

Jesus is Alive!

Message for Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

Children's Message: The candle that won't go out
(in *Creating Children's Sermons* by Bucky Dann, p. 95).

Ask the children what happened at Easter. Let them tell the story in their own words.

Put three birthday candles in a row. Light the middle one, and tell how Jesus was arrested, beaten, and finally died on the cross. With him were two other people, also sentenced to die — *light their candles*. But Jesus had never done anything wrong; he didn't deserve to die. But all three died that day — *blow out all candles*.

Continue talking about how unfair it was that Jesus was killed; how sad his friends were; how much they loved one another, and how Jesus had changed their lives... but now it's all over.

All of a sudden, the middle candle lights up again, all by itself (it's a trick candle). Jump back in surprise. Who lit that candle? Who else has matches? You mean it lit by itself? That's what Jesus did.

They put Jesus to death; but Jesus is greater than death. That's why we worship him and follow him.

Sermon "Jesus is alive!"

Jesus is alive! He was dead, but he rose from the dead, got out of the grave, and is alive forevermore. This is my faith. I am convinced of it. It has been the central core of the faith of the Christian church for almost 2,000 years.

But that's exactly where the problem lies for many people: "How can I be sure of something which is supposed to have happened 2,000 years ago, and the only evidence I have is a book written by people who all died shortly after that?"

I agree, that is asking a lot. Too much, in fact. Look at it this way. Suppose someone is trying to sell me a car. The salesperson has never seen the car, but just heard third- and fourth-hand reports about it. I'm not allowed to drive the car or even look at it. I just have to take it all on faith. Well, I wouldn't dream of throwing away money on a deal like that. And that's just a car. Being a Christian means a commitment of your whole life, not just a few thousand dollars.

I agree with the skeptics: believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ just on someone else's say-so is pretty far-

fetched. However, let me say this: Christianity may be based on faith, but it is not based on blind faith.

There are many sources of evidence about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

the unanimous agreement among all the books of the New Testament, written by several people over a number of decades.

letters and books not included in the Bible, which include eyewitness testimony of the risen Jesus (example: Josephus, a Jewish historian, mentions Jesus in *Antiquities*, written around 100 A.D.).

many people, not just the handful of disciples, saw Jesus after Easter:

1 Corinthians 15:5-8, Today's English Version:
He appeared to Peter and then to all twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, and afterward to all the apostles.

Last of all he appeared also to me.

the Roman legionnaires guarding the tomb. These were professional soldiers, trained killers, who would themselves be killed if they failed in their job.

the empty tomb. If Jesus did not rise, what happened to the body?

After Easter, and especially after Pentecost (when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit), everywhere they went, they told people that Jesus was alive, raised from the dead. The Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities tried to stop them: they warned them, threatened them, beat them, imprisoned them, and even killed them. That's a lot of work; there was another way that would have been much easier and quicker: all they needed to do was go to the tomb where Jesus' body was placed, and show the corpse. "There, you fools! There's your 'risen' leader. Now shut up and go back home." They did everything in their power to stomp out this rumour; but that's the one thing they did not do. Because Jesus' body was not there.

Any of these pieces of evidence by itself is powerful proof. Put together, they are a solid foundation to the Christian faith.

Someone may still have lingering doubts. Let me try to address those doubts, by saying a bit more about how the

lives of the disciples were changed by what they witnessed.

Oh my, look at the time! It's time for a commercial break.

Some of you know that I majored in chemistry before preparing for ministry. I still like to keep up with what's happening in the field, and do some research myself. Just recently, I have developed a special formula which will allow a person live to a hundred years of age, with perfect health!

This magic medicine has healed people of cancer. It cures baldness, kidney stones, and ingrown toenails. Whatever your ailment, from your head to your toes, I have the cure for it! Since I used it, I have never had a sick day at all. You can have it too, for just \$100.00!

Come up to the front here, bring your money with you. While everyone is joining the line-up, I'll prepare the potion. [Mix the drink in a glass pitcher while talking]. First, I take some used engine oil, to make things run smoothly. Then I'll add some Old Dutch cleanser, to kill all the germs in your body. Now, a squeeze of toothpaste to keep you fresh. Finally, some sugar to make it taste good. Stir it all up and—there, it's ready! Now, who's first with a hundred dollars?

[In the unlikely event that no one believes me—what, they don't trust their minister!! -- ask people what's wrong. I'll even offer to drink a glass, to demonstrate that it works. Bring the glass to my lips, about to drink it, then stop.]

Now, who here thinks I'm crazy? [Count all the hands, and make a note to have all those people expelled from church!] Of course, I'm not going to drink this stuff!

But suppose I did drink it, and it was enough to convince you that it was really worth \$100. If everyone here bought a glass, that would be several thousand dollars. I would be rich! But I would also be dead in a few hours, after drinking the glass. That would be pretty stupid, wouldn't it?

No one in their right mind pulls a trick like this, whether it's for fun, or even to get rich. It's not worth it.

But this is exactly what the disciples of Jesus did after Easter. They went around telling everyone that Jesus had risen from the dead. They caused such a disturbance with their talk that most of them were killed to keep them quiet. If they were doing that for a joke, that would be pretty stupid, wouldn't it? If they were getting rich

for it (like me and my magic medicine), it would still be stupid. No, they did it because they had seen Jesus with their own eyes, and no one could keep them quiet.

Let's look at some of them:

- Peter boasted that he would never desert Jesus; but just a few hours later, he did exactly that. After Easter and then after Pentecost, he spoke to a crowd of 3,000 about how Jesus had risen from the dead. Some reports say that Peter was later killed for his faith.
- Paul wasn't one of the disciples. In fact, he delighted in catching the disciples, and putting them in prison after giving them a good beating. But after Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he travelled thousands of kilometres to find people to tell about Jesus. Paul, too, was likely killed.

I could go on. But I think you see my point. People may lie as a joke. Lots of people will make up stories if they will get rich by it. But no one goes around telling lies, just to get killed for it.

No, this isn't a lie. It's the truth. Jesus is alive. And the way the disciples lives were changed, still happens in the lives of people today. In my life and in yours, too.

Next Steps:

- It's OK to have doubts about Jesus. That's normal. Any intelligent person would do the same.
- Consider the evidence. Maybe you should doubt your doubts, instead of doubting Jesus.
- And if you put your faith in Jesus, that's just the start; it's not the end. It's a lifelong love relationship, where you invited him into your life, seek to know him more, and follow him.

Theme for today: "Jesus is alive? That's nice, dear." That's the response of many people to the most important moment in the history of the world. In other words, "Ho hum; so what?" What difference does it make to us today?

A huge difference:

- It confirms that Jesus was telling the truth
- It means that we can follow him with complete confidence
- It shows that he has power over death: not just his, but ours as well
- It means that we don't need to worry or be afraid about anything.