

I have been preaching Easter Day sermons for over four decades. And still the stories in the Gospel books of Jesus' resurrection are as wild as ever. *They refuse tidy explanations. They refuse tidy rebuttals. They are still raw and shocking, carrying the sense of eyewitness reports...of something utterly mindboggling.*

However, because the idea of Jesus being resurrected from the dead *is* so mindboggling, it can be quite tempting to *try to explain it away*. And to try to fit these stories into some kind of larger narrative that we find easier to deal with.

One would be to say that the disciples or the early church just *made this stuff up*. Maybe even for good reasons—but still they made it up. That would definitely fit with all the lying we see in the world these days. But the gospel stories just won't cooperate with that idea. Because if you are going to get a group of people to start a lie then there's two things you do: *you make your stories completely uniform* so as to minimize questions. And *you make yourselves look good* in the story. *Instead*, what we have in the Bible are multiple differences of details in the resurrection stories even though the basic points are shared in common. And what we have are stories that consistently portray the disciples in less than a flattering light. In the Gospel stories, the disciples find the initial reports of Jesus' resurrection to be completely unbelievable—and they persist in their unbelief as long as possible. That just isn't how you make up a good story.

Another way we may try to soften the shock of the resurrection stories is to explain them away by trying to be smarter than the stories themselves. That is, we could say that, really, these aren't stories based in any fact at all, but instead, they are just stories meant to represent something that we think we already know anyway—the immortality of the soul. So, supposedly the resurrection stories are really no biggy—they just mirror what most people in human history have believed in the first place: that there is life after death. *But*, you know, these stories sure do have a lot of details about Jesus' *resurrected body* and the *struggle of the disciples* to believe. These are stories about something completely *unassumed* and *unfamiliar*.

Honestly, even if there are some legendary embellishments here and there in the stories, for the most part they really do read like *eyewitness reports...of something so mindboggling...that they could scarcely put the words together*. That at the root of all these stories is *something that happened* that was so *unexpected* that the disciples were totally *unprepared* for it: *Jesus was dead. And then he wasn't. They talk of meeting Jesus again face-to-face, of him actually speaking to them, and of the disciples touching him. And yet there was something about him that wasn't just the same as before—something about him had also changed.*

These stories of Jesus still *haunt* me—not in a “ghost way”—but in a “God way”. They seem to exist on the borderland between the known and the unknown...*the seen and the unseen*. They call into question our whole perception of life—that there is a lot more to life...and God...than we would have ever imagined.

So, what if, instead of trying to *explain* these stories of Jesus' resurrection—or *explain them away*--we allow the stories to be just as mindboggling as they are. *And we let the stories question us?*

- What if, in fact, God did change something about life and death for everyone on that first Easter Day, beginning with Jesus?
- What if, just as death destroys everything in this life, God restores everything in the life to come?
- What if we, and all our dearly departed loved ones, will be the same persons after death but also somehow changed?
- What if our wounds...and sins...from this life will not be simply left behind...but healed in the truth and mercy of Jesus in the life to come?
- What if the resurrection of Jesus is the reason for a peace from God which passes all human understanding?