

“Believed”

John 20:1-18

Scott B. Martin – April 12, 2009

I recently asked a group of 9th graders what the most important date in the Christian calendar was. Most of them said Christmas. Perhaps many of you would have said the same thing, but let me suggest that the most important day in the Christian calendar is not Christmas when we celebrate Jesus’ birth; but Easter when we celebrate his resurrection. If it were not for his resurrection we would not care when he was born. This is why on the Christian calendar this is the year A.D. 2009, anno domini, the year of our Lord 2009. We measure time from Christ resurrection, not from his birth.

We just read from the Gospel of John’s account of the resurrection. Buried, if you pardon the use of the word on Easter Sunday, amidst the story of the Resurrection is most curious line. Mary Magdalene, Peter and the beloved disciple have come to visit Jesus’ tomb. They find the stone at the entrance rolled away. Peter, ever the impetuous one, runs into the tomb to see what he can see. He sees the grave clothes but no body. Jesus’ body is gone. He doesn’t know what to make of it. He’s just staring at the scene. Then the beloved disciple steps into the tomb. We are told “HE SAW AND BELIEVED.” Hallelujah! But wait, this scene ends, “he saw and believed; FOR AS YET THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURE, THAT HE MUST RISE FROM THE DEAD. THEN THE DISCIPLES RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES.”

This is a very strange form of belief, or maybe not. Many people believe in the resurrection but the question is what difference does it make in their lives. Does it bring them comfort and hope? Does it cause them to rejoice

each and every day? Does it cause them to seek to serve the risen Christ and those around them in Christ's name? They believed and returned to their homes.

Perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on Peter and the beloved disciple. I suspect we've all been there. I know I have. It is not easy in this world to nurture a sense of resurrection and joy and living into our everyday lives. Even when we manage it it is hard to sustain it.

John offers us a path to give us a shot at living life in the light of the resurrection. He tells us that they "saw and believed" and "returned to their homes" because "they did not yet understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead." John suggests that if we immerse ourselves in the scriptures, if we spend time reading, studying, and praying over the scriptures, alone at home and with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we might, with the help of the Holy Spirit develop a life filled with resurrection hope. In doing so we will become a new creation in Christ.

Many movies about the life and ministry of Jesus have been made. One of the most popular is the movie simply entitled *Jesus*. It has been translated into 871 languages and it is estimated that six billion people have seen it all around the globe. As you can imagine, evangelists often use it to tell the Christian story.

The story is told of one evangelist who was spreading the good news of Christ in the jungles of East Asia. One night he set up a generator, plugged in the movie projector and began the film. This would be the first time this group of people had ever heard the Christian message. It was also the very first time they had seen a movie!

At first all went well. The audience felt deeply attracted to Jesus' as he went about sharing the news of the kingdom of God, performing miracles,

healing people, welcoming children and forgiving sinners. Clearly this Jesus was a good and power filled man. But then trouble began. When the film showed Jesus being falsely accused, mocked, cruelly treated, the audience began to become incensed that Jesus should be treated so.

They became so outraged that they began to blame the missionary who was showing the film. They felt he must have something to do with this great injustice. The missionary actually had to stop the projector and calm them down, assuring them to wait, there was more to come.

But when the film came to the crucifixion the audience again lost control. Weeping and wailing broke out throughout the crowd. Once again the missionary had to stop the film and calm them down. Once again he assured them to wait, there was more to come.

When he switched the projector back on crowd continued to mourn as they buried Jesus, but when the resurrection scene rolled around pandemonium broke out! The people began singing and dancing, shouting and slapping each other on the back in celebration. The cheers and shouts of joy were deafening.

Once again the missionary stopped the projector, only this time he didn't tell them to calm down. They were doing exactly what should be done when experiencing the resurrection of Christ. Christ is risen! Let's celebrate!