



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Easter Day, being the Feast of the Resurrection, April 5th, 2015

✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. *AMEN* ✠

People have found it hard to believe Jesus Christ's physical resurrection from the time the women arrived at the tomb on that first Easter Day to anoint his body. Even though he had assured them many times during his three-year ministry he would rise from the dead on the third day the empty tomb came to his disciples as a complete shock.

In fact, they preferred to believe their enemies had stolen his body rather than accept that he had kept his promise and risen physically from the dead. And if his own disciples found it hard to believe he kept his word, should we really be surprised that ordinary people find it hard to believe?

Should we, therefore, be in the least bit surprised that it has become a tradition for "progressive" clergymen – even Princes of the Church – to clamber into the pulpit on Easter Day and proclaim they don't believe Jesus Christ was physically resurrected from the dead?

Yet it is shocking. It is, in fact, the most shocking thing about the resurrection. After all, if we actually believe all we say about God in the Creeds – that, for instance, he is "the almighty, eternal Creator of the Universe" – it follows that, for him, performing a resurrection or two should be a piece of cake.

Indeed, it is truly amazing how many people have no trouble accepting that the Lord our God created heaven and earth and all that therein is, and yet seem to have a hard time accepting that

he physically raised his own Son from the dead. It's a perfect example of swallowing a camel, while choking on a gnat.

Isn't it illogical to imagine that God, who effortlessly created our vastly complex universe, would find it in the least bit difficult to raise a human body from the dead. The only thing that's difficult to believe about it is that he would bother to do such an inconsequential thing.

Compared with the creation, the resurrection is a very modest miracle indeed; an act of creation in miniature so to speak. But, then, the most striking thing about God's miracles is their remarkable modesty.

Think about what God's miracles would have been like if he'd assigned the job to Hollywood movie moguls like Sam Goldwyn, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Imagine how Hollywood would treat for the plagues of Egypt. The notion of the Nile flowing with blood shows promise. But they wouldn't have bothered with anything as banal as plagues of locusts, frogs and flies.

Hollywood's scriptwriters would surely have arranged for space aliens, gremlins, the Blob and Godzilla to give the Egyptians their comeuppance. The Crossing of the Red Sea wouldn't be the result of the blowing of the wind. Superman would have toted in the Brooklyn Bridge, the Golden Gate, or may be the Hoover Dam.

A Steven Spielberg or George Lucas resurrection would send Jedi Knights with light sabers to rescue Jesus and beam him up to their Death Star. Intergalactic troopers or Extra Terrestrials would zap the chief priests and scribes and Romans. "May the Force be with you."

And forget about loaves and fishes, the Five Thousand would have feasted on a seven-course meal catered by The Inn on the Park, The Plaza or Maxime's de Paris.

Outlandish ideas. Not a bit of it. The unfortunate fact is that God is always a bit of a disappointment to us. He never does things in quite the way we'd like him to do them. Our enemies are never crushed and obliterated in the way we want. We are never vindicated as gloriously as we feel we ought to be. We must always be content with something very much more modest.

If the Bible teaches anything, it's that there's nothing new about this sense of disappointment and frustration. Humans have been frustrated with God from the very beginning. Adam and Eve didn't eat the forbidden fruit because they were hungry. They did so because they thought they'd be better at God's job he is.

This fundamental human refusal to be satisfied with the way that God does things – this endemic dissatisfaction with way he ordains things to be – was the root cause of the Crucifixion. The crowd who cheered Jesus into Jerusalem knew exactly who he was. They knew he had fulfilled all the prophecies about God's Messiah. That's why they shouted: "Hosh'ha'nah! Save now! Save now!"

Four days later, however, they decided they didn't like the way he was going about things. They wanted a war. They wanted to beat the Romans to pulp and conquer the world. But that wasn't the deal God was offering. So they killed his Son . . . in the most humiliating and painful way man has ever devised.

If, of course, they'd treated an earthly king that way, they'd have been in very deep do-do. As in

In the parable of the landowner who planted a vineyard and rented it to wicked tenants Jesus points out that a human king would have obliterated them for their crimes. And it's true. A human king would exact punishment to the last jot and tittle. But, mercifully, God is not at all like us. And far from being upset by it, we should be thankful.

God, being perfectly good, takes everything evil in the world and uses it not just for the better, but for the very best. Thus he took the most appalling act of evil human beings have ever committed and turned it to our benefit.

He used our murder of his only begotten Son to provide the means of saving us from the consequences of being human. Instead of the death we so richly deserve, he offers us the promise of eternal life.

There is, of course, a price to pay for this. But it's not the sort of price human beings would exact – an arm, a leg, the life of a child, an exorbitant sum of money, or a humiliatingly servile act of gratitude.

All he asks is that we love him, and demonstrate that love for him by loving our fellow men as much as we love ourselves. It's a pretty cheap price when you come to think of it and we ought to have no trouble showing our love for him that way. Yet we rarely make anything more than a vague stab at it.

This, of course, points us to the real miracle of Easter. It isn't the miracle of the physical resurrection of Christ's dead and broken body. The real miracle is what that modest little resurrection miracle represents. It is that: "So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
AMEN

To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power now and forever. AMEN