

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Easter is over, one of our iCAN kids told me this week, but we continue to proclaim the risen Jesus. Easter is too big for one day. In fact, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord for a week of Sundays in the season of Easter. Thus, today, Easter is not over. In fact, Easter is never over for us, for we are Easter people; we are people of the resurrection. That's why we keep talking resurrection, that thing of first importance, apart from which our preaching and our faith are all worthless.

Now because of this message's importance to Christianity, you know, or might expect, that people try to explain away the message of the resurrection. Theories abound on how to explain it away.

There's the story concocted by the Jews—recorded in Matthew—that the disciples stole away the body as the soldiers guarding the tomb slept. They were paid for that story. Some have claimed that the women, who watched when Jesus was laid to rest, got mixed up and couldn't find the right tomb. Then there's the swoon theory: that Jesus didn't really die at all, but passed out, and regained His strength in the cool of the tomb and pushed His way out. All these theories are trying to deal with the empty tomb. If you don't want to admit the resurrection, you have to give some sort of answer for the empty tomb.

But then, there's the eyewitness testimonies: the women, Peter, the two on the road to Emmaus—St. Paul talks about 500 brothers all at one time. One theory tries to discount these as mass hallucinations — how unbelievable is that? I didn't realize that hallucinations were communicable.

Of course, today many doubts have been raised regarding eyewitness testimonies in court. Scientific evidence calls them into question. I'm sure you've read how, with the advent of DNA evidence, many people, convicted on the basis of eyewitness testimony, have later been found to be innocent, and have been released. Thanks be to God that these injustices are being corrected. And Lord have mercy upon those wrongly imprisoned—for all the damage that has been done to them and to their families.

Christian skeptics have received this news about eyewitness testimony with glee. They like to use this newly found lack of confidence in eyewitness testimony to bring doubt into the resurrection story. But I suggest that these new doubts about eyewitness testimony don't really apply to our situation. Those contexts are a crime scene with a victim in a traumatic situation and with an unknown assailant. That's certainly not what we have in the Gospels. The situation was certainly traumatic, but disciples knew Jesus well, and they knew the high priest and the governor.

Moreover, we're told, when there is corroborating evidence, the confidence level of eyewitness testimony goes way up—and, today in our Gospel, we have a lot of corroborating evidence — Jesus' wounds.

Thus we hear of the resurrection appearances in the Gospel today, and of the disciples as eyewitnesses. The Gospel begins on the day of Jesus' resurrection, in the evening, as Jesus appeared to the disciples. We don't know why, but Thomas is not there.

Now Luke tells us that the disciples thought that it was Jesus' ghost that made an appearance. That's why Jesus showed them His wounds. That's why Jesus spoke to them — "*peace,*" He announced. Their fears and doubts were allayed. They were glad. He, who was dead, is alive! Jesus is risen, just as He told them!

Of course, remember, Thomas was not there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples, but when he returned, the disciples were excited to tell him, "*We have seen the Lord.*" But Thomas refused to believe their eyewitness testimony. "*Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe,*" Thomas said emphatically!

Thomas' disbelief is in some ways understandable. Resurrection is not an every day occurrence. In fact, I'm rather confident to suggest that none of us has ever witnessed a resurrection. Therefore, Thomas is, perhaps, giving voice to thoughts that go unspoken by many of us today.

Of course, Thomas did have an advantage that we do not. Jesus had told the disciples that He would do just that—rise on the third day. Jesus had told the disciples that He was returning to the Father (it was even Thomas who questioned Jesus about it). Jesus had said, "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" (John 11) and "*I lay down my life that I may take it up again*" (John 10). Jesus even raised several people from the dead, including very recently Lazarus. Thomas was a witness to all these things, and yet here he says, "I will most assuredly not believe it about Jesus."

As we heard, Jesus did not leave Thomas wallowing in this unbelief, for this was Thomas' problem: not just doubt or even skepticism, but unbelief. Therefore, eight days later, Jesus appeared to Thomas, and spoke to him, and showed him His wounds. "*Don't be unbelieving, but believing.*" And Thomas responded with faith, "*My Lord and my God.*"

And then Jesus speaks to us as He admonishes Thomas: "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" Though ours here may not be the rank unbelief of Thomas, we still may be afflicted with pangs of doubt, especially as we are afflicted with emotional and physical trials.

I say to you, you can “trust the eyewitness testimony.” You can trust the testimony of the apostles who, huddled in the closed room on the evening of the first day, saw their teacher, who had been crucified, and rejoiced. And then they proclaimed it boldly. Theirs is the testimony—of Christ crucified and risen from the dead—upon which the church is built. You can trust the testimony of Thomas who, began that day in unbelief, but eight days later, having seen the wounds, concluded it in faith, confessing, “*My Lord and my God.*”

Trust the word of the apostle John, “*who saw [the spear that was thrust into Jesus’ side, proving that He had died, and who] has borne witness.*” And he affirms, “*his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.*” That same apostle affirms today that these words concerning the risen Jesus and the many signs that He did, “*these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

The cross of Jesus is the locus of our salvation. There we find the forgiveness of our trespasses. There was “*the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands ... set aside*” as it was nailed “*to the cross*” (Colossians 2:13-14). But the resurrection of Jesus is the historical evidence that He is exactly who He said He is—the Son of God, that Christianity is true, and that by believing in Jesus, we will attain to everlasting life.

On Tuesday, I heard a quote. It was from a famous defense lawyer, in the Guinness Book of World Records as the most successful lawyer ever. Sir Lionel Luckhoo is his name. I admit I had never heard of him before. But as a defense lawyer, he was experienced in the use of evidence as he defended his clients.

Well, he “was challenged to take his legal powers of analysis and apply them to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” After years of “studying the historical record,” this “is his conclusion. ‘I say unequivocally that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.’”

Jesus’ resurrection is fact; the evidence, the eyewitnesses “compel” us to this conclusion. Therefore, our resurrection is sure too, as we listen to Jesus’ words and the words of the apostles and believe and go forth with the promise of life in His name.

No, dear Christians, Easter is not over for us. Easter is eternal. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.