

Homily for Easter Day 2018

Passage: John 20:1-18

1. Stand or Fall Day:

We live in a world of faster and faster change. I don't agree with the Duke of Cambridge in England in the late 1800's who said: "Any change, at any time, for any reason, is to be deplored." Change happens. And I feel the need for a point of stability. Something that is constant. The question is, "Is there such a thing? Is there even one point that remains the same no matter what? One thing that you can count on despite all the change swirling around us?" The cynics will say, "Actually, yes – there are two: death and taxes."

But we Christians have something – or rather someone – who is even more certain than those.

It's the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Bible says: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews chapter 13 verse 8)

How do we know?

We know because of today – Easter Day. Make or break day. Our epistle readings make that point: If Jesus did not die in our place and bear all our guilt, and if he did not rise again from the dead, we've believed in vain. Our faith is futile. We are still unforgiven.

How can we be confident that Jesus did rise again? How can we help our friends understand it really happened, and that it changes everything? That we are not stupid for trusting this Jesus because he really did do what so many think is impossible? Make no mistake, if Jesus did die, but then remained dead we may as well be fishing!

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Let's look at:

2. **That First Sunday.**

Remember our gospel reading for today from John chapter 20.

It tells us everyone agrees that the cave tomb where they put Jesus dead body, wrapped in graveclothes was properly closed and sealed. But on Sunday morning Mary Magdalene discovers the tomb is open and the body has gone. The worst has happened. Grave robbers have struck. Jesus' body, so lovingly laid to rest has disappeared. Imagine her feet hardly touching the ground in her distress as she runs to the chief disciples to tell them the awful news. Her explanation of the empty tomb? The body has been stolen.

Moving very quickly Peter and John (that's who "the other disciple" is) go and check.

If grave robbers had stolen the body, they wouldn't have bothered to unwrap Jesus' body or take the cloth off his head. Nor would they have bothered to place them neatly. Yet that's what Peter and John find. The point? Grave robbers haven't stolen the body. That's why we find this intriguing statement: "John saw and believed"

Believed what?

Right throughout the gospel of John there is a huge emphasis on the need for people to believe and that there is really good evidence for believing.

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John chapter 1, speaking of Jesus says: *"He came to his own people, and they did not believe him; but to as many as believed him he gave power to become the people of God"*

At the end of our chapter today (20) we see the purpose John had in writing his gospel or biography of Jesus: *"I have recorded these signs (or great deeds of Jesus) so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name"*

As he saw the empty tomb, John drew the right conclusion. Like people can today, even over 2000 years later. We may not be able to visit the empty tomb-cave, but we have trustworthy records that it was empty and that Jesus had come back to life again.

But wait, there's more! I won't read it again, but there's this wonderful little cameo where Mary Magdalene meets Jesus in his risen glory in the garden where the tomb was. She thinks he is the gardener; that he, not robbers, may have moved the body she took part in burying. But no – he speaks to her in a familiar voice and she is overcome. As she falls down before him, he urges her in gentle tones to see that his work is not yet finished. He is to return to his Father and his God – who is now also the disciples' Father and God. And she is in no doubt that she has seen the Lord.

There is much more to look at, of course.

Each of the gospel/biographies of Jesus has similar things to say.

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I want to say, for my part, that this, like the ends of the other gospels, has:

3. The Ring of Truth.

You can get the feel, the vibe of the way this story is written by John, that it's not the same as we find in the other gospels. No-one has gone through and tidied everything up. It's raw. It's "messy". That is, it's eyewitness evidence.

As well, the story (and the ones in the other gospels) is able to be tested. We can test them for accuracy against each other, against records we have from 2000 years ago. Although there are differences, they are not differences that make the stories contradict one another.

So many people over the last 2000 years or more have done the work of trying to prove them wrong – and so many have come to the opposite conclusion: that the stories have the ring of truth. Though it may seem impossible that dead people do not rise, they stay dead, the evidence points to Jesus actually and bodily rising from death.

But – what does that mean? There's another step to be taken.

Because Jesus died and rose again he indeed is who he claimed to be and does what he claimed to do:

He is The Son of God, the King God has appointed over everything, the true ruler of this world and all creation, the true boss of every individual person, the one before whom everything in heaven and on earth will one day bow, the judge of all before whom each of us must one day appear;

But the judge whose verdict we are able to know now.

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The judge who himself suffered God's right judgement against each one of us.

The saviour who rescued us from God's just punishment because we haven't lived with him at the centre.

You see, the historical evidence points us to a person, the person, who is at the very centre of everything, who does not change in his character or love for us.

Is he your glorious Lord and Saviour?