

It's all nonsense.

In 1999 or 2000, we had a family holiday at Katherine's sisters place in the south of France, and on one weekend the five of us went to Barcelona. I texted the family and asked what they remembered.

Katherine's reply begins with the Naked Man! On the first evening, walking through the city to a restaurant we went through a famous market square and a naked man was wandering around posing for photographs with tourists. Welcome to Barcelona!

Helen's memory was of Gaudi's cathedral, Gaudi's house and Guell park and the musical fountain.

Anna remembered walking down Las Ramblas and the La Sagrada Familia as well

Iain texted.

"I remember the drive home because we survived and had an alright time. I was also quite proud of us because we hadn't done anything like that before.

The gospel according the Katherine, Anna, Helen and Iain are all speaking of exactly the same event...I know, I was there. A witness will recall what they remember and what stuck in their mind...which clearly involves the incident of the unclothed Spaniard.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each tell the resurrection story with apparently conflicting details.

In Luke's gospel, the stone is already rolled away and two men in gleaming clothes appear and speak to the women. Peter runs down to the tomb.

In Matthew, the stone is rolled away by an angel of the Lord accompanied by an earthquake. The guards are mentioned. They fainted. Matthew tells us Jesus met the women and instructed them to go and tell the others.

In Mark, the stone is removed and a young man in white is sitting on it. It records that the women were to go and tell the disciples and Peter.

Finally in John, only Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, she runs to tell Peter the tomb is empty, Peter AND John run to the tomb...then we have the delightful story of Mary's encounter with Jesus. She thought he was the gardener.

Four accounts. All subtlety different from each other including which women are mentioned.

If you are of a mind too, you could cite this example of conflicting accounts to make the point that not only is resurrection a challenging event to accept, but that the bible doesn't even tell the same story.

I find it a strength, not a weakness.

Firstly, it's well established that the gospel of Mark was written first (AD 50s) and both Matthew and Luke drew heavily on Mark as a source.

(Matthew written in the late 50's and 60's and Luke 59-62AD. Matthew and Luke appear to have drawn on another source called Q which is a gospel account now lost to us.)

John wrote the last gospel from his own recollections but aware of the earlier ones. (AD85)

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The point being – if you are happily copying from available sources, you would think they would make sure the account of the resurrection was identical if it was vital.

But they don't.

Secondly – the canon of books that form the bible was hotly debated over the centuries following Christ. What we know as the New Testament was decided during various councils under the guiding hand of Augustine (354-430).

No-one thought it necessary to make sure that either A) the gospels chosen all agreed with each other or that B) amendments were made to make sure they agreed.

The reason is the value of a true witness.

The accounts record what various people remember because what they remember was important to them and impressed itself upon them. No-one has perfect recall and no two people ever remember the same thing identically. The important thing they are witnessing to is that the tomb was empty and Jesus had risen.

Rather randomly, my son texted the other night and asked if I had ever driven a Ford Cortina. How old does he think I am? I replied that my Dad had various Cortina's and I tried to remember which ones. A Mark, 1 and 3 and 4 as far as I can recall but I might be wrong even though it's the sort of thing I take interest in. BTW don't ever ask Katherine about our cars. The other day she asked me a question about our Toyota. I said "do you mean the Volkswagen we own"?

Written years later the witnesses testify to the shock of the empty tomb, the confusion and the realisation that dawns on them. He's alive.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. Without it...we are without hope. Because of it, life can be transformed.

We too are witnesses and our accounts of faith differ widely. If the 8 people who were confirmed yesterday in the Minstar each told their story they would be very different. Yet each have faith in Jesus Christ.

On resurrection morning it is the women who are the first witnesses. In NT times, women were not able to give testimony to a court because they were women. It's included because that's how it happened...another indicator of the subversive nature of the Christian faith over culture.

The women rush back to tell the others and Luke records

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed like nonsense (NIV) an idle tale (NRSV)

All the Gospels include Jesus telling the disciples that he would die and rise to life again, but what the story of Easter morning shows us is none of them believed it or had taken much notice.

The women only "remembered" what Jesus said when the angelic fellows told them. They had gone with the clear intention of anointing his dead body.

The Disciples had no idea that resurrection was on the cards... so much so, they dismissed any talk from the women as nonsense, an idle tale.

Nothing has really changed over the centuries.

When we speak of Jesus resurrection it can seem like complete nonsense to those who hear it. The idea of Resurrection is extra-ordinary...but even if it did happen, so what?

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The Apostle Paul says (1 Corinthians 1)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The chaos and confusion of Easter Sunday morning begins to change as the disciples meet Jesus Christ. Then, there is no doubt.

Our responsibility is to witness to the resurrection and the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Those who hear might think it nonsense, or be confused, or not really grasp it. That changes, when they meet Jesus for themselves and experience, new life in Christ. It starts with you sharing what you believe and have experienced, however different that might be to another Christian. Same faith, widely different experiences.

The Gospel of John records seven things Jesus claims about himself. He said, I am the Light of the world, I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Way the Truth and the Life, (etc.) At some point he had to make good on those claims. His resurrection does that.

One of my favourite TV adverts of all time is for Ronseal products. The famous strapline was created by Dave Shelton and Liz Whinston in 1994.

They had written some scripts for the TV adverts. They had in a mind a straightforward kind of bloke saying things like "If you've got wood to stain and you want it to dry quickly, you need Ronseal Quick Drying Woodstain."

Dave Shelton said We'd soon knocked out several scripts but we needed a line... "Does exactly what it says on the tin" was a great way of summing this up.

Jesus did what he said he would do.

If resurrection is to mean anything to us, it must be that our lives too are transformed as theirs were. And if they are and we too are experiencing the love and grace of Jesus Christ- then we are called to bear witness.

We must recognise that faith is a journey a progression of understanding.

Take Peter. He hears garbled and idle talk that Jesus is alive. Nonsense. But he goes to look and finds an empty tomb. He searches. He goes away wondering – and at some point he meets Jesus.

If we are willing to witness to our faith, there will be those who find it nonsense, but some will come to see, and some of those will begin to wonder and as we pray, they too will meet Jesus Christ.

How you witness is entirely up to you and whatever comes naturally. It could simply be that you talk about going to church. You might speak about how your faith is important. You might get into a dialogue about your faith. It may simply be the way you conduct your life and what you say and do. Very often the most powerful witness is to volunteer to pray for someone. That is rarely refused.

Just live it, Don't be ashamed, embarrassed or reserved...but don't ram it down anyone's neck either.

Jesus resurrection opened up the kingdom of heaven and calls those who believe to partner him in working to that day when His kingdom comes in all its fullness. The dream of Isaiah is one kind of picture of what God's kingdom is like, peace freedom provision joy.

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On Easter Sunday, on resurrection day, we live in the now of how the world is, look for the kingdom that is not yet...made possible by the astonishing and transforming resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Amen!