

If one wanted to prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a court of law, then the testimony of the four gospel writers in the Bible would not be good witnesses. They would not be good witnesses to proving the resurrection because their facts are not the same. They offer differing accounts that any good lawyer could pick apart.

For instance, how many women came to the tomb? Matthew would take the stand and say that there were two women named Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary who went to the tomb. Mark would be called to the stand and say that there were three women that came to the tomb. He would say that a woman named Salome joined the two Marys.

Luke would take the stand and he would add at least one more woman to the mix and maybe more. He would say there were two Marys, a woman whose name he could not remember, and a woman named Joanna.

And then John would be called to the stand and he would be asked how many women were there at the tomb and he would say that there was only one, named Mary Magdalene. Four gospel accounts and they each have a different number of women who came to the tomb. Any jury listening to this testimony would begin to doubt what they had to say.

But the number of women at the tomb would not be the only bit of evidence that these four men would offer different details about. Any good lawyer would then ask these 4 witnesses to testify to who appeared to this woman or women depending on who was on the stand.

John would testify that Mary was crying and as she was bent over two angels appeared to her in white. John would say that Mary then turned around and saw a man standing there that she thought to be the gardener but then she realized that it was Jesus.

But Luke would say that it was not two angels but two men. Luke would also say nothing about Jesus appearing. Mark would say that one man appeared to the women and then Mark would be all confused because Mark actually has two stories of what happens next. Matthew would say that there was one angel who appeared and then Jesus appeared out of nowhere like a flash of lightning.

The four gospels also disagree about how the stone was rolled away and who was told next. Any good lawyer would put these four witnesses on the stand and fry their testimony. Their testimonies would be very inconsistent. So here we are today gathered to celebrate a resurrection of Jesus when the primary documents to the events that happened are very contradictory of one another. How can we prove the resurrection?

We are in a quandary. Because anyone reading these accounts with a critical eye would find all of the evidence that they would need to disprove that the resurrection even happened.

I haven't been watching the History Channel's interpretation of the Bible since I don't have the channel. But at the point where they tell the story of the resurrection the writers and producers of that show have to make a decision about which of the gospels they believe is telling the truth. Because the four gospels do not agree on many of the details of what happens after the death of Jesus.

So do we discount their stories? Some in our culture do. Do we ignore the discrepancies and make it all fit somehow? That is what many in the Christian church do. We try to pretend that the details fit together somehow. We try to make the Bible very clear when many details are not so clear.

But I don't think either of these solutions is a solution that fits for us today. Rather than making these four accounts fit together, I think we read each gospel and allow each gospel to stand on their own. We don't try to make them fit with each other. We, instead, allow each story to tell us something about the witness to Christ.

So what does the gospel writer Luke reveal to us today about the resurrection? In reading Luke's story, one is struck by how many people are involved in these resurrection events. Luke says that there were at least four women and maybe more who came to the tomb. Luke says two men appeared and stood beside these four women.

Luke says that the women then returned from the tomb and told the 11 remaining disciples. Luke records Peter then coming to the tomb to check it out. Luke then records Jesus appearing to others after these first appearances.

Luke seems to be saying that the resurrection is not just an individual experience. Luke seems to be saying that the resurrection is best understood as a part of a community of faith that seeks to understand the event together. Salvation for Luke seems to be salvation for a group of followers. Together they meet the risen Lord and together they figure out what this event means to them all.

There are lots of reasons to not be a part of a Christian community. Churches and Christian fellowships can be stale. Christians within churches can be backward looking. Christians within churches can be judgmental. Christians within churches can lack the diversity that represents our culture and can exclude people rather than include people that are different in some way.

Christians within churches can make decisions which drive you nuts and Christians within churches have throughout time made decisions and taken stances that clearly go against God's will. Christians in churches disappoint and many times Christians that gather in churches just don't get it.

But when Luke tells his story he tells it as a community of believers that have seen something incredible and they all try to figure it out together. That is what a good church is. A good church is a group of people who commit together to work together to figure out together what God is doing in their midst and in the community around them.

If you are here today unsure about being a part of a Christian community, we understand. If you are here today having been burned by a Christian community and you only want to show up on occasion at worship because you don't want to get close to a Christian group again, you have a right to feel that way. Churches and the people that make up churches and Christian fellowships do disappoint. But sometimes, churches do get it right. Sometimes people bring their passions into a church and something incredible happens.

In today's Charlotte Observer is the story of Gary Simmons. Gary is my brother-in-law. On January 20<sup>th</sup> of this year, his wife, my sister, performed a funeral where she is the pastor in Davidson. She thought that the next funeral she attended would be his. On January 21<sup>st</sup>, Lib contacted my parents to ask about a burial plot for Gary. Gary was diagnosed 3 years ago with a genetic liver disorder that has deteriorated his liver over time. He was in need of a transplant but it appeared to be too late. But then on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, they received a phone call. A call saying that a new liver was available. That liver was placed into Gary. Last Sunday I gathered with my brother-in-law, my sister, and other family members to celebrate Palm Sunday together. A real resurrection story. At their church in Davidson today, organ donor cards will be distributed to folks attending worship. Lib and Gary are now passionate about organ donation. Working through their church they are seeking to make folks aware of how important it is to be an organ donor and help bring life out of death.

If you have a passion to change something in our culture, something that is nagging at you, or if you see something in our culture that needs to be challenged, or if you see a need beyond these walls that needs to be addressed, I invite you to talk to us here at Allison Creek and together let's begin to talk about what you are seeing. Together let us move from then talking into action. Don't look to someone else to do what God may be calling you to do.

Luke's story of the resurrection is a story of a group of followers that come together to tell a story of God doing something new and amazing. Maybe God today is nagging at you to be a part of something new as well.

We here at Allison Creek would love to hear about it. Because God working through you may lead to something that leads you and others to boldly claim that

Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed!!! AMEN.

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-Text: Luke 24: 1-12

-Given: March 31, 2013 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

On this first day of the week, O God of empty tombs, we must admit that we have not lived faithfully the last few days. It is not that we have done great evil; we simply have failed to do good. It is not so much that we have caused hurt, but we have not brought healing. It is not that we have trouble believing in the event of Easter, we have difficulty speaking about this day to our friends and neighbors.

Call us by name, Redeemer of all creation, so that we might hear your words of mercy. You have not given us over to despair, but handed us hope. You have not ignored our emptiness, but filled us with the Bread of Heaven. You do not hand us over to death, but raise us to new life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, in whose name we pray.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Through the resurrection of your son, O God, you destroy the power of death and remove your people's shame. By the power of the Spirit, raise us from sin so that we may rejoice in the gift of salvation Jesus has won for us.

O God of new life, the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread. Feed us with the bread of life and break open our hearts, that we may know him not only in the good news of the scriptures, but risen in the midst of your pilgrim people.

Lord, we believe that you are constantly creating and re-creating. We sense that maybe there is someone here this morning that you are inspiring to create something which does not yet exist. Give that person bold conviction to trust the dreams you are providing to them. Surround them with the necessary support so that your will can be created through them. Give all of us open minds and hearts to see the needs around us and to respond in a way that is pleasing to you.