

If Jesus rose, that changes everything

Sermon for Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

At the start of the sermon, before saying anything, while people were watching, I picked and ate a daffodil from the Easter flower arrangement. After I was finished eating, I began speaking.

As you leave here today, if you say to a woman you see walking by, “I saw Bruce Fraser eat a daffodil in church today,” the typical person would wonder what on earth you’re talking about. That woman might think you’re a bit strange, talking such nonsense.

If two more people come out and each of them says, “I saw Bruce Fraser eat a daffodil in church today,” she might think the three of you are all a bit strange.

If fifty people walk out of here today, all of you apparently sane and sober, and you all tell the same story to that woman on the street, “I saw Bruce Fraser eat a daffodil in church today,” she will think Bruce Fraser is definitely strange. There won’t be any “might” or “perhaps” in it. She will pull out her cell phone and call 9-1-1 for the ambulance to come and pick me up and take me away.

When you have a multitude of witnesses all in agreement about having seen with their own eyes the same event, then it becomes difficult to doubt the truth of their story, even though it seems very improbable.

This is what we find with the resurrection of Jesus. “Resurrection” is a big word: it means “a person who was dead—truly dead, not just near death—who returns to life.” There were many, many people who saw Jesus alive after he was crucified and put in the grave.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7, New Century Version:
I passed on to you what I received, of which this was most important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say; that he was buried and was raised to life on the third day as the Scriptures say; and that he was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, Jesus was seen by more than five hundred of the believers at the same time. Most of them are still living today, but some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles.

The gospels and the book of Acts record a variety of times when Jesus appeared to his followers, to teach

them and encourage them. On one occasion, Paul reports, there were five hundred people who witnessed Jesus alive. Not just one or two; not just fifty. But *five hundred!* What if we asked them to come and speak to us, to tell us exactly what they saw and heard that day? If we gave each person fifteen minutes—barely enough time to talk about the most amazing thing they’ve ever seen in their lives—and they kept coming, one after the other, non-stop, around the clock, it would take 125 hours. It would be Friday morning before we heard the last witness!

Song:

Some of you may remember the Watergate scandal in the United States in the 1970s, which brought about the resignation of President Nixon in shame. Charles Colson, one Nixon’s key advisors, reflects on what happened in his book *Loving God*.

History reveals that after the criminal investigation of the White House began, the end of Mr. Nixon’s presidency was only a matter of time. The break-in at the Watergate Hotel occurred in June of 1972. The real cover-up criminal conspiracy didn’t begin on March 21, 1973, and it fell to pieces by April 8.

Colson: “With the most powerful office in the world at stake, a small band of handpicked loyalists—no more than ten of us—could not hold a conspiracy together for more than two weeks.”

All of these people believed passionately in President Nixon. They had sacrificed very lucrative private law practices and other businesses for the privilege of serving under this president. The pressure to crack was not that great: they would all be embarrassed and humiliated in public; some might go to prison. But no one’s life was at stake.

Compare that to the followers of Jesus. Their lives were at stake. The New Testament records the killing of only two of them: Stephen and James. In the years to follow, however, a terrible wave of persecution swept across the Roman Empire. It would have been a simple thing for one of them to say, “Stop! Don’t hurt me! I renounce Jesus, and everything I have said about him. It was all a story we made up, a legend to give us hope.” This did not happen, though.

Colson: “Take it from one who was inside the Watergate web, who saw firsthand how vulnerable a cover-up is: nothing less than a witness as awesome as the resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and the Lord.”

Song:

Many of you know I grew up in Saskatchewan. You know: prairies, land so flat you can watch your dog run away for three days.

The city of Saskatoon wanted to host the Canada Winter Games to be held in 1971. They were told, “You have to have a mountain to run the alpine ski events.” “No problem,” said Mayor Sid Buckwold, “We’ll build one.”

The site they chose was the shore of Blackstrap Lake, 30 minutes south of Saskatoon—which was an artificial lake, built for recreation and irrigation. They trucked in 900,000 cubic yards of fill to create Mount Blackstrap, 100 meters high. “The Pimple of the Prairies we used to call it.”

When the final touches to the hill were being made in January of 1971, the people of Saskatoon donated their Christmas trees. The trees were anchored to the hill with ice, to give it an authentic alpine feel.

There you have it: an artificial forest on an artificial hill built on the side of an artificial lake. That’s how we do things on the prairies.

That’s not the end of the story. One April Fool’s Day in the 1980s, a Saskatoon radio station had a special news bulletin that Mount Blackstrap was erupting. Much of the fill, they reported, had been from the city’s landfill. The methane gas from decomposing organic matter had built up to the point where the top of the hill had blown off, and it was now spewing out rotten food and large appliances. They broadcast an emergency appeal from the RCMP, asking people to please stay off Highway # 2 south of Saskatoon because of the extreme danger of being hit by falling refrigerators. Of course the very opposite happened, and the highway was jammed with people driving to see this amazing site.

It was one of the great April Fool jokes of all time. But that is nothing compared to what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ:

- Believe that this man we know as Jesus was actually God come in the flesh
- Base your life on obeying his commands: “Love your enemies,” “Pray for those who mistreat you,” “Do not worry about anything, but trust God.”
- Believe that he was killed, but that he rose to life again; and he lives today in us, by the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever heard such nonsense? At least that is what the people said about those early Christians. And that is still what many people today say about you, when you let it be known that you are a follower of Jesus.

To me, that’s what the resurrection of Jesus is all about. It proves that he is who he said he was; that what he taught is the truth; that to know him is to know God; that following and serving Jesus Christ is what life is all about.

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