



# Is Jesus really alive?

by Rev Dr Dan Mueller

On Easter Sunday, Christians often celebrate by saying responsively "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!"

However, the very first followers of Jesus struggled with this confession of faith. Although Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection numerous times, his early followers did *not* expect the events that unfolded on that first Easter.

In fact, Jesus' closest followers (known as "the eleven disciples" or simply "the Eleven") thought his rising again was 'nonsense.' Luke, an early collector of eyewitness accounts, writes: 'They [the disciples] did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.' (Luke 24:11).

Let's recap the events. Some women have come early on Sunday morning to the place where Jesus of Nazareth was buried. Three days ago, Jesus had gone through a mock trial and been brutally murdered on a cross by the Roman authorities, egged on by the Jewish religious leaders of the day. He's hastily buried on Friday afternoon, before the Jewish weekend. Now these women come to finish his burial rite.

But something unexpected happens — they discover the tomb is empty! After speaking with two men in dazzling white they return to the village to tell the other disciples that Jesus' body is missing. Could Jesus be alive like he said? In the culture of that day, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Yet they are given the privilege of being the first humans to witness the most important event in Earth's history! Luke emphasizes their role by naming the women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James.

But the Eleven male disciples do not believe these women. The Eleven think the women are speaking 'nonsense.' This is a specialist medical term for delirium that comes with a fever. It's babble. Talk devoid of any sense. Foolish. Silly. It's as if they're saying, "How could Jesus' tomb be empty? Don't be silly, he's dead. Jesus can't be raised to life, that's impossible. We don't believe this drivel. Do you have a fever or something?!"

When we stop to really consider some of the basic tenants of the Christian faith they can, at times, seem like nonsense. I mean think about it! God came down to earth as a baby, born to a teenage mother and an adopted father who was a carpenter, in a backwater village in the Middle East. Is this just babble? This baby grew up claiming he was God, but was wrongly accused as a terrorist and crucified by the Romans. Is this foolishness? On the third day after his death, his body went missing, but some women claimed to have a conversation with heavenly beings who said Jesus is raised from the dead. Isn't this impossible?! You become a follower of Jesus by being splashed with water, which makes you a new person and an adopted child of God. Does this sound like drivel? Followers eat bread and wine around a table and they experience the presence of the living Jesus. Is this silly? Is Jesus really alive today? Or is this just nonsense?

It would be nonsense except for one thing — the Word of God. See God is the Creator and Sustainer of this universe. God brought the whole world into existence, and holds it together, with a few simple words. "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). God's Word is power itself. And the Word of God concerning Jesus' death and resurrection has been written down in Scripture. Scripture includes eyewitness testimony to historical events. God's Word says that Jesus was crucified but raised on the third day. The two men in white, the messengers of God, speak God's Word: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? [Jesus] is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, [remember God's Word] ... 'The Son of Man must ... be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" (Luke 24:5-7). Likewise, God's Word says that when you are splashed with water in baptism you are washed clean and inherit eternal life. It's not the water that does this, but God's Word plus the water. And the Word says: 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved.' (Mark 16:16). God's Word says that eating bread and drinking wine while trusting in his words "This is my body" and "This is my blood" gives you forgiveness of your sins.

And because it's God's Word, it happens as God says. If God's Word can create the entire universe, then the Word can raise a dead body.

The events of Easter, and the entire Christian faith, boil down to this one thing: do you trust the Word of God which tells you that Jesus was crucified, but raised to life and is alive today?

Allow me to illustrate: Max Lucado tells the story of a medical worker in Brazil who discovered a tribe of indigenous people in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was in need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily. A hospital was not too far away — just across the river, but the tribe would not cross because they believed the river was inhabited by evil spirits. And to enter the water would mean certain death. The medical worker explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. But they were not impressed. (This seemed like 'nonsense' to them!). He then took them to the river bank and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn't go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed his face. It didn't matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He raised a triumphant fist, punching the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the tribe broke into a cheer and followed him across.

This is what Jesus did. He entered the river of death. It seemed like nonsense to everyone else. But he came out on the other side alive. This means we no longer need to fear death. Jesus has made a way through death to life. We trust this because we have heard God's Word.

May you join with Jesus as he punches the air in victory at Easter. May you continually trust God's Word which promises that Jesus is alive today. And because he lives, the grave no longer has any hold over you.



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