

me when I was growing up.

It was only when I was a man in my mid-twenties, however, that the truth of these so-called stories became evident to me. A young colleague at work shared his faith with me one night, and spoke as though this Jesus were *alive!* I was astonished! I had never before heard someone my own age talking about their relationship with Jesus and about how wonderful Jesus had been to him and his family. You see, my context for the Gospel stopped at the level of it being a religious story, and I was blinded to the truth. But thanks be to God, only a week later, my eyes were opened when I accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour and Friend.

If you have never asked Jesus into your heart, how can you be certain that He lives? How can you be certain that you will go to heaven? How can you come to know Him as a friend?

If you have not already done so, then I invite you, in the silence that will follow these remarks, to ask Jesus to come into your life, to forgive your sins, and to take away any blindness you may have, or any confusion about the truth of the resurrection. You don't have to say anything out loud, if you don't wish, but in the silence of your hearts say to Him, "*Lord Jesus, come into my life and help me to know you. Please be a friend to me.*"

May the glory of the resurrection transform your life. May you see Jesus and hear Him call your name. May you find your true life in Him and walk with Him in this world and throughout eternity.

Jesus lives! The Lord is risen indeed!

Χάρις τῷ θεῷ, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. Ἀμήν

## EASTER

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**T**he resurrection of Jesus Christ is the crowning glory of the Church. It is the good news that God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, has vanquished death and has overcome, once for all, the everlasting consequences of sin and death. It is good news to the frightened; good news to the guilty; good news to the sick; good news to all those to whom life has dealt tough blows; good news to the young and good news to the elderly. The resurrection is good news to the hopeless in every generation. Jesus lives! He is Lord to the glory of God the Father! Alleluia!

Can we possibly praise God enough for the gift of eternal life? Can we possibly praise Him sufficiently for the blessed assurance that where Jesus is, we shall also be? And can we possibly praise God as we ought, that the good news of the resurrection begins here with *our* spiritual renewal in this life?

Because Jesus lives, we have a relationship with Him. Because Jesus lives, our fellowship with Him and His with us, are an ongoing part of our lives here and now. Because Jesus lives, we can believe as absolute truth, all that He taught. Because Jesus lives, we can still approach Him with our brokenness and need. Because Jesus lives, we can ask Him to forgive our sins and give us a fresh start to life. Because Jesus lives, we can experience His love personally in our own lives. Our faith is not past-tense as is the faith of many around the world, because Jesus has accomplished His mission here on earth. He lives!

Do you truly understand how unique the Gospel is? It is the eye-witness account of those who were there. The Gospels don't tell us what they *think*, but rather, what they *know* to be true. The Jews are still looking for Messiah, not having

recognised Him in their midst. The Muslims consider Him to be another of the ancient prophets, ranking well below their own prophet, Mohammed. Sikhs and Hindus and Zoroastrians and Buddhists venerate dead spiritual leaders. We alone have the good news that Jesus Christ is the living Son of the living God. We alone can approach Him in this life and anticipate our eternal fellowship with Him in the next.

The Gospel tells in simple language what happened on this day. Because Jesus was buried hurriedly only a few hours before the start of the Jewish Sabbath, Mary Magdalene had to wait until first light on the day following Sabbath, before she could go to the tomb. Understand that she, and all of Jesus' followers were in shock and deep mourning, because the One in whom they had placed such hope had suddenly been put to death. They had personally seen and heard and witnessed the full horror of the crucifixion.

How would *you* feel if, just two days after you had buried your loved one, you returned to the cemetery to find the grave opened and the body gone? At the very least I think you would feel violated, hurt, or outraged. All we know is that Mary ran back to Peter and to the mysterious "disciple whom Jesus loved" and told them. They went to see for themselves and found everything just as she had said. The tomb was empty: empty that is, except for the burial shroud that had covered the body of Jesus. We are told that the beloved disciple saw and believed: we don't know what Peter's reaction was.

And Mary Magdalene, whom we know to be one the Lord's closest followers, stood bereft in her grief. Again she peered into the tomb and saw, this time that it was *not* empty: two angels dressed in white were sitting there, and they questioned why she was weeping.

Context sometimes blinds us, doesn't it? When you don't expect to see something, then oftentimes you don't recognise it for what it is when you do see it. I've been burying people for well over thirty years and can tell you that I have never, ever, had a conversation with them after the fact. And nor would I expect to. But if I did, if someone I had buried suddenly walked up to me and starting talking to me, I might think that there was something familiar about that person, without actually recognising them. *I would be blinded to the truth.*

Isn't that what happened to Mary? The risen Jesus spoke with her and she assumed He was the gardener, that is, until He spoke her name with all the love and tenderness that was so familiar to her. Tears of sorrow suddenly became tears of joy! Could it be so? The Lord Jesus was standing in front of her in Person. The voice that she knew and loved was speaking her name.

*"I have seen the Lord!"* she later told the disciples. *"I have seen the Lord!"*

Easter is all about seeing the Lord and hearing His voice. It is all about experiencing life over death, joy over sorrow, amazement at the gracious workings of God. Easter gives us hope for the future in the face of all that is happening today. Jesus lives!

Let me return to the blindness of context. I dare say that all of us, together with most of the people among whom we live, know something of the Easter story. And for some, that is what it remains—a *story*. I grew up in a nominally Christian home during a time when Christianity was more culturally obvious than it now is, and therefore I was familiar with the Christmas story and with the Easter story. I knew about the birth of Jesus, and I knew about His death and resurrection. These were part of the spiritual furniture that was all around