

STO!

Acts 10³⁴⁻⁴³; Psalm 118^{1-2,14-24}; 1 Corinthians 15¹⁹⁻²⁶; John 20⁻¹⁸

We are witnesses! [Acts 10³⁹]

Just down the road from here, Cadbury's have banned the use of the word 'Easter' in association with their eggs in case other religions get offended!

Should we get upset? After all, in the Gospel there is no mention of Cocoa beans, sugar and milk in secret proportions.

This morning, as we celebrate this great Feast of Easter I want to Stake the Obvious and to do so positively and cheerfully!

Christianity is distinctive from all other faiths in the joining together of three claims:

1. God became man in Jesus.
2. Jesus died and then rose from the dead, conquering death and the fear of death.
3. Jesus offers us full and complete forgiveness as a gift.

These are fundamentals and reveals the character of God as well as the things that are non-negotiable, whether or not other religions are offended (which they are not).

I did, however, have a message from one of my previous students - a very devout Muslim - who asked if there was any evidence for Jesus resurrection? The claim that Jesus rose from the dead is so startling that it is a fair question. So

- ✦ It is possible to find texts outside of the Bible to state that this was what the early Christians were convinced about above everything else. This was what was in their preaching and Christians gathered to celebrate the resurrected Jesus.
- ✦ Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians - one of the earliest Christian documents - is at pains to list how many people Jesus had appeared to - over 500 - and has said bluntly **If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**
- ✦ The Gospels all make mention of the empty tomb and it would have been such a triumph for those who opposed Christianity if they could have produced a body, but they didn't and still haven't!
- ✦ Peter in Acts is keen to dispel any notion of the accusation that this was a spiritual experience when he says, declaring himself as a witness of the resurrection that he **ate and drank with him.**

- ✦ For the first two centuries of Christianity it was something that people - especially those who were listed as eyewitnesses of the resurrection - were prepared to die for rather than state it wasn't true, such was their conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead and had conquered death.

However, if you have made up your mind that the resurrection is an impossibility, there is very little that can be said that will change your mind! But let the real human characters in the text of John stand as a challenge:

- ✦ If you were writing a story about the resurrection of the Son of God you probably wouldn't write this story. Nowhere does anyone tell us about the moment itself or present an image of Jesus standing triumphant over death. Surely that would be important?
- ✦ Instead you have Mary Magdalene, very close to Jesus coming to where the one she loved was laid to spend time working through her grief. - her response to the stone being rolled away was to run and get help.
- ✦ Peter and John run - and fully in character, John is cautious and Peter rushes in. **They did not as yet understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead** so the text goes on blandly to say **the disciples returned to their homes.** It was clear that they had no plan for how to deal with this and it wasn't what they expected.
- ✦ Mary is left alone again and the exchange with the **angels** was one of grief not of joy or of understanding the resurrection **They have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him.** The lack of clarity in the encounter with the **gardner** if fully consistent with grief as is the separate appeal, **if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him.**
- ✦ Can you imagine the suddenness and total abandonment of her response to the simple mention of her name, **Mary**, as she **turned and said to him in Hebrew, Rabbouni!**
- ✦ Mary simply announces to the Disciples - **I have seen the Lord!**

This humanity - the sort of responses that you and I would have made in the same situation - give the Gospel account authenticity: the resurrection of Jesus is what happened.

Cadburys can take or leave Easter - I can take or leave Cadburys. In a world where so many struggle to come to terms with events like the Brussel's bombing that is of no account on the large scale of things! It doesn't change the fact that for 2 millennia the Church has been **stating the obvious.** Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Because of that death is conquered and the sin is forgiven. In a week where a Muslim shopkeeper loses his life because he wishes his Christian customers Happy Easter, I wonder how many Christians would be so committed to the message of the resurrection.