



Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class
Apostles' Creed
March 3, 2024

Rose Again - Part 1

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." 1 Corinthians 15:13-17

"If Christ has not been raised...." No one can accuse St. Paul of skirting around the ultimate question. For if Christ has not been raised, he was just another in a long line of well meaning but ultimately misguided teachers who gathered followers, fell out of favour, and was ultimately killed for what he/she believed. The history of the world is filled with many examples from Socrates in ancient Greece to Alexei Navalny in Russia. They may live on in their teachings, they may live on in the hearts of those who cared for them, but their lives are over.

The Christian Church confesses that there is one exception to the finality of death. We believe that Jesus Christ, rose bodily from the grave on the Sunday following his execution. We confess that even though he died a real death, he is now and evermore will be alive as our Lord and our Saviour. This belief separates Christianity from all other world religions past and present.

Is it true?

Is the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave actual fact, or is it what we "hang onto to get us through the tough parts of life"?

While it is impossible to empirically verify the resurrection using modern scientific methods, there are several things that can help us see the Scriptures as an historically accurate account of the resurrection of Jesus. Among these are the following:

1. The Tomb was empty. Of this there is no doubt. Even Jesus' critics acknowledged the body was not in the tomb on Sunday morning.
2. Resurrection was the last thing anyone expected to happen. Even though Jesus foretold the resurrection at least 3 times in his earthly ministry, no one, including the disciples understood resurrection the way Jesus meant it. This was more than wish fulfillment.
 - a. Jewish hope was in a "general resurrection" at the end of time. It would have never occurred to Jesus disciples to make up a story about bodily resurrection. They did not believe such a thing was possible.
 - b. Greeks and Romans were even more pessimistic about life after death. At best they believed in the immortality of the soul.

3. There were witnesses. Hundreds of them, in fact. Paul writing some 25 years after the resurrection speaks of Jesus appearing to more than 500 people in the days following Easter (1 Corinthians 15:6). While some of these folks had died, many were still alive and were able to verify the reality of the resurrection.
4. The first witnesses were women. In the ancient world, women were not generally regarded as credible witnesses. They could not give evidence in court and were often deemed to be given to hysteria. One gets a sense of this in reading Luke 24:22 when the Emmaus disciples report hearing the story of the women who had gone to the tomb. Had women been seen as credible witnesses these disciples would not have been on the way home. It follows therefore that if the Gospel writers were inventing a story to explain the missing body, they would not have had women be the first to encounter the empty tomb and the Risen Lord. Other more acceptable witnesses would have been written into the story.
5. While each Gospel records the resurrection, they are alike, but not exactly alike. If people invent a story to explain something they want others to believe has happened the first task is to get all those who invent the story onto the same page. Make sure everyone agrees with each other about what happened. The Gospels show no sign of mutual influence as they record the events of Easter morning. Each record the same event, but do so differently, highlighting different events, at different times to underscore the reality of what happened. This is what eye-witness testimony looks like. Agreement on the main event, with some differences.

Thus, while the resurrection of Jesus is not like the always provable Pythagorean Theorem (the sum of the square of the 2 sides of a right-angle triangle always equals the square of the hypotenuse), there is a solid, real-life basis for belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

The Power of the Resurrection

Accepting the reality of the resurrection is, however, just the beginning. The resurrection is not just fact but is to be the basis for our entire existence. St. Paul puts it this way:

“⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection**, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:8-10

In our next sessions we will turn our attention to living out our resurrection faith.