

Wrington and Lynch Chapels

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What's Easter for? Well, go to the beginning. The bible says clearly that God wants a relationship with everyone. He doesn't want to frighten us, or just get us to do things for him, for brownie points. And that's the reason for Easter. For centuries, people tried to get in God's good books, instead of getting to know him and learning to love him. God sorted that at Easter.

Good Friday and Easter Sunday are bound together. On Friday, on the cross, Jesus bore your sins and brought you a chance of forgiveness, for ever. But Sunday is when new life came. Jesus is not just about removing your sins. Jesus is about your personal resurrection, for him to live inside you and live his life through you.

So, if you've never run to Jesus, try trusting him. Tell him, 'If it depends on me, I'm in trouble. But I heard that, if I came to you, you would accept me and forgive me, and I would live for ever. So I confess I'm not worthy, But I come to you, my only hope.'

Jesus died on the cross. The thing is: if he stayed that way, it's no use celebrating. That's why the bible says in 1st Corinthians 15:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ...we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

What's that about? The Christian faith rests on the fact that a dead man got up and walked. How, then, can we be sure it's true? Firstly, if Jesus stayed in that grave, how do we explain the disciples? If you lived at that time, you would have seen the disciples' terror at the crucifixion. They hid in an upstairs room, because they were afraid. Everything they believed in had died on that cross. And if Jesus was crucified, it could happen to them. But, forty days later, those disciples confidently preached to thousands of people, 'We have seen a dead man walking! We've spoken to him, eaten with him.'

The trouble is, saying that could get them killed. Would you have insisted on a lie if you knew that every time you said it, you risked death? If Jesus remained dead, why did they stick to their story, even in the face of their own martyrdom?

Something happened to them. There's a solid tradition that Peter was crucified upside down on a cross. He could have gotten out of that easily. All he had to do was say, 'I admit it. We made it up.' If he had said that, he would have lived to old age. But he didn't, and they drove nails into his hands and feet. You don't insist on a lie if you know that you're bringing on your death.

James was killed with a sword. Bartholomew was hacked to pieces. Stephen was stoned to death. Of the original twelve disciples, only one died of old age. They all died insisting they had seen a dead man walking. You can't explain that, unless it really happened.

Secondly, if Jesus remained dead, why did 500 other people say they saw him alive? 1st Corinthians 15 also says:

After that, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living.

Most of them were still alive when this was written. You could have asked them.

If somebody tells you that a dead man rose from a grave, you'd call the psychiatrist. If two tell you, you'd say they're joking. If ten say it, it's a conspiracy. But, if 500 tell you, It's worth checking.

Credibility bothered them, the same as it bothers us. They asked the same questions we'd ask; but they had an advantage - 500 witnesses to question. If that story couldn't stand up to cross-examination, the Christian faith would have died immediately. It didn't. By the third century it swept the world. There's no explanation, except that those 500 really saw a dead man walking.

Thirdly, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, how come the sceptics had no answer? When Rome realised the Empire was being threatened by these Christians, they only had to dig up the grave. If the religious leaders realised their system was in trouble, because of Christians, they only had to produce the body. But, they didn't. Why? Because there wasn't one.

So, what's Easter for? For a dead man to walk. And for him to say, 'He who believes in me will never die. 'That's the catch. He who BELIEVES.

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Every blessing

Duncan