

It Must Be True

Easter Message by Rev. Brian Maitland
(inspired by words from Fred Plumer)

We live in a time and a place where asking about the reality – the truth if you will – of any statement or idea immediately brings to bear the tools of the scientific method – hypothesis, experiment, measurement, records and conclusions. Since the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment some hundreds of years ago, what we know – or think we know – about our universe and our very living that has been uncovered and tested through the scientific method is truly staggering. And the pace of the growth of that kind of factual knowledge, I am told, is still increasing. We are learning more and more, about more and more things, faster and faster than ever before.

Science can tell us whether something is a fact or not, and we then name it as true or not. For so much of our lives, when we want to know the truth about something, we turn to science.

Now I am fascinated by science. I love science. I'm delighted to learn some of the new things that science and its methods can teach me. Astronomy, geography, geology, anatomy, chemistry, physics – I truly enjoy hearing and reading about new discoveries and deeper understandings of the world around me.

But I've also become convinced over time – because of my own experiences and those told to me by many others – that my much-beloved science offers understanding only in strictly bounded and limited ways. I've come to believe that there are arenas of life for which science offers little insight. It's incapable of responding to some questions, or of testing some truths. That creates a lot of difficulty for a many people.

First, people have become so used to a basic worldview where scientifically-tested facts are deemed “true”, that they have forgotten the deep insight nestled within our very being – that other dimensions of truth exist too. So people forget that fact – as known through science – does not cover the whole breadth of truth. In a related way, people have forgotten that the scientific method simply offers the wrong tools to name or even express some of that broader dimension of truth.

I’m not setting up a conflict between science and religion, or science and faith. That’s an utterly false and meaningless opposition between realms of existence – ways of knowing, if you will – that are **not** actually opposites at all. They are just different, like water and air are different, and tools to work with water often aren’t very useful when you want to work with air. Just as air and water are different but not opposite – so is it with science and faith.

What do I do then, when someone comes to me and asks, “So Brian – the Easter story – is it true?”

Science will never tell me the answer to that question. The question comes out of the wrong dimension of life for that. But that doesn’t let me off the hook. The question remains.

My answer is simple. It doesn’t carry the same qualities as an answer from the dimension of science. My answer is, “It must be true. For all of us to be here today, for this church or any church to be what it is today, for people of faith to continue to do the amazing things they do, then Easter **must** be true!”

In saying that, I may not be saying what you might think. I'm not talking at all about the FACTS of the Easter story – it's details and its historicity and its verifiability and its provability. I'm not talking about the trial and the crucifixion and the tomb and the angels and the rolled-away stone and the resurrection appearances of Jesus, as we hear in the Gospel stories and in Christian tradition down through the centuries.

In truth, I have become convinced that the physical resurrection is one example of early Christian midrash – where tellers of the story filled in the blanks and gaps and missing details in the earliest Jesus-stories that were circulating soon after his death, and even before. Building understanding for the holy story through midrash was a time-honoured Jewish practice, and it only made sense to continue that practice into the emerging Christian community too. Even Paul speaks very clearly to those who might otherwise believe in physical resurrection, when he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:44 "of course the resurrection was spiritual. What goes into the ground is physical. What comes out is spiritual."

If this is so – if the physical resurrection itself is Midrash or mythology – then does it make the Easter story – or at least that part of the story – false? Not at all. Powerful carriers of truth do not always rest completely on fact.

There's that problem again – within our science-dominated way of life, we presume we should equate truth with fact. But facts – those notions verifiable by scientific methods – only contribute SOME of the world's truth. Gospel and Midrash and mythology and legend and folk-story – and faith – are all about some of the REST of the truth, a truth that lies outside the realm of science.

So let me tell you some of those TRUTHS of the Easter story.

What is true is that is that anyone can experience the Kingdom of Heaven or the Realm of God if they are willing to behave and see the world a certain way. And if that has ever been one of your experiences, you don't want to live any other way.

What is true is that, for his first followers, and for us, Jesus couldn't do it for them or us. **We** have to walk the path. **We** have to learn live the way he invited people to live, to think that way and to be that way. **We** have to know and see and feel our world touched with – filled with – the Spirit's holiness. **We** have to figure out how to live in this problematic, inconvenient, counter-cultural, death-defying way that is the way of Jesus' whole life.

What is true is that when we learn to take responsibility for our actions, to make amends for harm we have caused, to change what we have to change so it won't happen again, then our lives – and the lives of a lot of people around us – will be different. We'll begin to live more in tune with the Ultimate Unity that we code-name GOD – and with all creation. We'll live into a fullness and a freedom than we could never imagine without that touch – that experience – that glimpse – of the realm of Heaven.

What is true is that if we begin to understand our reality as having a unifying Spirit that joins and connects every person and everything, then it becomes immediately clear that all we do, every action we take, every mistake that we make becomes a new opportunity to build and re-build connection. That's a lesson we've always needed to learn – and one we most likely need to keep

learning – again and again and again. And if we learn from such lessons, life becomes richer and fuller and more than we can imagine.

What is true is that if we want to stop feeling lonely, if we want to stop feeling weak, if we want to discover that holy realm of which Jesus spoke here – in our time and place – around us – even in us – then we have to learn how to stop judging others. The fundamental equality –the essential goodness and blessedness – of people in **EVERY** important way – is right at the core of our faith.

What is true is that learning to forgive others – and forgive ourselves – is a giant step toward freedom. The biggest gift we can give ourselves is to recognize the weight that we're carrying – the weight of all the anger and hatred and bitterness toward those who we believe have hurt us – and then to get it off our own backs by letting go of it just enough to discover we don't really need it after all. That's forgiveness – a truth from right at the heart of the Easter story.

What is true is the need to love with the utter extravagance of divine love. We have people so much like us we want to – and do – call them friends and neighbours. And we have those at so great a social and emotional distance from us we want to – and do – call them enemies. When we can take them all, and love them all, just the way we want to be loved, then the world-spanning transformation toward the Realm of Heaven begins to unfold.

What is true is that when we reach out in compassion to someone who needs us, or can learn from us, or from whom we can learn, or can be healed by us,

or through whom we can be healed, then we discover the truth that at some level we really are one. And we are never really alone.

What is true is that Jesus taught that life is a gift – a chance to step onto the pathway of full humanity – and fuller reality. When we come to see our own lives – and those of every other person – as a gift, then every life takes on new meaning. Our death – any death – can have no ultimate sway over that truth.

Jesus didn't do much for us through his death. What he did for us, he did through his life. The message of his life was so powerful that it ultimately became a parable itself, told and retold. So powerful was his life's parable, that even after he died, his closest friends found the story giving them hope and trust and strength and insight and wisdom and courage and the will to tell it to others. They believed him when they remembered his direction to "go and do likewise."

Now it's up to us. We still have this same story – this same parable – with which we grapple and struggle, and which speaks deeply into our souls. We're called to live it – to live the same kind of risk he chose, in a world that often still doesn't understand.

We're called to look inside our spirits and see truth that lies there, to look at others and see their truth too, and to recognize in ourselves and each other the same truth that fills the parable and story and Midrash and reality of Jesus' life. That reality hasn't changed. That reality remains alive in its truth.

So is Easter true? It's as true as sunlight in the morning, as breath in your lungs, as the beating of lovers' hearts. It's as true – and as powerful – as love and compassion and trust and hope.

Is Easter true? Of course it is. Hallelujah!