

On this grand day we gather to celebrate an event that nobody actually saw—the resurrection of crucified Jesus—but which God wants everyone to know about.

Having not seen it, all we know about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the aftermath. Many of us wish we could have seen the first Easter with our own eyes. Even those who were present with Jesus didn't actually see him rise from the dead. The only thing we know for sure is the aftermath. (Read More)

In this way the resurrection is akin to what I once heard someone say of Jesus, “I've never actually seen Jesus face-to-face nor in a dream or a vision, but I know Jesus because I've seen him in his workers and in their works in his name.”

It's the aftermath of resurrection that actually enables us to believe in its truth. So, Matthew himself doesn't waste time trying to convince us of an eye-witness report, but proclaims the resurrection's effects on those who were there after Jesus had been raised.

New Testament scholar N. T. Wright calls the resurrection of Jesus the “the launch pad for something which many Christians have just not got on board with at all.” (Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense, HarperOne, 2010).

Easter is a launch pad.

Most of us don't spend much time thinking about the resurrection because we assume it's mostly a matter of life after death. We're still living, so why think about such matters now? When resurrection is mentioned say, in Easter sermons—pastors will often say things like, “Jesus rose from the dead; therefore, we know that we will go to heaven when we die.”

Of course, there is some truth in such a statement. But Matthew wants us to hear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ means so much more. Make note, almost nothing is said about the movements of the once dead body of Jesus. Most of the focus is on the effect that the resurrection has upon his first followers. What we see is the significance of Jesus' resurrection reflected back in the lives of people like us.

As Paul says, the resurrection of Jesus is the “first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:23 NRSV) of what God plans to do in all creation, transforming the world, moving from death to life, until the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). The resurrection of Jesus is the launching pad, the first act in a grand celebration of re-creation.

That's the resurrection promise in a nutshell. But we who live now in the meantime, are not just passive spectators. We are not just people who know a secret reassurance of an eternal destiny. We are not silent possessors of a secret wisdom, or smug beneficiaries of a privilege that's denied to others: we are the agents of Easter.

We're at the core of our faith so listen carefully. Easter not only launched Jesus Christ into heaven and earth in a whole new, victorious way. Easter is also our launching pad as witnesses of resurrection. We are Christ's, commissioned ambassadors, having learned the truth about where the world is headed, who are sent forth publicly to proclaim to it, a truth that the world cannot tell itself.

I'm sure that's what Matthew wants you to know as you listen to his story of the first Easter. We are not only as mystified and astounded as those first visitors to the empty tomb; we are also equally commissioned to, “Go! Tell! ‘He has risen! God wins!’”

When Jesus calls you to him, it is in order to send you out from him. Before resurrection and after, whatever Jesus wants to do in the world, Jesus chooses to do it not without us. Sorry if you think Jesus came to help us because he came to commission us to help him. Jesus is not among us to reduce stress in our lives; he puts us in stress we wouldn't have had if Jesus had not barged in on us. You'll never hear Jesus say sappy stuff like: “Would you like to have a more positive attitude about yourself?” His first word: “Go! Tell.”

You can't “give your life to Christ.” He takes it. Jesus' invitation, “Come to me” is always linked with his resurrection commission: “Go! Get out of here. And don't just hang around Judea. It all belongs to me and you're going to help me get it back. 'How?' Baptize them in my name, teach them all I've commanded (even the stuff about forgiving enemies). And Lo, I'm with you to the end of the world, just to make sure you have all the power and confidence to accomplish it.”

Christ is Risen!

Pastor Steve