

The Outrageous Is Real and True Because of Easter

Jesus' resurrection from the dead certainly has turned mankind's understanding of reality upside down. For death, which most people don't want to talk about and try hard to avoid, is a reality that affects every living thing in this world. But Easter announces that it's not the final conqueror. And the idea that death has been defeated may be considered by human reason to be impossible, silly, or even outrageous. Why? Because we can see death's march continuing daily.

But the resurrection of our Lord tells us to get rid of these doubts. For because of Easter, all sorts of shocking and outrageous promises are true. Let's examine just a few Biblical examples.

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b, ESV). Following His resurrection, but before His ascension forty days later, Jesus said these words to His disciples. And they are words that apply to us as well. And think of what this now means. Jesus can and does hear our prayers – and answers them as well. He now (and until the end of this world's existence) can and does protect, lead, guide, and care for His church. He continues to be the church's prophet, priest, and king because He has risen and now lives forever. For Jesus' resurrection was a rising to eternal life – not a resuscitation to temporal life in this world, only to die again (like Lazarus in John 11). See, ***“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34b, ESV).*** And our risen and living Lord is not just serving His church, He is also taking care of the universe. Our cosmos isn't on autopilot with no one awake at the controls. The Divine Savior who became a human being and laid down His life for every person is in control of our world. Some may find this to be an unbelievably outrageous assertion. But Easter shows that it is true.

Now consider these passages. ***“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39, NIV2011).*** And the Apostle Paul wrote: ***“I have received of the Lord that which I delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread. When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take and eat. This is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He took the cup after He had supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25, Modern English Version).*** As I believe I've said in the past, the use of the Sacraments in the early church indicated that the first Christians understood Jesus to be alive. For how could a dead Jesus wash sinners clean in the waters of Holy Baptism or give them His body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine? The presence of Christ in His Word and Sacraments is revealed in the Bible. In fact, to a crippled man ***“Peter said... ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong” (Acts 3:6-7, ESV).*** How can this be? That's outrageous! How can Jesus, who died two millennia ago, be bodily present today in the Sacraments? How could the name of someone who had died have resulted in healing in Acts 3? How can His Word give remission of sins today (John 20:21-23)? Well, all this is reality because Jesus rose from the dead. His name and His Word have real, active, and saving power because He is alive.

Finally, Jesus said some truly disturbing things when it comes to your mortality and mine – disturbing at least to man’s understanding of how things work biologically in this world. Perhaps this quote from Him takes the cake: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”*** (John 11:25-26a, Modern English Version). Wow! How can it possibly be that ***“bodies will rise”*** - that ***“the earth will give birth to her dead”*** (Isaiah 26:19, NIV2011)? This is outrageous! Undoubtedly, for many it is offensive to their human powers of observation and comprehension. But it’s true because of Easter.

My friends, the Creator became the creature to suffer Hell for mankind and to reconcile us to Himself. Jesus took away our sin and guilt at the cross. His sacrifice destroyed the power of the devil. His death destroyed death. And His resurrection shows us that His victory is certain. And Jesus went to great lengths to demonstrate the veracity of His resurrection – showing Himself to His disciples at different times and in different settings. For ***“He presented Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, appearing to them for forty days, and speaking concerning the kingdom of God”*** (Acts 1:3, Modern English Version). He even stressed to them that His resurrection was not a dream or an apparition, but that He had tangibly and bodily risen from the dead (Luke 24:39-43).

See, Jesus’ saving death and glorious resurrection are miraculous. And we accept these events as true through faith. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to say that there isn’t any evidence that Jesus died and rose again. Jesus’ death and His resurrection appearances didn’t happen ***“in a corner”*** (Acts 26:26, ESV). To the contrary, they occurred publicly and in real time. Christian faith has a real and living object - the crucified and risen Lord. For the gift of faith isn’t given so that you and I can believe in crazy fairy tales. Instead, God-given faith provides the ability to trust in God’s Word even when what it reveals is beyond the capacity of our human observation and understanding to explain or to fully fathom.

My friends, Jesus has saved us by His death. And He now offers us His salvation through His Means of Grace, and we receive this salvation through the gift of faith that He gives. For three days after He died, Jesus bodily rose again and now lives for us. And His disciples were told at His ascension: ***“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you to heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven”*** (Acts 1:11b, Modern English Version). Sound outrageous? I’m sure that it does for many unbelieving minds. But these words that sound outrageous are true. And this gives us great hope. For Jesus tells the Christian this wonderful promise: ***“Because I live, you also will live”*** (John 14:19b, ESV). And the life that the Savior gives is forever – reaching its fulfillment in everlasting resurrection glory in Heaven. And we trust this promise and know that it’s real and true because of Easter.

Blessed Eastertide,
Pastor