

John 20:19-31 Did Jesus rise from the dead? St. George's 24th Apr

During my time in ministry, I have met many community leaders and had vary discussions with them. One such leader was the principal of the primary school directly opposite the church I was rector of.

We met together often over various matters in relation to the school and or the community. It came to pass that on one occasion this fellow said that he was an atheist. My response was, "Well I'm a Christian." He said his father was an atheist too.

I can't recall how this topic came about but my friend said that he visited his father in hospital the day before he died. Whilst he sat with his father his father asked "Do you have your mobile phone?" "Yes," said the son. "Why do you ask?" The father said, "I want you to ring *him* to find out where I'm going." The son said "Who do you want me to ring?" The father, pointing upward, said, "*Him*. I want to know if I'm going up there or not." The son didn't know how to reply.

We're still in touch this man and I, even though he is long retired as I have been. When he comes to visit, he shares jokes and stories and wants to know how life is going in Tasmania. This past week he sent me a little clip, on social media, where a boy and professor were discussing "Is God real?" The article concluded that it is in our faith and belief where we meet God.

My friend said that he thought I might be interested in it and might want to use it for my sermon today.

But I said to this man I would be talking about him this Sunday you see his name is Tom and he doubts the existence of God and so we're looking at doubting Thomas today.

The age in which we presently live is a very sceptical age people are making up their own minds about what they think, what they believe to be or know to be true.

The vaccination against Covid has shown us that there are many people who hold their "own" belief regarding its safety and these people are prepared to accept potentially severe consequences.

According to the national church life survey carried out in 2016 about 35 percent of Australians believe that Jesus' physical resurrection was an actual historical event, a similar number unsure and about 30% believe it never happened at all.

Jesus' resurrection is at the centre of the story the Christian gospels tell. The resurrection nearly 2000 years ago is the pivotal event in all human history. It shaped the lives and beliefs, the deepest intuitions and culture and politics of billions of people.

What evidence do we have? Jesus is a well attested figure in the ancient world. Dixon historian and founder of the centre for public Christianity points out that the great Roman historian Tacitus, Stoic writer Serapoin, Pliny the Younger and the pagan historian Thallos all write *incidentally* about Jesus within a couple of decades of his death.

The most well-known secular references regarding Jesus' life and ministry are from the first century Jewish historian Josephus.

Further the great Jewish Oxford scholar Geza Vermes, wrote the definitive treatment of Josephus' writings and concluded that while the Christians exaggerate Josephus references, he did describe Jesus as a wise man, a performer of paradoxical deeds, and crucified by Pontius Pilate.

In the New Testament era there is no previous thought, conception or idea of a physical resurrection at all, so to have that included in the Jesus narrative gives something more to think about today.

There are many thousands of documents that verify the accuracy of the gospels, even Paul's writings which are earlier than some of the gospel writings. For instance Paul's letter to Thessalonians was written about 50 AD and 51AD nearly 20 years after Jesus death.

Tellingly, Paul often refers to the resurrection as something his audience already knows all about, as a very well-established fact or belief. So, the resurrection was Christian belief long before AD 50. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul summarizes that the community already knows:

Corinthians 15:3- 5 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

To the Gospel passage before us today.

Peter and the other disciple had seen the empty tomb, and Mary Magdalene had seen the Lord and passed on his message to the disciples that he was soon to return to the father. Nevertheless, the disciples with the exception of the other disciple had not yet realized that Jesus has risen from the dead.

They were still afraid of what the Jews might do to them as his followers and so secluded themselves behind locked doors. These locked doors might have kept out the prying eyes of the Jews, but they could not exclude the risen Lord Jesus!

Jesus came and stood among them and said, “***Peace be with you!***” Jesus’ sudden appearance to his disciples behind the locked doors, like his emergence from the tomb, demonstrated that in his resurrected state he was no longer bound by earthly physical limitations.

When Jesus appeared to them behind locked doors his greeting of ***peace be with you*** showed he was not holding their failures against them rather he was offering a restored relationship.

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. By showing them the nail wounds in his hands and a spear wound in his side Jesus removed any doubt that he had that the one who stood before them in that locked room was indeed Jesus who was crucified, but now risen from the dead.

Jesus predicted that the disciples’ sorrow at his death would be turned into joy following his resurrection. John 16:20 *Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.* Now his disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus repeated his greeting “***peace be with you***” a second time. However, this time it came with a commission for his disciples. Instead of reproaching them for their failures in the recent past he recommissions them as his emissaries: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Later, Thomas wanted physical proof of the resurrection as so many do! In the second week after his resurrection, once again, Jesus found his disciples behind locked doors.

27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Without being told, Jesus knew the conditions Thomas had placed upon his acceptance of the reality of his resurrection and Jesus invited him to touch him.

The effect of Jesus' words was immediate, Thomas said to him, "***My Lord and God.***" Thomas no longer needed to place his finger in the nail marks or his hand on Jesus' side; seeing him was enough. Seeing was believing!!

This is the last of a series of confessions of Jesus found in the fourth gospel;

John 1:49 When Jesus called him Nathaniel declared, "***Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel.***"

John 4:42 The Samaritan woman said, "***We know this man really is the savior of the world.***"

John 9:33 The man born blind said, "***If this man were not from God, he could do nothing, and later worshiped him as the son of man.***"

John 11:27 Martha the sister of Lazarus said, "***I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God who was to come into the world.***"

Thomas's confession is not only the last, but it is also the climactic confession of the fourth gospel. He confesses Jesus not only is Lord but is his God also. It was a strongly personal confession.

By recording it John the gospel writer brings his readers back to the opening of the prologue **in the beginning was the word and the word was with God.**

In response Jesus told *Thomas* "***Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***"

Thomas came to believe because he saw the risen Lord, but Jesus did not praise Thomas' pathway to faith. Rather he pronounced a blessing upon those who have not seen the risen Jesus yet have believed in him, nevertheless.

This verse 29 is a great verse of reassurance for contemporary Christians especially in a world where minds and beliefs are often swayed by popular thinking.

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We know this. It is such a pity that there are so many people in this world who do not believe. I wonder if my friend Tom will come to believe?

The Lord be with you.