

Why I Believe In the Resurrection

John 20:1-18

April 4, 2010 Easter Day

You probably don't remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. He was a Russian Communist leader who took part in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd, he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity, hurling insult, argument, and his own proof against it.

An hour later he was finished. He looked out at what he hoped was the smoldering ashes of men's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern, standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" En masse the crowd arose and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!"

I say to you this morning: CHRIST IS RISEN! (congregational response: CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!).

I am convinced! I have faith that Christ was dead and he was buried. That I believe. But, this too I accept as true: He rose from the dead and will come again in glory.

This is Easter. And to stand here on this day in this pulpit and proclaim this word. . . I cannot begin to tell you how this defines all that I am.

But, some in the world will say, how do you know that the resurrection is real?

First I would say that I believe in resurrection because somebody told me about it. Well, some would immediately reply, that certainly isn't very reliable. It may not be. But the truth of the matter is that most of what we know is simply because somebody told us about it. How do you know that Columbus discovered America in 1492. Were you there? No, you weren't there, but there were people who witnessed and wrote about it, and that is how we know about that true event.

When Mary went to the tomb on that first Easter morning she did so with a heavy heart. Her Master, her teacher, her friend had passed away. All of life was now in doubt. She stood at the entrance to that tomb weeping. And then she meets a man who she believes to be the gardener. Then this man calls her by name. "Mary."

Can you imagine the look in her eyes as she turns and looks into his? The joy of that first Easter can be found in Mary as her heart wells up as she recognizes her Lord!

Now I want you to listen what Jesus tells Mary. It is the job description for the church. He tells her: *Go to my brothers and tell them.*

They told everyone who would listen! My friends I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because what was first shared by the very followers of Jesus has been shared with me.

The second reason that I believe in the resurrection is that it has stood the test of time.

Fame fades and new fads and fashions emerge. This is acceptable business encouraged by things like the music industry. The industry philosophy is, “You are only as good as your last hit record.” Songs come and go so fast you barely have time to learn them, but take the song Amazing Grace. Now there is a song that has stood the test of time.

John Newton, at his conversion to Christianity, renounced his slave trading and wrote this great hymn:

*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.*

*I once was lost, but now I'm found,
was blind but now I see.*

Your great grandparents sang that song, and long after you and I are gone, people will still be singing that song. Why? It's the real thing and it has stood the test of time.

I believe the resurrection is genuine because it has stood the test of time. It has stood the test of time because it is Truth. Sooner or later, lies are found out – myths are debunked. But Truth stands forever. Not even the gates of hell can defeat this Truth. As long as there is life on earth there will be people talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church will see to that under the leadership of Holy Spirit.

Third, I believe in the resurrection, because I have experienced it. The first century disciples believed in the resurrection not because they could explain it; they believed in the resurrection because they had experienced it. One whom they had known in the flesh, and had seen die, was now alive and with them.

The best proof of the resurrection however, is not in what the witnesses said that they saw, but in how they responded to what they saw. A frightened band of disciples huddled together in a house with the door barred. That is the scene before resurrection.

The scene post-resurrection? A powerful band of mighty witnesses thrust out into the world. It has been estimated that by the end of the first century over a half million people had come under

the Christian banner. That is the power of resurrection.

It is never easy to disregard the testimony of witnesses who are ready to die for their words. And, eventually, every one of the disciples met a violent death. People may lie to perpetuate a myth. But people are not prone to being willing to die to perpetuate what they know to be a myth. Maybe one would be willing to die for a lie...maybe even two or three...but all twelve disciples?! They were not men who had a death wish. They knew what they had seen; and, they believed in it so passionately that they were willing to put their lives on the line in their efforts to tell the story to others. They were empowered, joy-filled people. They were resurrection people.

My friends, we can sing the great hymns of Easter, we can hear again the familiar stories of scripture, we can enjoy the lilies, and we can join in shouting, "Christ is risen indeed!" But the real power of Easter is the way that people's lives are moved from death to life...from sealed tomb to open doorway...from despair to hope...from the old ways to new opportunities. That is Easter. That is resurrection.

I believe in the resurrection because I have seen the God of resurrection at work. I have seen the risen Christ raise people from the death of despair to the joy of new life.

Through the resurrection, Christ comes today, this morning, to share with you the joy, the encouragement and the forgiveness of Easter.

Why do I believe in resurrection? I believe in it because somebody told me about it. I believe in it because it is Truth that has stood the test of time. But also I believe in the resurrection because I have seen it's power in your lives and I have experienced it myself.

It is why I can stand here this morning and shout: CHRIST IS RISEN! (congregational response again: CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!)