

## Evidence for the Resurrection: Luke 24: 1-49 BCP

I don't know whether you saw the survey that turned up in the press last weekend about belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Like all surveys the results can be spun in different ways – either showing an amazing amount of belief in the resurrection from people who aren't Christians, or a worrying lack of belief in the Resurrection who claim to be active Christians.

So I wonder what you make of it? And I wonder whether you noticed the huge amount of evidence in the passage before us this morning: 10 things which point to the truth of the physical, bodily, world transforming resurrection of Jesus.

### **1 Stone rolled away**

Matthew's gospel tells us that Pilate's seal was placed on the tomb and a Roman guard was stationed outside to make sure no one stole the body of Jesus. And yet when the women arrived at the tomb, the soldiers were not there and the stone had been rolled away. Something dramatic must have happened to make them leave their post.

### **2 The Empty tomb**

The women came to the tomb expecting to find a body but the tomb was empty.

### **3 The angels**

There may have been no guards and no body, but the women who went to the tomb did something: they saw angels. Seeing angels is rather a rare occurrence in the Bible, and when they come it's at moments of great importance. And this was one of those! Not everyone saw the angels, but the women went back and told the other disciples and I'm sure the disciples would have seen in their faces that something extraordinary had happened.

### **4 The promises of Jesus**

Before the angels left, they reminded the women of what Jesus had told them whilst he was alive. Did you notice that in verse 7? Jesus had told them that "*The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.*" The women had forgotten what Jesus had said would happen. And now his words were coming true!

### **5 Strips of cloth**

Now this was all staggering stuff, so when the disciples heard what the women told them, they didn't believe it, their words seem like nonsense! But when they went to the tomb, they saw another wonderful bit of evidence. They saw the strips of cloth in which Jesus had been buried, lying there in the tomb.

Now when someone breaks into your house to steal your belongings, they don't take away the milk and the food from the fridge but leave all your jewellery! Thieves take things that are valuable, that can be sold. And the only thing of any value were the strips of cloth and yet they left them behind. No wonder Peter is confused! No wonder he and the other disciples wonder what had happened!

But as the day went on other amazing things happened as well. Two of the disciples took a walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus and on the way they met a man they didn't recognise. They got into a conversation with them about Jesus which eventually gave them two more bits of evidence. The first is number 6.

### **6 The Old Testament Scriptures**

The man on the road pointed them back to the Old Testament, to Moses and the prophets and explained that the Messiah had to suffer before he would come into his glory. It wasn't just Jesus that spoke about

his death and resurrection, the Old Testament, words written hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus was born talk about exactly the same things.

And that's not all: as they sat down to eat suddenly there is evidence number 7.

### **7: Sightings of Jesus**

There is a wonderful moment in our reading when the three travellers sat down to share a meal together. They asked their travelling companion to give thanks for the food and as he broke the bread they suddenly recognised who he is. It was Jesus! It was Jesus! They had seen him, in the flesh. And so they ran back to the other disciples to tell them than good news, only to find that Jesus had already appeared to Simon. And as they're sharing this amazing news Jesus came and stood among them once more. And this time they all see him.

And that isn't the end. Over the next 40 days or so Jesus appeared to his disciples again and again and again: sometimes in Jerusalem, sometimes by the Sea of Galilee, sometimes on the top of mountains. Sometimes it was to just a few disciples together, but on at least one occasion he appeared to 500 people at the same time. These are not imaginary visits. This isn't just wishful thinking. This isn't a mass hallucination, because they don't happen like that. Jesus appeared again and again and again.

### **8: Touching Jesus**

And of course they didn't just see Jesus, they touched him too. In this passage Jesus invited them to grab hold of his hands and his feet. In John chapter 20 we read the story of Thomas who wasn't there in the upper room when Jesus appeared to the rest of the disciples and so he refused to believe until he had seen Jesus himself. And when he does, what does Jesus invite him to do? To touch him! To put his fingers into the nail holes in Jesus has and feet, to see whether sword went into his side. Jesus had a real body and the disciples touched him.

### **9: Sharing a meal**

Evidence number 9 points us to verse 42. Jesus ate food with his disciples. Now I don't know whether Jesus was hungry, or whether he just wanted to prove again that he wasn't a ghost, but in this passage and elsewhere in the Gospels we see Jesus sharing food with his disciples, proving that the resurrection was real. He had died, but he had come back to life again.

But there's one more bit of evidence. And this to me is the clincher.

### **10: The transformed disciples**

At the end of this passage Jesus told his disciples that since they were witnesses of his life, his teaching, his miracles, and most importantly of his death and resurrection then they were to pass that message on. He told them that they should stay in the city until they had been clothed with power from on high and filled with the Holy Spirit but then they were to go to preach the good news of Jesus to the whole world. They were to preach the promise of forgiveness of sins to all those who repent and trust in the name of Jesus no matter what nation they are from.

And that's exactly what the disciples did. On The night Jesus was arrested they ran away. The night he died and the day after and the morning after that they were hiding in fear for their lives. And then Jesus showed up, risen from the dead, and within just a few short weeks these fearful and weak disciples were standing up and preaching about Jesus without fear of what would happen to them. And when they were beaten or whipped they praised God that they were suffering like Jesus did. And when they were arrested and thrown into prison, they praised God in their prison cells and because of their witness their jailers put their trust in Jesus. And even though some of them, in fact many of the first disciples were killed for telling people about Jesus they just kept on doing it.

Now lots of people are willing to die for something they truly believe in. That's true for the brave members of our Armed Forces who fight for Queen and country, that's true for terrorists as well who believe in the cause they are fighting for. But no one is willing to risk their life or to give their life for something they know to be a lie. People don't do that.

So what happened to change the disciples and to give them this kind of courage in the face of ridicule and imprisonment and torture and even death? The only thing that makes sense, the place that all the evidence leads us, is that Jesus died and rose again.

It is no myth. This is no fairy story. It is the truth.

What's more, it's the truth with life changing consequences.

It's the truth that proves that Jesus was who he said he was. He claimed to be God, and his life and his teaching and his character and his miracles and most of all his resurrection from the dead proves that beyond doubt.

And it's the truth that means that Jesus' teaching is true. Since Jesus died and rose again we have to take seriously his teaching about who we are, what we are truly like, how we must relate to God and how we can have eternal life.

And finally it's the truth that means that we can have hope in the face of death. Friends, Jesus died and rose again. On the cross Jesus took the punishment we justly deserve so that if we come to him in repentance and faith, acknowledging our guilt and recognising who Jesus is and what he has done for us, then we can be completely forgiven and have the promise of eternal life. Confidence in Jesus' identity, confidence in his teaching, and confidence in the face of death: that's the implications of the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus died and rose again Easter changes everything!

But I wonder if it does for you? You see that BBC survey said that 42% of people who would not class themselves as Christians as well as a high proportion of those who classed themselves as Christians but who rarely if ever come to church said they did believe in the resurrection! And that's even more surprising! They believe the fact – but they haven't really grasped the truth if it.

So here's a final challenge: If you believe Jesus died and rose again but your life doesn't really look much different to those who don't believe, then I want to challenge you this morning. This is not one of those facts to file away and pull out at parties to impress your friends. If Jesus rose from the dead then it must change the way we live; it must change the way we spend our lives, and it must change the way we face joys and tragedies, successes and failures, and it must change the way we feel about death.

And like those first disciples if we are convinced of the truth of this event then we have to pass it on. We cannot keep silent about something as life changing as this. So may God stir our hearts with the good news of the resurrection and may it move from our heads to our hearts and transform our lives.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!