



This Easter Sunday we read in Matthew 28v1-15 of how Jesus' resurrection was discovered.

1 – An extraordinary change

Though the resurrection may feel familiar, we sought to imagine these events as if we were there with the women seeing them unfold.

On Friday afternoon Mary and Mary had seen Jesus die. On Sunday morning they went to visit his grave – no doubt expecting a quiet time of reflection and prayer. But instead they discovered an earthquake, an angel of the Lord and an empty tomb (v1-4)! The angel explained what had happened to Jesus (v5-7), and then, as they left, they met the clearly physically risen Jesus for themselves (v9-10).

An extraordinary change had occurred for Jesus: he had died, been buried, and then was raised. This, surely, is the greatest event in history! Yet of course it should not have been so great a surprise. Jesus had many times told his friends this would happen (v6, cf. 16v21, 17v9, 26v32), just as he and the Father planned.

2 – Some extraordinary responses

Extraordinary events tend to get reactions, though not everyone who witnesses them will respond in the same way. We see the same thing as Jesus is raised:

- the women: Mary and Mary were terrified by these events (v5, 8, 10). But as they heard the angel's words, believed his message, and met the risen Jesus, their terror and any disbelief and doubt fell away and they, having seen everything, **in wonder worshipped** the risen Jesus (v9).
- the guards: They were filled with fear, too. But once the shock had worn off, they were more scared about what would happen to *them* than about what had happened to Jesus. They did not stop to consider, but, having

seen the angel, earthquake and empty tomb (though not the risen Jesus), they **selfishly slipped away** to the priests, in fear for their lives (v11).

- the priests: They didn't see any of it. But they heard the guards' testimony. Instead of examining the tomb, meeting with the disciples or praying for wisdom, they calmly and coldly decided to cover this news up (v12-14). They **ruthlessly rejected** the risen Jesus.

The priests created a story that many still believe today: Jesus' disciples stole his dead body from the tomb. But the idea that they would have been able to convince people that this corpse was alive again is ridiculous. The idea that Jesus only fainted is equally unbelievable given his torture and how weak the 'raised' Jesus would have been when he woke. There is one true story: Jesus was raised.

Jesus' resurrection lies close to the heart of the Christian faith. Without it, "your faith is futile; you are still in your sins," Paul writes in 1 Cor 15v17. With only Jesus' death and no resurrection, we don't know:

1. whether his payment for our sin was enough (did God accept his sacrifice, or is there more for us to pay?)
2. whether we have a future (if he is still in the grave, then surely we, too, will stay in the grave when we die)

How wonderful that Jesus really was raised to life!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How important is the resurrection to the Christian faith?
→ What does it add to our theology?
→ What would we lose without it?
→ How important is the resurrection to your *personal* faith? (*Perhaps you could share something of the role of resurrection in your testimony.*)
2. What are the 2 negative responses we see to the discovery of the empty tomb?
→ How do we see similar responses today (*in society, in particular loved ones*)?
→ In what ways might we be tempted to respond like the guards and priests?
3. How is the response of the two women to the empty tomb a model to us?
→ Though we live 2000 years later, how can we, in the Spirit's power, worship the risen Jesus like they did?