



Christchurch Ikley

Online@9 – Sunday 30 March 2008

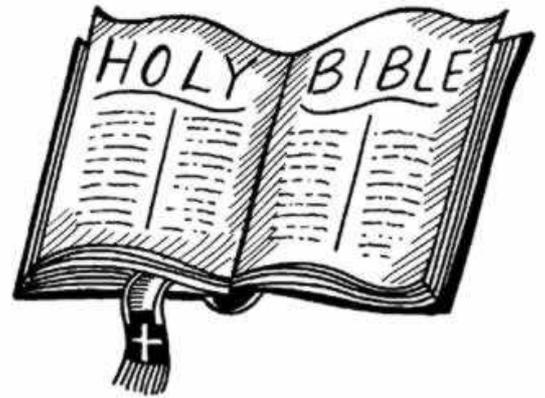
'SIFT the Evidence!'

John's gospel tells of two meetings with the risen Jesus on Easter day. Early in the morning Mary meets Jesus near the empty tomb. In the evening the disciples meet Jesus in their locked house. So with confidence they can say, 'We have seen the Lord.'

Thinking

For some of us faith does not come easily. We look at life with a proper caution. We are wary of enthusiasm. We are suspicious of those who are convinced too easily. Sceptical Thomas is a disciple after our own hearts.

Surely Thomas was right to be sceptical. There was so much to be sceptical about. The whole of Jerusalem knew by now what had taken place on the Friday. They knew about the trial. They knew about the crucifixion. They knew about the death. The soldiers could not keep quiet about the final thrust of their spear. Can talk of resurrection make any logical sense? Is it not better to be sceptical than gullible?



Surely Thomas was right to be sceptical. There was so much to be sceptical about. Already from early in the day the network of Jesus' followers had been buzzing with excitement and with rumour. Peter and that other disciple whom Jesus loved had been to see the tomb. They had found the stone rolled away, but they had found no body. They had seen no risen Lord. On the basis of such slim evidence, can talk of resurrection make any logical sense? Is it not better to be sceptical than gullible?

Surely Thomas was right to be sceptical. There was so much to be sceptical about. When Mary Magdalene returned from the tomb, she came proclaiming, 'I have seen the risen Lord.' But the evidence of one person testifying alone would never stand up in court. When pressed, Mary Magdalene could not say that she actually touched Jesus. On the basis of such slim evidence, can talk of resurrection make any logical sense? Is it not better to be sceptical than gullible?

Surely Thomas was right to be sceptical. There was so much to be sceptical about. The other disciples came proclaiming 'We have seen the risen Lord.' But they brought no real physical evidence of what they had seen, no fingerprints or plaster cast of the wounds. On the basis of such slim evidence, can talk of resurrection make any logical sense? Is it not better to be sceptical than gullible?

Sceptical Thomas is a disciple after our own heart. But once Thomas saw for himself, Thomas believed. Maybe it would be just too sceptical not to trust his judgement now.

(Readings taken from Exploring Mark's Gospel by Leslie J Francis and Peter Atkins published by Continuum ISBN 0-8264-6562-5)



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Feeling

Here is a story about how some very different people came to find faith in the risen Christ. The people are very different; their pathways to faith are quite distinct; and yet there is a clear pattern to their different personal experiences.



Get to know Mary Magdalene. Share her experiences from the inside. On the Friday, Mary Magdalene shared the anguish of standing at the foot of Jesus' cross. She had felt her hopes drain right away. On the Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb, not knowing what to expect. But she had put herself in a position from which Jesus could take the initiative. Share in Mary Magdalene's joy as Jesus addresses her by name, 'Mary'. With her cry, 'Rabbouni' faith is announced and commitment proclaimed. Here is Mary Magdalene's journey to faith.

Get to know Peter. Share his experiences from the inside. On the Friday, Peter had shared the anguish of seeing Jesus led away to Golgotha and nailed to the cross. He had felt his hope drain right away. On the Sunday morning, Peter had come to the tomb, not knowing what to expect. His mistake was to leave too quickly and not to put himself in a position from which Jesus could respond.

Get to know Peter better. Share his experiences from the inside. On that Sunday evening, he had met with the other disciples behind locked doors. Now, Peter had put himself in a position from which Jesus could take the initiative. Share in Peter's joy as Jesus addresses the disciple by name, 'Peace be with you.' With their cry, 'We have seen the Lord', faith is announced and commitment proclaimed. Here is Peter's journey to faith.

Get to know Thomas. Share his experiences from the inside. Like the other disciples, Thomas had shared the anguish of seeing Jesus led away to Golgotha and nailed to the cross. Like the other disciples, on the Friday Thomas had felt his hope drain right away. On the Easter Sunday evening, his mistake was not to place himself in a position from which Jesus could respond. The following week, however, Thomas was there with the others. Share in Thomas's joy as Jesus addresses him by name, 'Do not doubt but believe.' With his cry, 'My Lord and my god', faith is announced and commitment proclaimed. Here is Thomas's journey to faith.

Here is a story about how some very different people came to find faith in the risen Christ. Share their experiences and learn from their examples.

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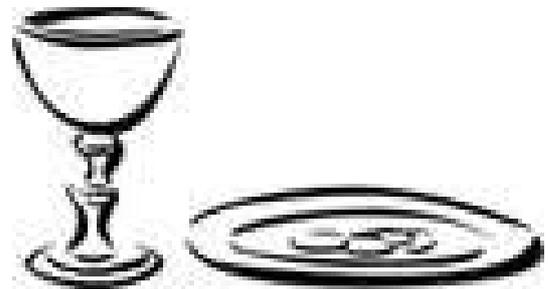
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Intuition

The story which John tells about the disciples' encounter with the risen Lord on the first Easter Sunday, when it was evening, contains the key ingredients of our Christian liturgy. Do you see what I mean?



When we come together to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we begin our liturgy with the words of salutation. Do you not immediately link the salutation with Jesus' words to his disciples, 'Peace be with you'?

When we come together to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we come with the mood of penitence and with the need for confession. Do you not immediately link this confession with Jesus' words to his disciples, 'If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven'?

When we come together to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we come with the intention of renewing and reaffirming our faith. Do you not immediately link this creedal affirmation with the disciples' words to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God'?

When we come together to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we come to be nourished and strengthened through the Eucharist with the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Do you not immediately link these holy gifts with Jesus' words to his disciples, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'?

When we come together to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we conclude our liturgy with the words of dismissal. Do you not immediately link the dismissal with Jesus' words to his disciples, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'?

When we are dispersed again to the four corners of the world, having met to commemorate our Lord's death and resurrection, we are commissioned to proclaim our faith to all and sundry through word and deed. Do you not immediately link the call to witness to the disciples' proclamation, 'We have seen the Lord'?

Today, when we repeat these liturgical words and actions in the Eucharistic community, the risen Lord continues to stand in our company. Do you see what I mean?

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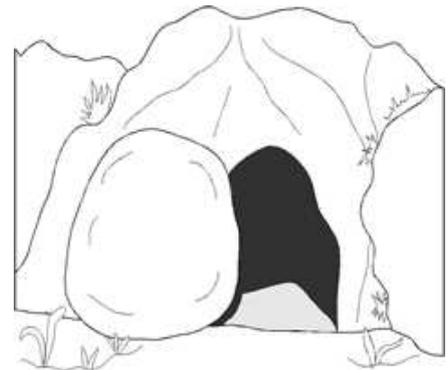
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Sensing

It is important to know what happened on that first Easter day. Listen carefully as the story unfolds. There are two facts that John wants to establish.

The first fact concerns the body in the tomb. There were objective witnesses to the fact that Jesus was really dead. Listen to the evidence. When the soldiers inspected the three criminals hanging on the crosses, they verified that Jesus was already dead. Then they pierced his side with a spear. With the witness of the soldiers, no residue of doubt could remain. Jesus was dead.



The first fact concerns the body in the tomb. There were objective witnesses to the fact that Jesus was really dead. Listen to the evidence. When the soldiers had finished their work, it was Joseph of Arimathea who took the body away. Joseph of Arimathea knew Jesus well. His witness can be trusted. Then Nicodemus, who had known Jesus from the very beginning of John's gospel, came to help prepare the body for burial; his witness too, can be trusted. With the witness of Joseph and Of Nicodemus, no residue of doubt could remain. Jesus was dead.

The second fact concerns the resurrection from the dead. There were objective witnesses to the fact that Jesus was really, fully alive. Listen to the evidence. On the first day of the week, when it was still dark, Mary Magdalene saw Jesus walking through the garden. Jesus spoke. Mary Magdalene knew his voice; her witness can be trusted. This close disciple went away and proclaimed with confidence, 'I have seen the Lord!' But with only one witness, the residue of doubt could still remain.

The second fact concerns the resurrection from the dead. There were objective witnesses to the fact that Jesus was really, fully alive. Listen to the evidence. On the first day of the week, when it was evening, the main body of the disciples saw Jesus walking through the house. Jesus spoke. The disciples knew his voice; their witness can be trusted. These close disciples went away and proclaimed with confidence, 'We have seen the Lord!' With the witness of so many, no residue of doubt could remain. Jesus is alive. Alleluia!

It is important to know what happened on that first Easter day.

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