to and remember and honour him. There's one for Peter in Rome. You can find it by going to St Peter's Church in the Vatican. Look round this Cathedral, we have memorials to people of all sorts. If anyone knew where Jesus had been buried it would have been marked dramatically.

And because the witnesses sound real. They're not made up to give credibility. In those days to have a woman as a witness counted half as much as a man. The other witnesses were poor and ill-educated lay people. They weren't wise sages.

And because the disciples were so changed in character, in vision and achievement. Something literally out of this world changed them.

And because people ever since have also been changed, know this person Jesus, love him and give their lives for the truth of this story of resurrection - including millions around the world today - and in a week's time at the Orthodox Easter.

The global church has to its shame sinned and sinned, and it has suffered and suffered, again and again since its birth 2000 years ago. And yet - due entirely to the power, grace and faithfulness of God - the church still finds a spirit of repentance, is given renewal, passes away from old failures and even new failures, and finds fresh life and new growth again and again.

It is my surest conviction and belief that these reasons - when put together - give every cause for us to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as amongst the most certain facts in history.

And that is why Christians long for others to know this God of love who became human, who became like us so that for all eternity we might live and become like him. That fact of the resurrection is why the church speaks of eternal values that are revealed in the risen Christ, even when they're politically uncomfortable, unpopular or treated with derision.

The resurrection of Jesus is claimed by Christians to be the turning point for the whole world, for each of us individually, and all of us together and for the whole of creation, always and everywhere. And that claim was made within 20 – 25 years of his death. So from the finality of death what this means is that the certainty of final endings is over. A new beginning is made.

Without the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, there are simply endings. Look at it through the eyes of the witnesses:

For Peter, it would be the end of any chance of forgiveness for his cowardice and betrayal.

For Mary Magdalene, it would be the end of a relationship, of a friendship, where she was valued, having importance and dignity.

For us gathering here in this extraordinary building, we would not be here because the building would never have been built were it not for the resurrection of Jesus.

It's not just an event in history; it is the most powerful event in history: past, present and the history that we are yet to know.

And we see the reality of the resurrection around us in all corners of the world. We see it in dead relationships that find the warmth of life again after many years of hurt and estrangement. In the millions who've heard the call of Christ and repented, changed their lives and become new people walking in a different way. In conflict reconciled and hatreds overcome. We see people living out the truth of knowing the risen Jesus in lives of new purpose. Purpose that is offered to each of us, and to all of us. Purpose that is God calling to us and saying, "Follow me."

Even in that old institution, the Church of England, we find the power of the living Christ.

For example, why in January did the Church Commissioners (the people who handle our money and stop us wasting it) commit to set aside a £100 million for a social impact investment fund, to invest in communities that have been affected by the historic scandal of slavery? Of course it was because investigation showed that part of its money came from that source. But the reality of the living Christ who we pray to and meet every day made it impossible not to respond when we see that we had done actions that denied the reality of God's universal power and love which the church is meant to live.

Every institution will respond to history in its own way, but in our case it is not something like post-colonial guilt; it is the presence of the risen Christ alive in the Church.

The resurrection means the things of God are eternal. The silent prayers of someone's life; unseen generosity; self-sacrifices made. They're not just actions that improve the world. They are actions that have eternal consequences.

And everything that is against God is sure to die. Injustice and brutality may seem to triumph, cruelty and oppression look as though they get

stronger, yet they will vanish. We know with certainty that policies that cause pain and suffering will fall away because they have no eternal foundation.

Because the tomb is empty, our hearts are full. The full resurrection of the body means this isn't just for one bit of our lives. Nothing is outside the power of God.

And that means eternal life, eternal hope, eternal joy because Christ is risen.

6 min read

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