

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

*"Why I Believe in the Resurrection"*

**A BLESSED RESURRECTION DAY TO ALL**

We gather once more to recall the most important sign God has given our world concerning death and life – the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is why we are here today. Without it, there is no true Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul wrote in **1 Cor. 15:14, 19; 32b**, *"and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain... If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die....if Jesus Christ has not been bodily raised our faith is in vain."*

It would mean that the Apostle's John and Peter, who both declare in their letters that they were eyewitnesses, were lying. It would totally discredit this book and our faith. That is why I am amazed when there are so called ministers and scholars in the Church who say it doesn't matter, even if the bones of Jesus were found, the truth of His resurrection wouldn't change. Or those who go a step further and discount a bodily resurrection altogether while telling people that what is most important is the *idea* of the resurrection. How truly pathetic?

I am glad that we have a God who is so clear and honest in His Word. The Bible says if it isn't so, this is all a charade. But the fact is Christ has risen from the grave. Of course, the question that arises is how do we know? That is a fundamental question we have all asked and I believe it is one that we should be able to answer if we are a believer.

The Apostle Peter writes in **1 Peter 3:15**, that we should always be able *"to give a defense for the hope within in us, yet with gentleness and reverence."*

Why is this so important? Not only to give a defense for what we believe, but it also will affect how we live our lives. You see if we are not convinced, then it won't make any difference in how we live. And I am convinced that not everyone here is convinced, otherwise our attendance wouldn't be so skewed on Easter.

So why do I believe in the resurrection? What would I say to that person who has doubts, who says that the Christian faith is no different than the mythology of old or any other religion?

As I reflected on this question, several things came to mind. And let me just add, before I begin, that there is an element of faith – faith is believing without always seeing everything clearly. But it does not mean a

blind faith, or faith without seeing completely. In other words, what we are talking about is evidence. Is there enough evidence to warrant faith? The Bible declares to us over and over again, look at the evidence, then you decide. So what is the first evidence? It's this book, it's the Word of God, itself.

### **THE WORD OF GOD – THE BIBLE**

Turn with me to **Luke 24:25-27**: ***“And Jesus said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” 27Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”***

This book is unlike any other in the world. It was written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 different people. It addresses all sorts of subjects, covers a broad sweep of time and yet it is consistent throughout the fall and redemption of man by God. Now the *Scriptures* that Luke mentions refer to the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. It was the Bible of Jesus' day. He read from it, quoted from it, and prayed from it as any good faithful Jew would. And it contained and still does contain hundreds of prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord's Anointed One – the Messiah. It is the only major religious book that has a substantial amount of predictive prophecy to its pages. Moreover, if the Lord's prophets were found to be uttering false prophecies, the penalty was death. So if you were going to speak in the name of the Lord, you better be sure you are hearing from Him correctly.

The truth is this Book, God's Word, the Bible, has stood the test of time. Translated into over 2000 languages, it has remained the world's bestseller, and the beauty is that there are more ancient manuscripts – over 20,000 – that scholars can study to compare and contrast to make sure that what is being said has not been changed or distorted over the centuries. So there is no vast conspiracy as some atheists would like people to believe.

And so when the prophets predict that there would be one sent from the God to save His people, one would suffer and die for His people (Isaiah 53), one who would be an everlasting father whose kingdom would have no end (Isaiah 9:6-7), in whom the Jewish nation would be saved from the world's armies (Zechariah 12, 14), one whom would come at the end of the age (Psalm 96:13; Daniel 7:13-14; etc.). My friends, Christ is that one. And the incredible thing is that there are a number of prophecies in the Old Testament that speak of the Lord, Himself, coming – hence the understanding that Jesus, the Son is just as much God as the Father (Psalm 2). What is the second reason why I believe in the resurrection?

### **EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS**

The eyewitness accounts...The testimony in the Gospels and the other New Testament writings of the New Testament is that what the disciples experienced was real, not hallucinations. If you read carefully, much detail is included in the accounts. Jesus had them touch His hands, His feet, His side. Jesus ate with them. Although they had forsaken Jesus and fled in fear, what made them change from men afraid for their lives to

men who were willing to die for their leader? What gave them boldness to proclaim that Jesus was risen? And notice they did not fight for their leader or cause. That is human nature. Remember what Jesus told Peter after Peter caught off Malchus' sword? ***"Put your sword back into its sheath, for those who live by the sword will die by the sword."*** (Jn. 18:10).

What made Paul, originally a zealous Pharisee who persecuted Jews because of their faith in the Risen Christ, all of a sudden become a disciple of Christ? It is why he wrote to the Corinthian Church ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*** (1 Corinthians 15:3-9)

In a court of law, eyewitness testimony is an important part of coming to a verdict. Unlike the ancient religions of gods and goddesses, and mythological accounts of super human beings doing bizarre things, the witness of the early disciples of Christ is very down to earth and matter of fact. Real people experiencing real pain, real trials, real hardships, and yet seeing the power of God at work and in fact, seeing God in human flesh – Jesus, the Messiah as foretold by the prophets of old.

### **TRANSFORMATION OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, NATIONS AND THE WORLD**

The third reason I believe in the resurrection is that it has impacted the entire world by transforming the lives of people, nations and the world. Remember how I said without the resurrection, this book is a charade? However, with it, the truth of God's Word is confirmed. And when people respond in faith to this truth, there will be incredible results. Jesus said in Jn. 14:12, ***"Greater works than these you will do, because I go to the Father."***

Why did the early Church grow from a small Jewish sect to a worldwide movement? Why has the Church grown faster in the last 100 years than at any other time in history? Why are millions following Christ in Africa, China, India, and South Korea, nations only fifty years ago had a small Christian population? Why is the Church flourishing in places like the Ukraine and Russia when only 50 years ago the Communists declared that Christianity would die out? Why can you find people from every walk of life, every profession, rich and poor, the educated and those without a formal education coming to Christ in record numbers every day?

Jesus likened the gospel to a mustard seed. That doesn't mean that bad things haven't happened in the name of Christ or in the name of the Church – there will be false Christians, phonies, and hypocrites. But when there is true faithfulness, true demonstrations of God's love, there will be true transformation. As Jesus said, in all four Gospels, you will know someone by their fruit.

## **MY OWN LIFE**

The final reason I believe in the resurrection, is my own experience. The resurrection not only confirms the reality of God's Word, but it gives me purpose and meaning unlike anything else in this world. It means that what I do has significance. It means that there is a reason for my existence and purpose to my life. We are not some accident, cosmic fluke or mere coincidence. However, without the resurrection, life is a cruel joke.

I like how Anglican theologian and writer, Bishop N.T. Wright put it when he wrote, *"The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice and love have won... If Easter means that Jesus Christ is only raised in a spiritual sense – [then] it is only about me, and finding a new dimension in my personal, spiritual life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world – news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things – and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement victory of Jesus over them all. Take away Easter and Karl Marx was probably right to accuse Christianity of ignoring problems of the material world. Take it away and Freud was probably right to say Christianity is wish fulfillment. Take it away and Nietzsche probably was right to say it was for wimps."*

My friends, Easter is not about some event far away in the dark, dim, distant past. It's about resurrection and new life here and now, today, in us and through us. It is the culmination of God's life giving power. It is not only about our future in eternity, but about our future in God, which has already begun, here and now, if we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We heard from our second reading, the Apostle Paul, tells us: *"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. **2**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3**For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4**When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* (Colossians 3:1-4)

You see, the Apostle Paul understood that the resurrection is also about the here and now – God's new life in us, changing and transforming us. But change and transformation won't happen unless we are open to allowing Him to come into our lives and to start a relationship with Him. The challenge of Easter is to embrace our own resurrection, which comes to us through Jesus Christ. So invite him into your heart and into your life. Don't just ask for a cosmetic, superficial makeover – change a few bad habits here and there; but rather, ask God to completely change and transform you, giving you His new life and His new power. Our past is forgiven – so let it go. Here and now is what matters. Let the Lord be in charge of you're here and now existence. And He will carry us also into a wonderful future, into eternity with Him in heaven. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!