

There is no doubt that Easter presents a challenge to belief unlike anything else in the Christian message.

We know *death*. We do *not* personally know the resurrection from the dead. We might have a compelling visionary or psychic experience of loved ones who have died—that kind of experience does make it more imaginable that Christ is risen. But still, to say that Christ is risen, is very provocative, to say the least. And it would be easier to say that... *it just cannot have happened*.

If it helps any, it is worth noting that the earliest disciples thought the same thing. The various stories of their encounters with Jesus after his death are punctuated with *disbelief*. The Gospel of Luke says this in an interesting way—that the disciples “...in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.” Even with the common ancient spiritual sensibility that, with God, or the gods, anything might happen, the disciples were not at all prepared for that kind of experience of Jesus. I mean, who would? The *candor* of the gospel stories on that point is revealing. But it is also just as revealing that the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection became the consistent testimony of these disciples. And it was so important for the early generations of Christians that they would proclaim this even at risk of death.

Nowadays we are more likely to think that the resurrection is *a somewhat crude metaphor for something we already think we know*—that there is life after death—and that the resurrection is just another way of saying the same thing. So if the resurrection is just a metaphor—well then why would anybody risk anything for just a metaphor? The clear fact of the New Testament is that nowhere did the disciples think they were proclaiming a metaphor—but something that really *happened* and *revealed* more about God, the world, and our purpose in life than we could have known otherwise. The disciples were talking about something very *particular*...that the man they loved...who had been crucified...was nevertheless alive again. They were talking about what they *experienced*—even though they could not understand it.

And the other striking thing about their stories is that not only did they have a hard time themselves believing their own experiences of the resurrection of Jesus, but their experiences of it made them *afraid*. People don’t get afraid of a metaphor. They might have been afraid of a ghost—but the disciples clearly reject that they had seen a ghost. And they might have been afraid if the experience of Jesus was threatening—but he was not...Jesus repeatedly said “Peace be with you.” They were afraid because they were in the presence of something completely outside of normal experience, very strange, and definitely of God.

And Luke’s story contains a strangeness that is almost funny...that soon after Jesus appeared in this specific appearance he asked: Have you guys got anything to eat? It almost makes him sound like a college student who’s come home for the holidays and almost immediately goes to the refrigerator. :) But when you are with people you love...food quickly enters the picture. Jesus’ question invites the disciples back to something very familiar and comforting in their experience together, like a family...the years they had spent with Jesus eating together, listening, and talking with this man they loved. The utter strangeness of the resurrection was embracing of the familiarity of intimacy and love.

Rather than trying to explain Jesus’ resurrection away, how about we try to hear just how contrary all this really is to all our expectations too? And how there is no science that can explain anything like this. There is an inescapable decision we face with the resurrection of Jesus: Do we try to tame this down so that it fits with what we think we already know reality is? Or do we allow for the possibility that Christ *is* risen and maybe we don’t understand everything like we thought we did? And maybe it will change us like it changed the disciples?

Notice how much it matters in the stories that Jesus shows himself *as actually being himself*—even after death. He is not a *ghost*—a faint shadow of himself. He is not just a *spirit*—yet another form of a shadow of himself. But he is *himself*. And we don’t have language for this—but we can say, as the apostle Paul did, that Jesus appeared to the

disciples in a “spiritual-body”—a combination of words we would not normally think to put together—Jesus appeared as truly himself, in a spiritual body, which embraced all that he was...in the glory of God.

And if this is indeed true for *Jesus*, then the proclamation the early church was given was that it will also be true for *us*...and for this *world*. The *particularity* of you...and me...of everything in this world...that endears us...ultimately matters...and will not be sloughed off. Because Jesus is fully himself--and more--after his death, then there is hope that we will be too.

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are...Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.” (1 John 3)

But this is even more than a lofty idea of life after death. The disciples quickly realized that Jesus’ resurrection has real world ethical implications. With God holding onto Jesus’ particularities even after his crucifixion and death...and the promise of the worth of our particularities as persons...God holds all of us accountable for how we treat each other, and for the kind of world we are creating...or destroying. The cross did not simply disappear from the story of Jesus after his resurrection...but was retained, even in his wounds, for a while, and transformed into even more life than was stolen from him. The resurrection holds the world accountable for what it destroys. The resurrection makes the cross even more unacceptable—even as it transforms the cross of Jesus’ tormentors...into the glory of God’s peace.

“You mortals, how long will you dishonor by my glory...?” (Psalm 4)

It is not unrelated then that whenever the disciples announced to others that Christ is risen...that the first response—of those who heard and were moved--was a realization of their ignorance about what they had assumed was necessary of the world and of God...and of their need to repent of their old ways of thinking and living. To affirm Christ is risen...is to imagine the unimaginable...that everything matters...and everybody matters...and of our high calling to live...like that is in fact true.

God’s vision for the world, in the resurrection of Jesus, is infinitely larger than our own. And God’s vision for the world judges all the ways we settle for so much less. The resurrection of Jesus calls us to imagine...the unimaginable wonder...of a God whose will is resurrection...of the whole world...and not to be reconciled with a world still full of all kinds of crucifixions...but to be reconciled...to God.

Peace be with you.