

If  
Easter  
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Colossians 3:1-15a  
Luke 24:1-9, 36, 44-49

“. . . if then you have been raised with Christ"  
Colossians 3:1

I was talking with some other pastors, and one asked, "I wonder why everyone makes such a big deal out of Christmas, while Easter comes and goes and it gets very little attention outside of church?"

And it's true, of course.

Christmas celebrations go on for weeks --- months!

Stores, streets, homes decorated with lights, holly, trees, tinsel.

Carols by the score, bells ringing on street corners.

Gifts, parties, the crèche, family comes home from far and wide.

But Easter.

Except for the few faithful who have gone through all of Lent from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, even in the church it is pretty much a one day affair.

The rest of the world – except for a brief flurry of lilies, candy eggs, and bunnies – the rest of the world hardly notices Easter.

No lights in the windows or bells in the streets.

Why are there so few Easter carols?

It's strange really.

Because if. . . .

If there were no Easter, there would be no Christmas.

If the child had grown up, lived a quiet life, died and been buried – what reason would any one have to remember the magic night of his birth?

If no resurrection – then no New Testament, no Church, no Christianity.

And the most important "if" of all – if Christ had not been raised then no salvation!

For, to paraphrase Colossians, if Christ has not been raised, then we have not been raised with Christ.

And that "if" makes all the difference.

It is a very big "if" indeed.

The gospels are very much concerned with "if."

The gospels spend no time at all with the "how" questions. There is no instant replay.

Not one gospel has an entire, complete, exhaustive account of the events of Easter morning.

Each grasps bits and pieces of the mystery of the resurrection, yet have little interest in the mechanics of what happened.

For example, when the disciples found the empty tomb they were full of "how" and "what" questions.

They wanted to know exactly what happened and how this could be.

Yet three times on that first Easter day they were rebuked for being concerned with the wrong things.

Tomb and body and how Jesus was raised the wrong things to be concerned about on Easter?

Apparently so, for Luke records three times that day they were scolded for their failure to understand what really mattered.

1. *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." (24:5b-7)*
2. *"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (24:25b-26)*
3. *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" and then it goes on to say: "You are witnesses of these things." (24:46, 48)*

And that last statement, "You are witnesses," leads us right to the vital "if."

“ . . . if then you have been raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1) The most important thing about the resurrection is that we have been raised with Christ.

The end of Christ's life is the beginning of ours: the resurrection is for us – for those who are his witnesses, witnesses of the resurrection we experience with and through him.

What do I know of the “how” of the resurrection?

Not much – and I don't really care about the “how” -- any more than the gospels do.

Can I prove the resurrection to you?

No, and I'm not even going to try -- any more than the gospels do.

Do I believe in the resurrection?

Yes! For the same reason the gospels do.

Because of the witnesses – and not because they were such good witnesses – for actually they were confused and contradictory witnesses.

Not because they were so loyal they stood by Jesus to the end – his disciples were cowards who deserted him, betrayed him, denied him.

They are the best of witnesses just because they are such bad witnesses.

Jesus was dead – but they were deader.

Their hopes, dreams, self-confidence, belief in God, belief in self – all died with Jesus.

They were as dead as you can be while you are still breathing – ready to slink off the stage of history and never be heard from again.

They were dead until Jesus stood alive in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.”

I don't know how it happened – neither did they.

I don't know exactly what happened – neither did they.

But they were alive again – raised with Christ on Easter.

They told anyone who would listen that they were more alive than they had ever been – they said it was like being reborn – to be raised with Christ.

Like having a second chance, starting all over again.

They did not know exactly what had happened, but they knew who had happened.

They knew he was alive with them, and they trusted him.

So in the end, it all comes back to "if."

". . . if then you have been raised with Christ. . ." – and they had – and so have we.

Then it is up to us if we will live as those born anew, given a second chance, starting all over.

It is up to us what we will do with this new life to which we will be raised with Christ.

Up to us "if" -- we will live in him; -- we will live for him; or we will waste what we have been given.

"If" we are raised with Christ, how shall we live?

Colossians says it better than I can:

*If you have been raised with Christ. . . put on then compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . .* (selected verses from Colossians 3)

It is all about the "if."

Amen