

“So what’s all the fuss, then? It’s just another resurrection story, isn’t it?”

Good morning! So, this morning we are celebrating one of the fundamental claims of the Christian faith: that God in Christ lived among us, died for us, and then on the third day was raised from the dead. And it’s this claim that sets Christianity apart from so many of the world’s other great religions, and it’s this claim that I believe gives us hope.

While I was preparing my remarks for this morning, I was reminded of something we all probably know, but so easily forget: and that is that the story of the resurrection of Jesus is not the only resurrection story in the Bible.

And because we heard it only a couple of weeks ago, some of you are probably thinking, “Well, yeah, there’s the Lazarus story,” and you’d be right. But my research reminded me that, including the story of the resurrection of Jesus, the Bible contains ten resurrection stories. It’s true, and I thought it would be fun to take a real quick look at them.

In the Old Testament, there are three resurrection stories.

In 1st Kings, is the story of how the prophet Elijah restored to life the dead son of a widow from Zarephath (1st Kings 17: 17-22).

In 2nd Kings, is the story of how the prophet Elisha restored to life the dead son of a widow from Shunem (2nd Kings 4: 32-35).

Also in 2nd Kings — and this is an odd story — is the account of a man whose body is inadvertently buried in the exact same spot where the prophet Elisha had been buried some years before. And when the dead man’s body touches the bones of the dead prophet, the man is restored to life (2nd Kings 13: 20-21).

The New Testament provides us with six resurrection stories, in addition to the resurrection of Jesus.

In Luke, there are the stories of how Jesus restored to life the dead son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7: 11-15), and the daughter of a man named Jairus (Luke 8: 41-56).

John’s gospel provides us with the well-known story of Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus, whom Jesus restored to life after four days in the grave (John 11: 1-41).

However, in Matthew, we find another odd resurrection story. Matthew tells us how, at the moment Jesus died on the cross, a violent earthquake shakes the ground and breaks open some nearby tombs. The bodies contained in those tombs come back to life, and they began to wander the streets of Jerusalem (Matthew 27: 51–53).

In Acts, when a prominent woman in the early Christian community named Tabitha falls ill and dies, St. Peter rushes to her side, prays for her, and she is restored to life (Acts 9: 36-41).

Also in Acts is the tenth and final resurrection story in the Bible. It's the account of what happened when St. Paul preached a *very* long sermon. A young man named Eutychus, was sitting in the open window of a third-floor room where they had all gathered. As Paul's sermon droned on and on, Eutychus fell asleep and tumbled out of the window, falling to his death. Paul rushed to the young man's side and — although the details are rather vague — managed to restore the young man to life (Acts 20: 7-12).

By the way, that last example is the reason why, in the Episcopal Church, we limit our sermons to fifteen minutes or less. It's really the least we can do for the members of our community!

So, there you have it, ten resurrection stories. But this morning we're celebrating only one of those resurrections. Which begs the question, What makes it — what makes the resurrection of Jesus — so special? A couple of things, I think.

For one thing, the people in the other nine resurrection accounts all eventually died again. Lazarus died. All those sons of widows died. The daughter of Jairus died. Tabitha and Eutychus died. And we assume that all those saints, who climbed out of their tombs on Good Friday to wander the streets of Jerusalem, are dead again as well. At least we certainly hope so! But Jesus didn't die again, and another of the basic faith claims of Christianity is that Jesus is still alive.

But I think the main reason we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, is because it was the only resurrection event that had a significant and lasting impact on a lot of different people. And, because it still impacts our lives today. And so, I want us to think about that for a moment.

The four gospels agree that, early on Easter Sunday morning, the resurrected Jesus *first* appeared to some women. Now, in the world of first-century Israel, women were second class citizens at best. But by appearing to the women first, Jesus was honoring them. And he was giving them the message that, in his eyes — in God's eyes — women were the equal to men. And no matter what else might happen in their lives, those women would always remember, that as far as God was concerned, there was nothing second-class about them.

Later that same day, Jesus appeared to two men who were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. To say that they were disappointed is to understate the case. They were among Jesus' followers, and they had placed all their hopes on Jesus being the one "to redeem Israel." Without the men being able to recognize him, Jesus joins them on their journey and explains everything the Bible has to say about himself. When all is said and done, the men joyfully recognize the risen Jesus. And no matter what else might happen in their lives, those two men would always remember the day that Jesus took the time to walk with them, and help them understand what had taken place, and help them see the world through new eyes.

That night, Jesus appeared to the disciples. They had heard the stories the women told of their early morning encounter. And the two men who had just rushed back from Emmaus were telling them similar stories. But the disciples were simply too afraid, and too confused, and they didn't know what to do. Suddenly Jesus appears in their midst; they see the wounds on his body, and suddenly they know the stories they've been hearing all day are true. And Jesus blesses them with his peace, and commissions them for the job ahead. And no matter what else might happen in the course of their lives, those disciples would always remember the day when the risen Jesus came to them in the depths of their fear and uncertainty, and gave them courage, and direction, and authority.

Eight days later, Jesus appears for the first time to Thomas. During the previous week, Thomas has heard all the stories; but he's a pragmatic man, the death of Jesus has wounded him deeply, and he's having a hard time allowing himself to be so vulnerable as to believe the stories ... only to be disappointed again. But when Thomas sees Jesus, and touches him, he knows the stories are true. And no matter what may happen to Thomas in the course of his life, he will always remember that God — the creator of the universe! — cared enough for one man to be there for him. Thomas will always have the assurance that, even though God has many, many children, he still cares for each of us, one at a time.

Finally, Jesus appears again to Peter. You remember Peter. He was the one who boasted the loudest about his faithfulness to Jesus, and how he'd stick with Jesus to the end. But we all know what actually happened: We know that when things began to get dicey, Peter couldn't say "Jesus who?" fast enough. And even though it's good that Jesus is alive again, Peter is so racked with guilt and shame that he doesn't know what to do. So, one morning, the risen Jesus and Peter share a breakfast of grilled fish by the sea. "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus asks him three times. "Yes, Lord, I do," is Peter's response. "Feed my sheep," Jesus tells him. And no matter what may happen to Peter throughout the course of his life, he will always remember that, even though he had done nothing to deserve it, he had experienced the unqualified love of God, and had received his unconditional forgiveness.

These stories are examples of the impact the resurrection of Jesus had on the people around him. And this is what it means to us:

It means that God accepts us, and loves us, and embraces us
... just as we are;

It means that God wants us to be his willing partners, and not just fearful servants;

It means that God wants us to have peace and assurance, not only about our place in this world, but also about our future in the world to come; and

It means that none of our concerns or needs are too small to bring to God's attention.

In other words, the resurrection of Jesus was God's way of showing the world how great is his love for us. And the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross was God's way of showing us how we can share that love with each other; by laying down our lives for each other. And that, my brothers and sisters, is why we celebrate and honor this resurrection, and not any of the others.

And finally, that's why on Easter Sunday, and all of the Sundays in the Season of Easter, we begin our worship services with these words:

Alleluia. Christ is risen. | **The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Amen.