

John 20:1-18 Easter

1. Have you had any conversations with people who aren't Christians about the resurrection of Jesus? What kinds of things do they say about the claim that Jesus rose from the dead?

This is simply a personal reflection question that would potentially get the larger nature of the conversation out onto the table. The hope here is to bring our own doubts and questions about the resurrection up to the surface – for we all have them.

It might be important to share in this that even the disciples, with Jesus bodily right in front of them risen from the dead still disbelieved (Luke 24:41). True faith is not about freedom from doubt, for faith isn't about the subjective experience of faith but rather the object of our faith. The amount, or degree, or freedom from doubt in faith isn't important it's where we locate our faith.

Read John 20:1-18

2. The disciple's first reaction to the empty tomb is that the body had been stolen. Peter however steps in and sees the linens clothes still twisted around – as if the body had passed right through them. John uses the Greek word for saw from which we get our word theorize – meaning that Peter is looking at the empty tomb and trying to figure out a theory to explain what he sees. How do you theorize the empty tomb? (Although it doesn't prove Jesus' resurrection it does demand an explanation)

Question 1 above may reveal more important details to theorize. Eye-witness accounts, the first disciples who went to their deaths for holding onto their resurrection belief (why would you die for a lie?), the reality of the church being a global movement that has lasted 2000 years etc.. Feel free to take another detail to theorize if it would be more profitable for your group.

Empty Tomb? What theories make sense?

If disciples stole the body why would they die for a lie?

If enemies stole the body to desecrate it – why wouldn't they produce it to squash the growing movement?

If there was a place he was laid it would have become a pilgrimage site.

3. John steps in behind Peter (8) he sees and believes. The word there is to see into – meaning he sees with meaning and believes – putting his active trust in the resurrection. What would active trust in the resurrection look like? (It might be helpful to first explore what the implications of the resurrection are to allow for your conversation to be more expansive)

1. Death has been defeated –

Active trust? The fear of death is greatly diminished. The secular worldview – that this life is all there is – so I have to fill this life with as many beautiful things, experiences, pleasures as I possible can – that drives consumption, forms throw away relationships, can't easily handle suffering etc. begins to erode.

2. Our sins are forgiven – the resurrection is the paid in full across all of life.

Active trust? Shame and guilt erode. The inner murmur of self-reproach, self-condemnation is quieted – for there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

3 Jesus is the first fruits of a new creation. Jesus is the pattern not only for the material resurrection of my own body by faith – he is also the promise that all of material creation will be renewed.

Active trust? We can't give up on ourselves, on others. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead has entered into us to make us new. There is a future of no more sorrow, no more death, no more pain, no more injustice – that future animates and gives hope to our work of stewarding all of creation for the good of all. We push back against sin and injustice in our world in light of that new creation.

Note: John locates these events on the first day of the week (vs. 1) – a very strong echo of the creation account of Genesis 1 – he is wanting us to see that in Jesus' resurrection there is an entirely new creation that is born.

4. Jesus specifically chooses Mary to be the first messenger of the gospel. Who was Mary? (See Luke 8:1-3, for a picture of what Mary's life would have been like see Mark 5:1-20) What is Jesus communicating about the new creation in choosing Mary?

That his salvation is by grace – for Mary was on the outside of every in/out category of the ancient world. A woman and not a man. A former demoniac and not a pillar of the community. One with a seedy background (Magdala was the sin city of the ancient world – to be called a Magdalene was not a compliment)- not the morally upright.

This choosing of Mary would have been scandalous in the ancient world. It would undermine every cultural expectation – particular as it pertained to the place of women. This undermines every form and expression of patriarchy and misogyny. Such things have not place in the kingdom of God.

In the sermon Tim mentioned that the choosing of Mary should make obsolete the question – should women be ordained ministers? Of course - Jesus chose Mary after the pattern of the high priest – the first messenger of the gospel – the apostle to the apostles . She in this is the church all by herself.

For some in your group this may raise questions and concerns – because the church is not unanimous in this affirmation and will turn to the same scriptures as this story to affirm their position. Don't feel any pressure to resolve the argument if it comes up – it often takes much time to develop a conviction and much time to let it go. Here are some thoughts that might help... (Be conscious that this isn't the main point of the text – it would be important not to have it take over)

A. Paul? We often point to Paul in various places where he says he does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man. The word authority is one that is unusual as it expresses an abusive authority – we wouldn't want anyone to have such authority over anyone else. Priscilla and Aquila are both given credit for teaching Apollos in the faith.

He speaks of women being silent in the churches – but then also gives direction for how women should speak and prophesy and pray.

He greets in his letters women who were house church leaders, apostles and deacons.

That we have some inconsistencies in Paul's reflections on women and their role in the church could give an indication that his prohibitions are linked to something specifically happening in the local church to which he writes that needed pastorally some direction. We don't have a clear sense of what that is – but the inconsistency should give us pause when we seek to make a declarative statement around gender roles in church participation and leadership.

B. Translation issues? The Greek word diakonos is translated both as servant, and as the title for one of the classes of leaders within the church - deacon. Translators have often translated it as servant for a woman, and as the title deacon for men. The role is certainly one of serving others regardless of which gender the title is attributed to but a bias is revealed in the translations.

C. Some will point to the pattern that God lays down in Genesis 3 that man will “rule over woman”. This however is the curse of sin (not what God declares but rather as the natural result of sin) - not what God desired in his good creation. When the power of sin is broken in Jesus' death and resurrection the curse of sin is undone.

The new creation then ushers in an entirely new dynamic between men and women.

5. In the sermon Tim made the point that God, when he created the heavens and the earth ordains humanity to a particular task – that is to carry the praises of creation, and to steward God's creation for the good of all. This is the task to which Mary is called, and everyone after her chosen by grace. What would this look like practically?

Certainly there is the call here to evangelism (reflect creations praise) – to go and tell others about the good news of God's reign in Jesus. The promise of new life and forgiveness of sins in his death and resurrection. That his God becomes our God, that his Father becomes our Father.

The first humans were called to be stewards – to be God's representatives in stewarding the creation for the good of all. We are renewed by the Spirit, made new by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to re-engage that creation calling. To steward the creation for the good of all.

The new creation is one where there is no more sin, sorrow, pain, division, and injustice. Where shalom – full flourishing in every aspect of life is promised. The call is to face the darkness with all of the resources at our disposal to point to the new kingdom of God – to actively work toward the full flourishing of all.

We do so animated by the hope that Jesus is coming again to make everything new.