

Sermon for Easter Sunday
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Holy Nativity, Plano

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Christianity presents us with a story. In outline, it's the story that Peter the fisherman told. "The prophets all told us this would happen. God sent Jesus of Nazareth. He went around healing and helping people. They hung him on a cross and killed him; but God raised him back to life and showed him to us. And then we ate and drank with him. He commanded us to tell everyone that he is going to be the judge. But he is also the one who forgives the sins of those who believe in him."

This is not a mythical story. On its own terms, it claims to be historical fact. Christianity is one of only three religions that claim to be founded on historical fact. (Four, if we count the life of the Buddha.) And none of the others make claim to a resurrection from the dead. Abraham died and was buried. No one has ever claimed otherwise. Muhammad died on 8 June, 632 A.D. His followers still visit his tomb. Buddha actually taught that the individual didn't really exist in the first place, much less after death. Jesus, on the other hand, was publicly executed, his death certified by the professional executioner to the satisfaction of the state. And no one has ever successfully refuted the report of his resurrection.

Century after century, the brightest of the skeptics have attempted to refute the claim of the apostles and come away from the endeavor fervent believers. Nowadays, the skeptics have learned better. They no longer send their brightest into that battle. It's easier just to teach the "obvious" conclusion that the Resurrection is a fable, leaving the student a bit misty on the evidence. The reason they just ignore the evidence these days is that it is inconvenient.

Examine it under whatever system you like; legal, scientific, or historical. It will stand the test. The Resurrection is a fact.

Neither is the Resurrection of Jesus some accident of history. Jesus himself claimed in no uncertain terms that his Resurrection would be the sign that everything else he said was true. He rarely spoke of his death without also predicting his Resurrection and claiming that he would accomplish it of his own will and in his own power. The Resurrection is a fact that requires belief in the rest of Jesus' teaching and miracles.

And if we believe in the rest of Jesus teaching and ministry, we find that we must believe historical Christianity; lock, stock, and barrel. Yes, Christians are divided, and there are details on which we disagree. But for the last two thousand years, Christianity has taught the same basic story. It is Peter's story. And it makes a very important point in terms of our own lives. Actually, two points.

First, that there is a judgment coming. Jesus has been given complete authority by God the Father. "He is Lord of all," Peter says. And in the end, he will brook no imperfection in his creation. There is an end point toward which the world is moving. And each of us has an end point (usually not more than a hundred years from now, and for most of us much less) toward which we are moving. There will be an examination at the end of the term.

Second, however, the examination will not be based on how much good you did versus how much bad. We would all fail that one. The examination will be based on whether you trusted Jesus, whether you believed in him and acted on that belief. He has already dealt with the good versus bad thing. He took on the punishment for that by himself. The question is whether we will accept that gift with gratitude and joy.

Today is the sign that Jesus accomplished what he set out to accomplish. He conquered death and sin. He settled our unpayable debt. He won for us

everlasting life. If we want it, all we have to do is trust him and try to do what he asks.