

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!¹
The Lord is risen indeed!² Alleluia!

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As different as the various Gospel accounts of the Resurrection are, they all share one thing.

They're all filled with people getting things completely wrong.

In John's account, as we hear it today, Mary sees that the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the tomb and she assumes that the body of Jesus has been stolen. Simon Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loves as John writes of himself, come to the tomb at Mary's call. They see the linen cloths but can't work out what it all means; and then just go back to where they came from without waiting to find out. No alleluias. No joyful proclamations that he is risen. Just a walk back home in the dark; both literally and figuratively. Then, as Mary stands outside the tomb weeping, assuming that someone has desecrated the body of her Lord, she's questioned by some angels dressed in dazzling white. But even with that hint of something great, Mary still doesn't know what's going on. Then, as she turns from the tomb, she sees Jesus; but, in her grief and fear, she assumes that he's just the gardener. And even when she realises that he is risen she's told not to reach out and touch him, as natural and as normal as doing so would have been.

You could hardly get more misunderstandings, more confusion, more mistakes, more errors, into a couple of paragraphs if you tried.

And the other gospel accounts are little better.

In Matthew's account the women run from the empty tomb in fear.

In Mark, the disciples refuse to believe Mary when she tells them that she's spoken with Jesus; and when two others give a report about walking with Jesus outside the city, the disciples refuse to believe them as well. In fact, so great is their unbelief that when Jesus finally appears to the apostles, he first rebukes them for their stubborn refusal to believe that he has risen.

Luke tells us in his account that the apostles assume that the first reports of the Resurrection are little more than idle tales; and when Jesus joins two followers on the road to Emmaus, they're completely blind to who he is.

And then, of course, there's the apostle Thomas and his refusal to believe any of this until he can see it for himself; and is able, as he says, to put his finger into the mark of the nails and place his hand into Christ's wounded side.

And the point of all of this confusion and error and misunderstanding is simply this: that Resurrection burst into a world of time and space and matter, a world filled with real history and real people and real life and real assumptions and real expectations, but our minds were too small to even begin to comprehend it.

Now, on one level, all that confusion and error is a clear sign of the story's authenticity. If, as some like to imagine, someone was just making up all of these

¹ Χριστός ανέστη

² ἀληθῶς ανέστη

accounts a generation or two later they would hardly have invented such a muddle.

But the first Christians weren't in the least ready for what actually happened. Nobody could have been. And, as a result, they struggled to describe something for which they didn't have the right words. And even in our own time, we struggle to understand what it all means. We look to nature to show us the way; to give us the words; but Resurrection is so utterly un-natural that images such as butterflies and lilies and easter eggs barely scratch the surface. We talk about light overcoming the dark; of love conquering hate; even of some nebulous form of spiritual life after death; but none of that really gets to the heart of the matter.

But for all of their struggles, and ours, the Resurrection is the central event of all history. Not just Christian history but of ALL history. The moment toward which all that preceded it was rushing; and from which everything emerges anew.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a shock wave that has rattled throughout all time and space; so much so that the world is, in fact, a different place, full of hope and possibilities never previously imagined.

But do we really know what this means?

Well, it means that death has no ultimate claim on us.

It means that we need not live in fear or denial of anything.

"The last enemy," St. Paul writes, "that shall be destroyed is death."

And it shall be defeated, because it has already been defeated; on a Sunday morning in a Garden tomb just beyond the walls of the City of Jerusalem.

Which is why the Resurrection became such a life-changing thing for Mary and Peter and John and all of the others.

Completely; utterly, absolutely life changing.

And it's why they spent the rest of their lives proclaiming it; even when it meant violence and death for them. Because they'd seen the darkness. Because they'd felt the reality of hopelessness and despair. Because they'd known the full weight of failure. And if Jesus was no longer dead; if, somehow, somehow, Jesus was risen from the dead, then he must have been right all along. That he was no pretender or fool or mad man. The fact that he was standing before them alive could mean only one thing: that he was the Christ; that he was alive; and that life had changed for ever.

His life, yes; but their lives as well.

And that's what happens to us.

That in Jesus Christ Resurrection is not just a future hope.

It's not just the life that we are promised after we die.

It's the life that we have right now.

Life changed, given new meaning, new purpose; shaped by hope.

In a world filled with darkness, a world groaning in pain, where hopes can so often be shattered in the blink of an eye; and our expectations are constrained by what we think is reality, because of the Resurrection and only because of the Resurrection, we, like Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter and John and the disciples, [we] can live in hope; without anxiety; without panic; without fear.

And we, like them, on this Easter morning, can echo that ancient cry:

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!*