

The Season of Easter

The Bible offers us all kinds of resurrection stories. In every gospel the women go to the tomb and find angels in white, but after that all the accounts diverge. Matthew's story begins with an earthquake and ends with the disciples worshipping at the feet of Jesus. Mark reports that the women were so frightened by the empty tomb that they told no one what they had experienced and ends with the disciples just as terrified so that they don't know what to do next. In Luke the women are excited to report what they saw but the disciples don't believe them. And, John's version reminds me of the Keystone Cops with several disciples running helter-skelter to the tomb to see for themselves.

Later, Thomas refuses to believe that Jesus is alive until he touches his wounds. Peter sees Christ across the Sea of Galilee cooking a meal on the beach. Other random disciples encounter the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus but don't recognize him until they share a meal and Jesus disappears.

Seems like a heck of a way to start a religion. Wouldn't it have been better if the Bible had gotten the story straight. Wouldn't it be more convincing if there was one accepted version...one standard account on which we could all hang our hats.

In fact the thin thread of agreement over the resurrection isn't even found in the gospels. Rather, it is told to us by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians written about twenty years after Jesus' death.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

1 Corinthians.

That's pretty much the extent of the agreement: died...buried...raised on the third day...appeared.

This makes me wonder if the Bible ever intended to present one unified version of the resurrection. I think that the Bible is telling us that resurrection is much too important to be contained in one simple version. Diana Butler

Bass writes, "The resurrection is not one thing. It is a prismatic mystery. It is an...experience of the beyond breaking in, the reality of love and life and justice and joy no matter the power of death. One story, a single angle of vision, can't begin to explain or communicate it."

Far too long, Christians have thought of the resurrection as a puzzle to be solved. Theologians and church leaders have sought to harmonize the accounts into a single narrative, privileged one story above the others, and attempted to create creedal conformity. Some tried to prove the resurrection scientifically and through historical evidence. But, what if the quest for uniformity is a mistake? What if the diversity of these accounts is actually a gift.

I believe that those people who need to know for sure exactly what happened on Easter morning and after are missing the point. They are spending too much time trying to figure it out, literally and historically, and not enough time enjoying the truth that through the resurrection, God in Christ is loose in the world. Nothing can contain Christ...not even death. And, perhaps if we think less about "How did it really happen?" and think much more about "What does it mean to us today?" then we might be surprised to see the resurrected Christ all around us.

Whatever happened on that morning a long time ago, it keeps happening...to me and to millions of others in thousands of ways in a multitude of times and places. I'm less worried about what happened then than how we experience the living Christ each day of our lives and how we practice living in the light of the resurrection.

That's why I'm so glad that Easter is not a day but a fifty-day season of the church. This year it begins on April 1st and continues until May 19th when we will celebrate the day of Pentecost. It's fifty days for us to contemplate the gift that God offers us through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and how our lives might reflect that kind of wondrous love to others.