

Message: “Nonsense”

Nonsense! I don’t know about you, but I remember the occasions when someone said those words to me. They’re words of rejection.

“I don’t believe you” – that’s what they mean. We carry them with us as a burden.

How does it make you feel? It hurts. When someone says this, they’re showing they’re unwilling to hear you. They don’t see value in what you say or think. That’s how Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the women who went to the tomb must have felt.

They saw something they didn’t really understand. It was scary and thrilling. They wanted to share the news. Actually, they feel they have to share the good news. But, when they went back and told their children and their friends, no one wanted to believe them. In fact, their loved ones actively resisted saying, “Nonsense. Are you out of your mind?!”

Though the women are convinced, the rest are not. They come to belief slowly. Many of the disciples were skeptics about resurrection. At first, they regard the women as hysterical, telling a ridiculous story. The word translated as “nonsense” was used to refer to the delirious stories told by the very sick as they suffer in great pain or tales told by those who fail to perceive reality (4 Maccabees 5:11). The other disciples think the women are dreaming. They just don’t believe them.

Yet Peter can’t sit still. He’s learned to trust what Jesus predicts. So he gets up and runs to the tomb, sees the linen clothes by themselves and then leaves. He wonders about what has come to pass. It’s hard to call Peter doubting here. Something stirred him to check out the situation when others were incredulous. His recent denials surely taught him to trust what Jesus says.

Peter walks away from the tomb wondering what lies ahead. Something is happening, and its reality is slow to sink in with Jesus’ followers. Just how much they struggle to understand the reality of Jesus’ resurrection shows in what follows.

The same thing happens today. I'm sure you've seen your kids, friends or co-workers roll their eyes when you talk about your faith or church. You can almost hear what they're thinking, "There they go again, off on the crazy Jesus thing."

Guess what? You aren't alone. A popular 1995 song by TobyMac has these lyrics:

*"People say I'm strange, does it make me a stranger
That my best friend was born in a manger?*

What will people think when they hear that I'm a Jesus freak?

What will people do when they find that it's true?

I don't really care if they label me a Jesus freak

*There ain't no disguisin' the truth."*¹

Paul wrote this in a letter to Corinth: "... we are interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. But people who are unspiritual don't accept the things from God's Spirit. They are foolishness to them and can't be understood, because they can only be comprehended in a spiritual way" (vv13-15). In other words, Jesus' resurrection is nonsense unless you are willing to suspend your disbelief and look beyond what lies on the surface, opening yourself to the spiritual side of life.

If you struggle with the concept of resurrection, you aren't alone.

It falls well outside our comfort zone. It isn't like we have conversations like, "Hey, did you hear John resurrected last week? Mary was sure thrilled and relieved. Their kids are struggling with it, though." No, that doesn't happen. We don't get extra lives, like you do in video games, role-playing games or movies. That's true today, just like it was in Jesus' time.

We know Jesus' friends and followers didn't believe in his resurrection, even though they saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. If they had, then they wouldn't be spending their money on the herbs they're bringing on that early morning. The group going to the tomb would've been going to greet Jesus, not care for a body. And it would have been more than their Moms and other women showing they cared.

¹ TobyMac & Jeff Heimnermann, *Jesus Freak*, 1995. Source: <https://genius.com/Dc-talk-jesus-freak-lyrics>

It's one thing when a person of power acts in a miraculous way.

Jesus showed he had the power to resurrect Lazarus. It's another thing when that person dies. Jesus died a humiliating, public death on a cross. That raises a question.

Who would resurrect him? When Jesus died, there were no Christians. Those who were with him in his last days didn't understand God's relationship with Jesus. And they didn't understand our relationship with God through Jesus. It makes all the difference in the world. Jesus, God incarnate, came to change the way things were, giving us a new, better relationship with God. Rather than reminding us sin can only bring death, Jesus showed us the love of God gives eternal life.

Jesus' resurrection changes everything. It means each of us, our families and all of creation get a new lease on life. Easter is a new start. It's a promise that our old life, our old self, our old patterns and behaviors, and those who would drag us down, can be left behind. When we truly believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we are reborn, a new person by the power of God's love and grace. God's love pardons and heals us, our family and communities. And God's love will heal all of creation in time.

Best of all, everyone is welcome to the kin-dom of God. The first Easter day opened a new way of life. We can be free from guilt, shame and negativity. They don't exist in God's kingdom. We can be filled with light, love and joy. Peace reigns in God's kingdom. We can trust God and believe in life.

There's only one problem: what do we tell other people?

Not everyone saw the angels, heard what they said or saw the linen strips. That was true in Jesus' time. And it's true for everyone today.

You know how it is with amazing things. If you didn't see it, if you weren't there, it's hard to capture the experience. You've tried to share it, you've tried to tell your friends or family about this amazing thing you saw, this amazing music you heard, this amazing experience you had. You describe it as imaginatively as you can. You show them the motions, you talk about what happened to you, you relive the moment in front of them. You try your best. And ... crickets. So you shrug and say

the only thing you can think to say. The only thing anyone says faced with a lack of response: “I guess you had to be there.”

That’s what we might be left with when we’re trying to talk about the latest movie we watched, or concert we heard, but it doesn’t seem adequate for this Easter thing. This Resurrection moment, this being-alive-in-a-way-that-leads-into-eternity experience. We can’t and don’t want to shake our heads and say, “I guess you had to be there” and sadly wander away. It’s too good to keep to ourselves. Too wonderful to hide under a bushel. Too incredible to not share. Because we are witnesses.

Bearing witness is more than simply saying we saw it. Saying, with the disciples, “we’re witnesses” isn’t simply a matter of pride, or worse, one-upmanship. It’s claiming a responsibility, or better, an opportunity to share. To share the experience, to offer the gift we’ve been given, to announce the kin-dom which has taken root among us. Jesus has risen! The promised Easter transformation has taken place.

We are witnesses to the way, truth and life of Jesus.

We are witnesses of the way God transforms lives, blessing our soul. We are witnesses of our shared and unique experiences of God. Let’s share them. Paul did. At first, he shared his spiritual experience of God “*with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking*” (1 Corinthians 2:3 CEB).

Do you know what got him through? Paul didn’t rely on wise words, but on the power of God’s Spirit. He knew true faith doesn’t depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God (vv4-5). Later, he said, “*God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven’t crossed the mind of any human being*” (1 Corinthians 2:9; Isaiah 64:4 CEB).

God, the great cosmic director, orchestrated what took place. From the arrest through the death to the resurrection, Jesus walked in God’s will. God took care of matters. God has been in control all along.

Though the church proclaims the resurrection confidently today, the original witnesses had to be convinced it happened. Resurrection was promised by Scripture and by Jesus, but only slowly, grudgingly and methodically did the disciples come to see it as true.

On this Easter, I invite you to hear the words, share your experience of God and choose to believe. If you aren't ready, I invite you to listen and hear like it was the first time. If you see and believe, then, with the boldness of children, go and tell others. Pass the good news on.

Jesus Christ is risen!

Let us pray ...

Dear God, the season since we were last together in person for Easter has been one of mixed emotions; of faith we struggle to understand. We greeted you with palm branches. We sat at table with you to share a farewell meal. We witnessed your death on a simple wooden cross. Yet on the third day, you come to us again in victory. By this we know death is not the final word. As the sun boldly rises to meet a new day, rise in our lives this Easter morning, for you are our hope, our life, and our joy. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Luke 24:1-12 (CEB)

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

Acts 10:34-36 (CEB)

Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!"