

Why I Believe In The Resurrection

John 20: 1-18 or Luke 24:1-10
Easter Day

A prominent Baptist pastor, chastised his young son for fighting a public school classmate who was Jewish. He said, **"Son, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Don't you know that Jesus was a Jew?"**

"Father, I'm sorry," his son replied. **"I know God is a Baptist, but I had no idea that Jesus was a Jew."** (Pause)

You probably don't remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day, he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. A Russian Communist leader he took part in the Bolshevik Revolution 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda (which by the way means truth), and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd, he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it.

An hour later, he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. **"Are there any questions?"** Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally, he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: **"THE LORD IS RISEN!"** En masse the crowd arose as one man and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: **"THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED!"** (Pause)

I say to you this morning: **THE LORD IS RISEN!** (Congregational response should be: **THE LORD RISEN INDEED!**). I am convinced! I have faith that Christ was dead and he was buried. That I believe. I also accept as true: He rose from the dead and will come again in glory.

This is Easter. I stand here on this day in this pulpit and proclaim this word . . . I cannot begin to tell you how this belief defines all that I am.

You will say to me, **how do you know that the resurrection is real?** How do you know that it is really TRUE?

I First I would say that I believe in the resurrection because somebody told me about it. Well, some would immediately reply, that certainly is NOT very reliable. **Well, it may not be very reliable** but **the truth of the matter is** that most of what we know is simply because somebody told us about it. (PAUSE) Think about it! How do you know that **Columbus discovered America** in 1492? Were you there? No, you weren't there, but there were people present who witnessed and wrote about it and that is how we know about that. How do you personally know that a man has walked on the moon? Were you standing there to meet him when he stepped off? You may say I know it's true because I saw it on TV. There are people to this very day who insist what you saw was all done in a TV studio down in Hollywood. Many of them would insist **that the International Space Station** is all a hoax. That may sound absurd, but the truth of the matter is this: **I cannot prove or disprove these things either way** and **neither can you.** In the end, I guess I would have to say: I do believe that a man has walked on the moon, simply because a lot of people have told me about it.

We have far more historical proof of the resurrection than we do thousands of pieces of information that we routinely accept as truth every single day. If we are going to take a stand on something, then why not believe the historic testimony of countless people throughout the ages who have declared the validity of the resurrection.

When Mary went to the tomb on that first Easter morning she did so with a heavy heart. Her Master, her teacher, her friend had been murdered. All of life was now in doubt. She stood at the entrance to that tomb weeping. Then she met the gardener. The gardener calls her by name. **"Mary,"** he says. Can you imagine the look in her eyes as she turns and looks into his? Do you remember what she said? The joy of that first Easter can be found in her one word response, **"Rabboni!"** She yells. **"My beloved Teacher!"** From what the gospel of John reports, she must have leaped into his arms. Jesus tells her not to hold onto him just yet.

Now I want you to listen to this next thing Jesus tells Mary. It is the job description for your church

and for mine. He tells her: **Go to my brothers and tell them.**

Undoubtedly, there are people who are bothered by the fact they cannot **prove in any scientific way** when Mary told the Disciples “**I have seen the Lord**” she spoke the truth. **I will grant you that It cannot be scientifically proven; however, the truth is that you will never have more proof than the testimony of those first century witnesses.** There are no photographs. **Resurrection cannot be proved, neither can it be disproved.** That is why there are many brilliant people who believe and many brilliant people who do not believe. What we know about it we know simply because people have told us about it.

II Second reason that I believe in the resurrection is because it has stood the test of time. A lot of things start out good but soon fizzle out. Speaking of Basketball.... (It is March Madness, you know) I'll never forget the old Chicago Bulls. The things that Michael Jordan accomplished on the floor of the United Center were simply impossible to describe. He was the kind of talent that sports journalist love to write about. During the nineties, he eclipsed all other athletes. Even in his comeback later he showed why he was the greatest, lifting a last place team like the Wizards to a competitive status. In my opinion he has been eclipsed by Tiger Woods. What Woods did in winning five Major titles in a row is arguably the greatest athletic accomplishment of our time. Do you know what someone projected? By the time Tiger Woods retires his lifetime earnings will be **6 billion dollars.** That's BILLION with a B.

Let me remind you of something. Athletes, singers and actors are catapulted to national attention but soon they are old news and become faded memories.

Fame fades - new fads and fashions emerge. This is accepted as business as usual by the music industry. The industry philosophy is, “**You are only as good as your last hit record.**” Songs come and go so fast you barely have time to learn their lyrics. Look for a moment at the song **Amazing Grace.** Now there's a song that has stood the test of time. John Newton, that infamous British slave trader, who was converted by John Wesley and subsequently renounced his slave trading wrote this great hymn: “**Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.**

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." Your great grandparents sang that song, and long after you and I are gone, people will still be singing that song. Why? **It's the real thing and it has stood the test of time.**

The story of the resurrection is genuine because it has stood the test of time. As long as there is life on earth people will be talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

III Third, I believe in the resurrection, because I have experienced it. The first century disciples did not believe in the resurrection because they could explain it; They believed in the resurrection because they experienced it. One whom they had known in the flesh and had seen die was now alive and with them.

When we have communion in the United Methodist Church, we invite people to come up to the communion rail and to kneel. After they have kneeled and received the communion elements, they rise and return to their seats. **Some folks want to know why we do that?** Now, some of you might say well it's obvious why we do that. We have to get up because there are others waiting to kneel to take communion so you have to move. (Pause) There is a little more to it than that. This action of kneeling is a symbol of our participation in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. **As we kneel, we are symbolically descending unto death, and when we stand we are proclaiming our experience of the resurrection to new life in Christ.**

Yet, as beautiful a sentiment and a symbol as that is, **there must be more to resurrection than that.** You see? **The best proof of the resurrection is not in what the witnesses SAID they saw.** **The best PROOF of the resurrection is what they DID about what they saw.** A frightened bunch of disciples huddled together in a room with the door barred. That is the scene before the resurrection. A powerful band of mighty witnesses thrust out into the world. That is the scene after the resurrection. It has been estimated that by the end of the first century over a half million people had come under the banner of Christ. **That is the power of resurrection.**

It is very difficult to disregard the testimony of witnesses who are ready to die for their beliefs. People MAY LIE to perpetuate a myth, I grant you that. But people are NOT GOING to DIE

to perpetuate ANYTHING they **know to be a myth**. Oh, you might find one or even two or three. But **not twelve**. They knew what they had seen. They believed in it so passionately that they were willing to put their lives on the line in their efforts to tell the story to others.

Do you recall the saying: **The only difference between a grave and a rut is the dimensions?** It is a folksy way of saying the resurrection is not about the **afterlife**; it is also for **this life** here and now. Don't get in a rut and miss the impact of the resurrection. It is power for the living of these days.

I believe in the resurrection because I have seen the God of resurrection at work. I have seen the risen Christ raise people from the death of despair to the joy of new life.

That is the Easter story. The crucified Lord comes back to life... He assures the disciples that they are forgiven.

Peter had denied his Lord three times.

Thomas had doubted.

All the disciples had forsaken Him.

Christ **came back, forgave them and resurrected them**. He came back to share with them. Here's astonishing truth today! He comes this morning, to share with you the joy, the encouragement and the forgiveness of Easter.

Why do I believe in resurrection?

I believe in it because somebody told me about it! I believe in it because it has stood the test of time! Ultimately I believe in it because I have seen it in the life of others **AND**

I have experienced it personally myself.

That is why I can stand here this morning and shout: **THE LORD IS RISEN!** (Congregational response again: **THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED!**) **HALLELUJAH!**

Pastor Larry Smith, 3/23/08