

Timeless Transformations

The Easter Story: Resurrecting the Spirit and Coming Alive

When I think about Easter when I was young, I think about pretty Easter dresses with gloves, a lot of sunshine, Easter baskets, and Sunday church. When I think about Easter when you three were young, I also think about pretty Easter dresses, sunshine, Easter baskets and decorating eggs, and having lunch at Neenie and Pop's, which sometimes included church. I believe reconciling our two generations (when I was young versus when you three were young) and how we celebrate Christian holidays has been a tremendous challenge for me. Your dad and I did our best to instill tolerance, open-mindedness, and a lot of reality checking. I know you will do your best with your children as well. Since it is Easter morning, I thought I would share what Easter means to me now in this moment, in hopes that it will jumpstart you by 27-30-33 = 90 years!

1. First, we have to **reconcile the fantasy of Easter** versus what is actually in the New Testament Bible. The problem for most people is they do not embrace the span of time between the crucifixion and the writing of the gospels. Plus, they never think about it from a comparison perspective.

<p style="text-align: center;">Basic Christian Belief about Jesus' Crucifixion (Commonalities among most Christian beliefs)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Testament Bible Literacy Matthew 27:27-28:8; Mark 15:16-16:19; Luke 23:26-24:35; and John 19:16-20:30</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a young boy growing up in a city called Nazareth of Galilee. • He was a son of a carpenter. • At the age of 12 his parents would take him with him to visit Jerusalem and he would impress all the elders by all that he knew and was able to share at that young of an age. • As he grew older he had the ability to perform miracles. • He was able to heal the sick. He raised a man named Lazareth from the dead. • He gave his life to service of his fellow man. • He was treated unjustly. He was sentenced to death; to be crucified. • Thorns were placed on his head and he was nailed to a cross and hung out to dry in between two thieves. • He died on the cross. • He was then placed in a tomb and a large stone was placed in front of the door. • It appeared that he had experienced death and defeat while everyone thought he was indispensable. • But, three days later at the break of dawn it was discovered that the stone had been rolled away and was no longer in the tomb. • Not only that he had risen and he appeared to a number of the disciples and others. • What appeared to be death and defeat became life and victory through the spirit of the living god. • Jesus said the spirit that dwelt within him resides in all of us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus' crucifixion occurred under the administration of the Roman prefect-procurator Pontius Pilate. It is estimated historically that Jesus lived between 4 BC (Before the Common Era) and 30 CE, dying at around the age of 34. The crucifixion is estimated to have occurred between 28-32 CE. It is normally referred to in history that he died in 30 CE. • There is no reference to an empty tomb in the writings of Paul. Paul wrote between 51-64 CE, at least 21 years AFTER Jesus' crucifixion. • The empty tomb story is first told in the Gospel of Mark written about 72 CE (at least 42 years AFTER Jesus died). In Mark's story, Jesus does not appear to the women at the tomb, rather a messenger appears who directs the women to tell the disciples that they are to return to Galilee and that they will see Jesus there. • Matthew, written about the year 85 CE (at least 55 years AFTER Jesus died), changes Mark's Gospel story so that the women do see Jesus at the tomb that is located in or near Jerusalem. Then Matthew goes on to describe the Galilean appearance to which Mark had only alluded. It occurred, said Matthew on the top of a mountain. • Luke, written around the years 89-93 CE (at least 59 years AFTER Jesus died) says the women do not see the raised Christ at the tomb, thus agreeing with Mark and opposing Matthew. Luke, however, denies any Galilean resurrection experience to anyone at any time. • John, written between 95-100 CE, (now we are in to 65 years AFTER Jesus died) reduces the number women who came to the tomb on Easter morning to one, Mary Magdalene, and she is the only one in this gospel to see Jesus before he ascends.

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2. Second, most people do not **comprehend the low level of literacy** present in the world at that time. Only about one in every hundred people could read and only about one in every thousand people could write. The lack of people in that society who knew how to write necessitated the position called a "scribe," which meant a professional writer, who was hired whenever a letter needed to be written. Scribes are mentioned frequently in the New Testament. Writing was such a rare and advanced skill in that day that one who possessed it would be considered a very successful person. One who could write would not be in a low-paying, unskilled position of a Galilean fisherman or carpenter, when they could earn far more as a writer. A literate Galilean fisherman would have been a wonder in that world. The book of Acts describes John (along with Peter) as "uneducated, common men" (Acts 4:13), which simply confirms this fact.
3. Third, we must **analyze the span of time between the events being described** and when Matthew wrote his gospel, some 55 years after the crucifixion, or 2-3 generations after the fact. How accurate is any version of any conversation that is said to have occurred almost 3 generations earlier? Matthew's version of his gospel leaned heavily on the author of Mark's gospel, which was written 42 years after the crucifixion. The problems of history accuracy are significant so what are we to make of them?
4. Fourth, we must **use logical thinking skills and ask critical questions**. For example, who carried the private details of the story of Jesus' crucifixion? Did Pilate, the Roman governor, that sentenced Jesus to death have a post-crucifixion interview with some of Jesus' followers in which these details, to which only he and Jesus were privy, were shared?

We are told what the soldiers said and did to Jesus just prior to his crucifixion: the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the limp reed. Who was the source of those details? We are then told what the crowd said to Jesus, what Jesus said to the crowd and what the thieves crucified on each side of him said. We are also told the words that Jesus spoke from the cross as he died, and then the words about him spoken by the centurion after Jesus died. How were these words recorded or remembered? None of the disciples is said to have been present in the gospels. Matthew does record that some women were present, but he states clearly that they looked on from afar. They were not within hearing distance. So if we see to view this story as history, we need to ask: how did these words travel from hostile sources to find their way into the narrative of the crucifixion?

5. Fifth, we have to **consider the problem of biblical translation**. There are no Aramaic originals that lie behind the Gospels of the New Testament. Jesus spoke Aramaic. Mark, the author of the earliest story of the crucifixion, wrote in Greek, a language that neither Jesus nor his disciples spoke. So if we want to assert historical accuracy for the details of the crucifixion story, then we must hypothesize not only an original eyewitness present in scenes where none is mentioned, but also a historical translation. To complicate matters, the bible was translated between Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and English – then modernized through the centuries in many, many versions.

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6. Six, and lastly, is just the pure contradictions that are inherent in the New Testament Gospels. Here are just a few examples.

When was Jesus crucified?

After noon on the day before the Passover meal

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. John 18:28

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. John 19:14-16

Mid-morning on the day after the Passover meal

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? Mark 14:12
And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. Mark 15:25

Where did the women watching the crucifixion stand?

They stood far away.

And many women were there beholding afar off. Matthew 27:55
There were also women looking on afar off. Mark 15:40

And the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things. Luke 23:49

They stood near the cross.

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. John 19:25

So, here we are. Knowing what we know and knowing that our family and friends don't share our beliefs. Knowing that we can't let anything come between us and those we love. We have to decide what to make of this Easter story, a story that has been passed down for centuries that is embedded in our work holidays, engrained in our family and friends core beliefs, and celebrated as one of the most sacred rituals. I believe there is a great metaphysical message in the Easter story. It is a story that we can all relate to - a story that has deep meaning in personal transformation. It is a story that I can buy into and I believe you can too. This is what the Easter story means to me.

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- I believe the Easter story is about resurrecting the spirit and coming alive! There is a powerful resurrection spirit that dwells in each of us. It is not dwelling on the negative aspects of the crucifixion and the “dying of sins” and the heaviness of guilt. It is a story of victory and becoming new. It is a reminder that we all go through defeat, injustice, betrayal, dark days, circumstances and conditions out of our control – in some sort of a dark place where it seems a stone is rolled in and blocking our way – where life is stuck and not moving forward. The Easter story is about asking yourself what kind of life you are going to create. Will you roll away the stones of limiting thoughts and ideas? Will you emerge from the difficulties that you may face? Will you open yourself up to a resurrecting power and spirit that dwells in you? Will you resurrect your life with newness and fullness, or will the circumstances with what you are facing win and defeat you?
- The Easter story amplifies the idea of new life that it always being held out to us. Things don’t remain the same. Life is not static. It is a dynamic. It is always progressing and moving forward never how dark the day may seem. Even the experience of death is a transition to a new state of being, which we cannot understand or explain. We are a spirit whether we are in or out of a body. Life is a divine idea that is evolving and emerging as we grow. Life is a gift. It is a treasure that we’ve all been given. The Easter story is about allowing that life to become expanded in us and resurrected with new life: not to allow ourselves to be stuck in a dark place inside a tomb with no way out.
- The Easter story is about the spark of the universe that can’t be put out. We can only go dormant for a time but then we can come back to life so to speak after we have had the life energies somewhat deadened, pulled back and retreated. I believe we can gain this Easter insight that it is about keeping the energies of life moving to have a new beginning – to have a new dimension of life. I say life is energy and there is no end to life. We are all creative beings. We are all moving ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and energies.

In summary, the message of Easter is that we want to be fully alive with life, not to be held back and defeated by circumstances. It is not to stop living or to stop loving for any kind of reason that our mind concocts – or anyone else concocts for us. It is to be able to bounce back and come alive again. Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% about how you respond to what happens to you. We all have within us a part of us that says we will never die. We will overcome in spirit. There is a part of us that wants to come alive. That is the message of Easter. Say yes to resurrecting your spirit and come alive every day – not just on Easter Sunday! That is the message that I can buy into and I know everyone else can too.

I love you more than my first breath in the morning as I am resurrected at the break of dawn each day – Love Mom!