

There is a significant problem with ALL of the accounts of the Resurrection! Not only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but the Emmaus Road, the Upper Room without and with Doubting Thomas, on the shore at Galilee, the one thing all of these have in common is: "No one believed in the Resurrection!"

Jesus had spoken of his death, telling his disciples repeatedly all this had to happen in order for the resurrection to take place. Yet after their compounded losses, of Jesus being Betrayed, Arrested, Tried by the Sanhedrin, then Herod, then Pilate, stripped, whipped and scourged, carrying the cross piece of his own death, hours of watching as he was executed, taking his corpse down, washing the sacrificed body and burying it to decay; NO ONE stood at the tomb as the sun came up shouting HALLELUJAH!

Almighty God created a miracle greater than providing New Land after flooding the whole world; greater than parting the Red Sea; greater than any story anyone had ever heard; as great as the Divine becoming Human: God defeated Death, God overcame Evil, God raised Jesus from death to life... and No one was there to say "Praise God!"

Rationally, reasonably, no one expects Resurrection, and at least at first NO ONE BELIEVES! Each and every witness experienced this for themselves to decide to become A WITNESS. The women went to the tomb with spices, expecting to continue what had been interrupted by THE SABBATH, to anoint the dead body because death stinks... they had no expectation Jesus had been raised. They did not even remember Jesus said this would happen, until the two in dazzling white reminded them. They ran to tell the Disciples and not only do the Disciples NOT BELIEVE, they think it an idle tale... Actually that is not harsh enough, the Greek is that they thought the women were DELIRIOUS, INSANE, UTTER NONSENSE.

Ben Franklin is attributed with saying that the only things in life that are certain, are Death and Taxes. But the resurrection seems to undercut, that even death is not certain, so all we are left with is TAXES. My Seminary classmate, Anna Carter Florence described "All of this is frightening, because if the dead do not stay dead, what can you count on?" Resurrection breaks all the rules, and even when we disagree with laws or rules, at least they give us absolute certainty. Certainty is predictable, a known quantity, and there is comfort in that assurance... RESURRECTION upsets everything we think we know.

This is why WE ARE CHOSEN BY GOD TO BE WITNESSES. Laws may change, circumstances may change, there is always a NEW COKE, or a NEW STYLE; but WITNESSES live and die by what they believe to be true and are willing to publicly affirm.

We have two weddings this week at Valley Church... in a wedding do you know why we have witnesses? Because even 75 years ago, not everyone could read and write, pastors may forget to file a License, WITNESSES are called upon to testify to what they have seen and heard and know to be true.

I went to Seminary TWICE, 10 years of Graduate Study. The first time was a year after college, in the early 1980s. The Professors at the time regularly spoke of the effects of the Enlightenment, the Modern Era, which had been a reaction to the Dark Ages. Ever since the Middle Ages, the World Trusted that there were rules, there is a Periodic Table of Elements, and We could eventually prove everything that was true, from what was false. My Master's Thesis was 382 pages, single-spaced, without counting the Footnotes, Bibliography and Appendices, All to prove my point. For the next 20 years, just as had been true for 500 years before, Reason and Understanding proved essential to faith and life in North America and in the church as well.

But something odd was afoot. I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. Where are the folk who are from St. Louis? In St. Louis in the 1960s, we were there when the Arch was completed, and when the Cardinals won the Series Pennant. There was also a brand new Housing Complex, called Pruitt Igoe, built as part of Urban

Renewal it won all of the most prestigious Architectural and Engineering awards. Pruitt Igoe was a series of concrete sky scrapers, a testimony to Methodology, to Reason and the Enlightenment, everything was rational and ordered and proportional to itself in a larger than human life size! Five years later, Pruitt Igoe was ordered to be destroyed, blown up with dynamite, because it was found to be inhumane. Hidden passages proved to be sought out by rapists, thieves and drug abusers. The concrete monoliths lacked any warmth, color, texture, so what was awarded for all of the intellectual reasons, was detrimental to humanity.

In 1984, two PhD Candidates in the School of Education at the University of Michigan, proposed as their thesis, that no matter how voluminous, THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD when applied to PEOPLE, could NEVER PROVE ANYTHING! There were always spurious pieces of evidence, individual results that were outliers, someone who does not fit the mold. So when I returned to Seminary in 2000, a doctoral thesis was only 20 pages long, double spaced, not trying to “prove anything” but through a number of case studies to describe and witness to an experience. It then became the responsibility of anyone reading the article to decide if this fit their understanding.

Even more, in this new Millennium education now had to explain “Postmodernism”, raising the question whether Postmodern was simply the next evolutionary development, or the Antithesis of Modern, or something totally different? What is at stake in all of this is “What is the Truth? What is Right and Wrong? Who is Authoritative and Whom can we Trust?” It is not enough to listen to CNN or to FOX News, to claim allegiance with one political party or the other... We each need to question what we witness to and why.

According to the Book of Acts, there was a Roman Centurion, A GENERAL from Italy named CORNELIUS, he is about as much a GENTILE as anyone could be. While a Centurion of the Roman Empire, Cornelius still prayed constantly to God and gave alms to care for others’ needs. Cornelius had a Vision from God to send for Peter, and simultaneously Peter had a vision from God not only calling him to go to Cornelius, but that while Israel had been THE CHOSEN PEOPLE, what Peter describes when they meet is his sudden realization, “GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY.” Which is not that God is uncaring... God accepts everyone. There is no difference for God whether a person is Russian or Ukrainian, Chinese or Burmese, American, African, Guatemalan, Mexican, Liberal or Conservative, Republican, Democrat, Gentile or Jew.

The TRUTH that Simon Peter suddenly realized and witnessed to was that: JESUS WAS A MAN, a COMMON ORDINARY ADAM, a LOVING PERSON just like you and me. Jesus was not masquerading as a human, he had no special powers. What we affirm in the Creeds is that he was born, he suffered, he died and was buried. But as God was able to raise Jesus from death to life, as God was able to overcome all powers to hurt and destroy in Jesus, GOD can do so through you and me as well.

The Easter Message is not only that:

Jesus was a real person like us,

Jesus suffered like all of us do, and being mortal died,

BUT On the 3rd Day GOD Raised Jesus from death to life, JUST as We are as well.

Because in our experience, we can identify with the life and experience of Jesus, as well as his death... We can also identify with GOD’S RESURRECTION OF US ALL!

GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY!