

The Gospel of the Resurrection

What do you think of Easter? Even more, what do you think **about** Easter?

It comes in the spring, which for most of us living in Saskatchewan is a season of recovery from whatever winter has brought our way – a time of pleasant anticipation of the warmth and light of summer. Especially this year, when winter has seemed so very long, spring brings a most welcome sense of change. The spring-time calendar placement of Easter makes it natural to connect it with eggs, newborns of all sorts (bunnies and others), and some of the rest of the cultural and economic trappings that are part of it all in our society here and now.

For those of us who say “Christian” whenever a form or some official asks us to name our religion, Easter is something more than just a nice spring holiday. In fact, I believe Easter is the very centre-piece of an approach to living as a Jesus-disciple. Easter is the root of it all.

I have sometimes mused that early Christians chose the wrong code-symbol for naming their faith in secret to one another. They chose the cross, which certainly was audacious, given the use to which the empire of their time put a cross in real life. The cross as a symbol also has the very great benefit of simplicity – just two straight lines at a right angle, easy to make in all sorts of media by everyone, without the need for artistic skill or talent.

I have a very big “But ...” to set against the cross as our primary Christian symbol. “But,” I want to say, “the problem with the cross is that it points to the wrong moment in our foundational story – the story of Jesus.” The cross highlights Jesus’ death, which was neither unique nor particularly noteworthy in his own time and place. Our church attention to Good Friday is important and essential to the whole meaning of Jesus and what we know in and of and through him, but it’s not the pivotal point, not the climax, not the crucial moment on which the whole story rests.

Easter is that moment. It’s the **resurrection** that takes Jesus’ death on the cross and turns the meaning upside down, just as Jesus himself did so often in his stories and parables. While his death may not have made much of a difference, his **resurrection** certainly did. It is the resurrection, not the cross, that made Christianity possible, perhaps even inevitable. That mystical, beyond-words experience of Jesus’ closest followers and friends, that he was somehow with them still, even after they had witnessed his very real death on the cross, launched them from their fear and lack of understanding into a whole new way of being in their world – a way that over years and decades and centuries has become the evolving faith that we call our own today. The resurrection is the central moment of the Christian Gospel – the “good news”, the core message of our faith.

I could argue, then, that something representing Easter could be more indicative and meaningful as our foundational Christian symbol, rather than the cross of Good Friday. The empty tomb, perhaps? Still, I am not about to undo a couple of millennia of tradition and work and world-wide Christian development in a few words, or even in a whole lifetime. As it happens, I don’t really feel called to do that. The cross will do, as long as we remember that we **are called** to live as resurrection people – those whose focus is on new life and not death, relationship and not separation, peace and not violence