



# into the Melting Pot

*the question is more important than the answer*

Sunday 13 April 2014

## **The Easter Parables - what does 'Resurrection' mean?**

### **Question**

- How do you decide what is believable, what to believe?

*note - believe: to regard as true; to trust*

An opportunity to remind ourselves that faith is not about believing things to be factually, historically accurate (especially those that are unbelievable in a contemporary context!) but is about trusting, about the truth beyond and deeper than 'fact'.

### **The Resurrection Story in the Four Gospels**

We will look at the resurrection accounts in all four Gospels, tracing elements that are common and highlighting differences, but most importantly, seeking to emphasise *the core meaning behind the stories*.

Easter is crucial (pun intended) to Christianity. However, we all have a pre-understanding from the Gospel stories, composited and merged into one, layered with years of preaching, liturgy and hymns.

But were the Gospel stories intended to be reports, history remembered (most likely inaccurately) or are they parable and metaphor to express the truths that are more than factual?

The differences do not mean that the accounts are unreliable: simply that they were written many years after the event, by different authors, with access to different sources, to different audiences with different emphases and points to make; they cannot be an historical account in a modern 'reporting' sense.

Familiarity can take away the power of the resurrection event (however you understand it to have happened). Was it a spectacular 'miracle' which most people today (including a good number of Christians) find unbelievable or do the stories try to convey the Easter experience to others in a language and context of the time, which we need to try to understand in ours?

What we want to do is recognise that whatever happened then, it enabled the disciples to go from the despair of Good Friday to the joy of Easter and the power of Pentecost.

### **Questions**

- What is the core message of the resurrection?
- How can we celebrate the joy of the resurrection?
- How can it change our lives?
- How might we pass this on to others?

*Whatever happened then, it enabled the disciples to go from the despair of Good Friday to the joy of Easter and to the power of Pentecost.*



## The Easter Parables – The Four Gospel Account details

<b>Easter</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
<i>Reference</i>	<i>16:1-8</i>	<i>28:1-10</i>	<i>24:1-12</i>	<i>20:1-18</i>
Page in Good News	71	44	113	144
Mary Magdalene	†	†	†	†
Mary (m. of James)	†	†?	†	
Salome	†			
Joanna			†	
Un-named women			†	
Guards		†		
Earthquake		†		
Angel rolled stone		†		
Stone rolled back	†		†	†
The empty tomb	†	†	†	†
One man	†			
Two men (angels)			†	
Women enter tomb	†			
He is raised	†	†	†	†
Go to Galilee	†	†		
Jesus meets women		†		
Gardener meets Mary				†
Women tell no-one	†			
Woman/women tell disciples	(†)	†	†	†
Peter goes to tomb			†	†
John goes to tomb				†
Peter sees linen			†	†
<b>Post Easter</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
<i>Reference</i>	<i>16:9-20</i>	<i>28:11-20</i>	<i>24:13-53</i>	<i>20:19-21:25</i>
Emmaus Road	(†)		†	
Jesus meets the apostles in Jerusalem			†	†
Jesus meets the apostles in Galilee	(†?)	†		
Thomas				†
Beach BBQ				†
Jesus meets Peter				†
Jesus meets John				†
Taken to heaven	(†)		†	

Note the wide variations in the stories, but also the only two common points

- Mary Magdalene went to the tomb (a woman's testimony was not legally recognised in those days)
- the tomb was empty.

I have generalised the interpretation of the Easter story into three categories:

- Factual, literal, infallibly true, recognising that the witnesses may differ in detail but that the event was still a reality, an historical event, including the resuscitation of a corpse.
- A softer form of the above (is this the majority view?) does not worry about the detail, just that the core is true – the tomb was empty. These folk may be unsure as to what 'resurrection' means, ambivalent or unsure about a miracle, but not delving too deeply.
- Reading the stories as parables, recognising that for those involved, there was an 'Easter experience' that was life confirming, life changing. The question moves from "did this happen?" to "what does it mean?"

The Emmaus Road story is perhaps the most telling part of the Easter experience

- Jesus is 'with us' although we might not always recognise this as such; that is 'Jesus lives' – he continues to be experienced and is a figure of the present and not just of the past.
- Sharing a meal is a fundamental part of loving (in the context of daily grinding poverty), and Jesus is 'recognised' by such loving action
- Jesus explains the scriptures – his life and death make sense of the written 'word'.

### Acts of the Apostles

Luke's Acts continues the Easter story and throws up some additional differences:

- Luke records another 'ascension' – were there two?
- The receiving of the Holy Spirit – there are multiple records: in the Upper Room, or several weeks later at 'Pentecost'.
- Paul's 'Damascus Road' vision was several years after the Easter experience.

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### Resurrection

The assumed meaning of the word is always 'physical', a re-invigorating of a corpse, a supernatural bringing back to life (eating, touching, passing through walls, . . .). Some may think that way, and good luck to them.

(Some call for a re-claiming of the language of the church; I would prefer a different word without the baggage . . .)

But don't ask that question; instead ask "what does the Easter event mean, to me, right here and right now?"

Metaphorically, resurrection is about **new life**

- **Jesus lives** – death and resurrection are coupled; a metaphor for our personal transforming, our being 'born again', becoming followers of 'the Way', being re-invigorated as people of purpose.
- **Jesus is Lord** – crucifixion and vindication (proved to be right, to be justified): Jesus is Lord, not the imperial authorities who crucified Jesus; not the religious authorities who were uncomfortable with his message. Jesus is vindicated because his peaceful, anti-imperial message of hope and love is for all, especially the 'poor', and this requires in us all a political transformation that actively seeks (distributive) justice in our world today.

*Recommended reading: The Last Week – What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' last days in Jerusalem – Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.*