

Why Was Jesus Resurrected?
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John 20:1-18 (NRSV)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

As we have traveled together this Lenten season, Jeff and I have tried to address some of the questions that have arisen during the journey. We come today to the culmination of that journey. We have traveled together from the Galilee to Jerusalem.

We were there when Jesus came into Jerusalem on “Palm Sunday” on a donkey, while at the same time, Pilate entered Jerusalem from the other side of town with his soldiers.

We watched as Jesus turned over the tables,

as he gathered together with his disciples for a last meal.

We watched as he was crucified and his dead body taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb.

If the story ended there — we wouldn’t be here this morning. We would not have come in expectation about the possibilities of a new kingdom. Without the resurrection — Jesus is just another Jew crucified by the Roman Empire in a time that saw thousands upon thousands of brutal crucifixions.

But it didn’t end there.

And we are here this morning because we want to experience the resurrected Christ in our own lives.

Now we could ask the standard questions.

Why was Jesus resurrected?

How was Jesus resurrected?

One of the things that has always bothered me is the notion that God had this bloodthirsty desire that can only be satiated by a perfect sacrifice.

The idea that Jesus had to die because God fore-ordained it — That makes no sense to me.

The idea that God won’t love God’s creation unless we pay a penalty.

That it is only by a blood payment that we can be in a relationship with God.

It doesn’t work for me.

But that is not the only understanding of Jesus death.

The notion of substitutionary atonement was first fully developed by St. Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury in the year 1097.

This concept goes way beyond what the New Testament says.

There is no question but that the language of sacrifice was one of many that the New Testament authors uses — but it wasn’t the only way they

understood Jesus death.

They also saw Jesus death as the result of the domination system wanting to get rid of this revolutionary troublemaker.

As I understand the Gospel stories Jesus did not die FOR the sins of the world — Jesus was executed BECAUSE of the sins of the world.

And we could spend time asking ourselves just what took place as we look at the resurrection stories in the Gospel.

How did it happen, and just what happened.

But at the end of the day — after we have picked apart, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul — where would it leave us? We would realize that we don't have a single understanding of what the resurrection was — nor do we have even similar stories of how the disciples encountered the resurrected Jesus.

So what does that do for us? NOT MUCH!

The reason is — that is the wrong question.

The question is not what happened. The question is WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The importance of the resurrection stories lie in their meaning.

I believe Jesus was resurrected. And I agree with Paul when he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:12

If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it — if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors.

But the question is not **IF** there was a resurrection.

The question is what does the resurrection mean to you!

As I read the gospels it seems that two themes run throughout them.

First, JESUS LIVES.

Jesus continues to be experienced even after his death.

At the very end of Mark's gospel, we are promised that "You will see him."

That is the whole point.

We, you and I can still experience Jesus today — and some of you have.

Borg and Crossan put it this way in *The Last Week*

the truth of the affirmation “Jesus lives” is grounded in the experience of Christians throughout the centuries. Not all Christians have had such an experience. It is not essential. To quote from one of John’s Easter stories, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” But some Christians to the present day have experienced Jesus as a living reality. For us, this is the experiential ground of the first of the central Easter affirmations: Jesus continues to be and to operate. The spirit, the presence, his followers knew in him before his death continues to be known. Jesus lives.

Think about the people you know who have encountered the resurrected Jesus — Their life is not the same.

All I need to do is think of someone who is a missionary.

Our group going down to Slidell

John Wesley

Mother Teresa

But many just plain common folk — who live with a certain attitude and focus

I think of that Liberty Mutual commercial

The woman picking up her kids from a soccer game and waits for the parent to come for the other boy

Those to me are all people who have experienced the resurrected Jesus — and because of that experience their life is not the same.

I think the second message of the Easter stories is that God has said “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the powers that executed him.

The most common post Easter affirmation about Jesus in the New Testament and in the non-biblical texts is; JESUS IS LORD. And if Jesus is Lord, the lords of this world are not!

If Jesus is Lord — then Caesar is not Lord!

When we look at Easter as the reversal of Good Friday it means that God has vindicated Jesus passion for God’s Kingdom, for God’s justice — and has said “no” to the powers that killed him. Powers that unfortunately are still very

active in our world today.

And the way that we live that resurrection experience – the way that Jesus lives — is when we take seriously the way that he showed us. A way that is not about you or me, a way that is about God — about God’s kingdom — about God’s justice.

Jesus passion was for the kingdom of God — what life on earth would be like if God really was king — and the rulers of this world — the dominations systems — the empires were not.

That is the world that the prophets dreamed of.

A world in which everyone has enough
no one in Hammond or Haiti would go to bed tonight hungry
A world in which justice — God’s justice rules.

That is the invitation that God offers to us.

Unfortunately, we are the empire of our day.

We may not be about taking over other countries lands.

But we are about using our military and economic power to shape the world for America’s, our, interests.

Barbara Ehrenreich, in her best selling book about the working class in the United States called *Nickel and Dimed* really illustrates how we as the empire of our day are using the death of Jesus to keep the system going. In the book she talks about going to a revival meeting which was attended primarily by poor people. The preachers sermon emphasized over and over again how because of Jesus sacrifice on the cross, these people would be vindicated in heaven. She writes:

It would be nice if someone would read this sad-eyed crowd the Sermon on the Mount, accompanied by a rousing commentary on income inequity and the need for a hike in the minimum wage. But Jesus makes his appearance here only as a corpse; the living man, the wine-guzzling vagrant and precocious socialist, is never once mentioned, nor anything he ever had to say. Christ crucified rules, and it may be that the true business of modern Christianity is to crucify him again and again so that he can never get a word out of his mouth.

She concludes:

I get up to leave, timing my exit for when the preacher’s metronomic head movements have him looking the other way, and walk out to

search for my car, half expecting to find Jesus out there in the dark, gagged and tethered to a tent pole.

WOW.

But the truth is we don't want to deal with justice — we don't want God's kingdom — we want the kingdom of capitalism and the American Way — that takes care of us.

Borg and Crossan conclude their book with these words:

Holy Week and the journey of Lent are about an alternative procession and an alternative journey. The alternative procession is what we see on Palm Sunday, an anti-imperial and nonviolent procession. Now as then, that procession leads to a capitol city, an imperial center, and a place of collaboration between religion and violence. Now as then, the alternative journey is the path of personal transformation that leads to journeying with the risen Jesus, just as it did for his followers on the road to Emmaus. Holy Week as the annual remembrance of Jesus's last week presents us with the always relevant questions: Which journey are we on? Which procession are we in?

Jesus Christ is risen is what we proclaim today.

BUT IS HE?

Or are we just keeping Jesus nailed to a cross — so that he can't change us or challenge our way of living — the procession that we are in?

It takes us following a resurrected Lord — a living Lord — A Risen Lord to combat the evils of our world.

God isn't going to come and do it for us.
 God has already shown us the way —
 Now all we have to do is decide if we are going to follow.

Jesus Christ is Risen!
 Jesus Christ is Risen indeed!

St Augustine — “We without God cannot, and God without us will not.”