

## **Luke 24:1-12 & 36-49**

Clearly, the disciples took some persuading that Jesus genuinely had physically been raised from the dead. Despite all the teaching that Jesus had given them, in the preceding days before his arrest, trying to prepare them for the unprecedented events surrounding his death and resurrection, it would appear that they had no expectation whatsoever that Jesus would be raised back to life again.

When the women arrived with the news that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty, Luke records that the disciple's initial response was to simply dismiss the story because it sounded like nonsense. It was just too far-fetched. They knew for certain that Jesus had died, there was absolutely no doubt about it, they knew for sure that Jesus body had been taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb and a huge stone had been rolled across the entrance. Under normal circumstances they realised that was the end of that.

Peter, being Peter, however, decided that he needed to investigate the women's outrageous claims for himself. So, he went to the tomb and discovered that it was just as the women had told them. He even went into the tomb and saw the neatly folded linen cloths, but even that did not completely persuade him of the mind-blowing fact that Jesus was alive. We are told that he went home again, scratching his head, wondering what on earth could possibly have happened. Peter Faith begins with wonder even though he did not fully understand straight away.

What happened to change the disciples mind? What convinced them that Jesus really was alive, to such an extent that many of them were prepared to die for their belief in Jesus? What transformed them from being so afraid that they locked themselves away in the upper room for fear of being arrested, into bold, fearless ambassadors for Jesus? What transformed their doubts to faith?

Quite simply it was their encounter with the risen Jesus. Initially when Jesus appeared to them, they were understandably frightened and sceptical. Jesus first words to them were to reassure them and give them his peace. He went on to show them his hands and his feet, the unmistakable marks of his suffering. Only after he had eaten a piece of fish, did

the penny finally begin to drop. Luke tells us that Jesus opened their minds to understand all that had been foretold in the familiar passages of the scripture which they all knew so well.

Many people in our society today simply dismiss the Christian message as a load of nonsense, seeking instead to enjoy the pleasures of this world. The story of someone coming back from the dead sounds too far-fetched to be believable. It sounds more like something you would read about in a fairy story or watch in a movie. Sometimes we treat the Easter message as just a nice story but not a reality that can change our lives for the better,

Sadly, unlike Peter, many people choose not to take time to investigate Jesus' claims for themselves. Otherwise, they might discover that the resurrection of Jesus is not just a nice story that someone made-up but a well attested fact of history. The evidence is overwhelmingly conclusive.

Jesus' resurrection proves beyond reasonable doubt that he won a decisive victory over death. As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin often said, 'The resurrection is not the reversal of a defeat but the manifestation of a victory.' The cross was *not* a defeat. On the cross, Jesus won a great victory for us over sin, death and the powers of evil.

Recently I heard the story of a young Christian who had a job working in the library of a major national newspaper. This newspaper kept files of old cuttings about every well-known person. The files were kept in rows of long shelves and were separated into 'living people' and 'dead people'.

One day, the young man was looking through the files of dead people and came across a large file marked 'Jesus Christ'. He glanced over his shoulder to check that no one was looking and quickly moved the file from the 'dead people' section to the 'living people' section.

Jesus Christ is alive. He is risen from the dead. The stone was removed not to let Jesus out, but to let us in. To anyone looking for him among files of dead people, the angels

would say, '*Why do you look for the living among the dead?* He is not here; he has risen!' (Luke 24:5–6).

Just seeing the empty tomb was not sufficient to convince Peter that Jesus had been raised back to life again, what finally made the difference was his encounter with the risen Jesus. Only then did the penny drop, did he begin to understand the truth of what had happened.

The same is true for us today. Studying the evidence for the resurrection, while it is important is not the be all and end all our faith which is based on facts not fiction. It is far more than just head knowledge; it is heart knowledge. Like Peter, we too need to encounter the presence of the risen Jesus for ourselves. We not only need to know about Jesus but to know him personally as our saviour and our friend. The risen Christ meets us where we are, at the tomb, on the road, or at the table. He listens to our sorrows, speaks truth to our confusion, and reveals Himself in ways we don't expect.

That's why I like the alpha course so much, because it gives us not only the opportunity to ask those important questions, who is Jesus? Why did Jesus' die? But it also gives us the opportunity to encounter the risen Jesus for ourselves on the away day.

I'm delighted that Dylan decided to attend our alpha course, which has helped him to come to the important decision that he wants to be baptised. It is always a great joy to baptise someone who has discovered Jesus as their saviour on my friend.

If you have never encountered Jesus before, why not ask him, today, to reveal himself to you. Don't put it off. It will be the best decision you ever make.