

Title: The News Is Bigger Than You Thought – Part II  
Text: John 20: 1 - 18  
Date: April 21, 2019

I like symmetry. While I don't exactly expect you to remember, on December 3, 2017 I preached a sermon here entitled "**The News Is Bigger Than You Thought**," also based on a passage in John. Of course, since we were in Advent then, the focus was on this concept we call "the incarnation." I was making the case that though this teaching was central to Christianity, it shouldn't be understood narrowly as just a selling point for a "new and improved" religion. As a matter of fact, I don't believe that Jesus came with the simple intent of starting yet one more religion. I believe that the Good News of Christ both transcends and informs all religions.

So here we have these major bookends of Christianity; beginning with the incarnation, and ending with the resurrection. You might think of this as, "**The News Is Bigger Than You Thought – Part II**." Your timing is perfect if you are what some call "a Christmas and Easter Christian."

You are a bright lot, you are. What do *you* make of this story of the resurrection? Is it wishful thinking? Is it intentional fabrication? Is it sweet mythology? Did Jesus rise from the dead? And if he did rise from the dead, what does that even mean? Was his corpse revived? Perhaps you simply say, "Don't know. Don't care."

Let me wade in here, and start by referencing a couple of perspectives that don't exactly float my boat.

I am not a big fan of the Christian Hallmark Card orientation. This is the sentimental reminder that the days are getting longer and warmer, and some flowers are beginning to come up. Isn't this the Good News of Easter? After winter, there is always spring. Easter is the Good News that there are always new beginnings. Doesn't quite have the gravitas that you would expect from a great world religion, does it?

I also have some problems with the popularized version of *Christus Victor*. This is almost a muscular image of Jesus where he has beaten Satan at his own game, and comes out victorious. I read an account of a Passion Play that was put on in Texas a couple of years ago. When Jesus rose from the dead, cheering broke out in the crowd, similar to that at a football game. When I think of the dynamic at work here, it is almost an in-your-face version of, "Yes! Our team won!" Of course, the implication is that if my team won, then your team lost. Religions are then separated into winners and losers.

For many, the resurrection is also associated with a rather ego-centric version of a ticket to heaven. You want to live forever, don't you? Well Jesus' resurrection *proved* that it is ours for the asking! It answers the question, "What do I get out of this?"

Well now that I have highlighted approaches to Easter that *don't* excite me, we need to say something affirming about Easter. Where to start?

Though I am supportive of modern, rational thinking, I have to sheepishly confess something: I actually believe that something miraculous happened here! (There, I said it.) Now I am not one to run through the mall shouting, "He's alive! He's alive!" I *am* one to sit quietly, however, and think, "Dang. This is significant! Lord, give me eyes to see!"

I am not one to try to argue anyone into faith, and those churches intent on *proving* the resurrection this morning are swimming upstream. For those of you who like debate, you might pick up a copy of Lee Strobel's "**A Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates the Evidence for the Resurrection.**"

Personally, however, at this point in my life, I am more prone to enter the story through a more mystical understanding. And I think this might appeal to you as well.

Let me make a couple of general observations about the gospel resurrection stories before getting to my main point.

First, I would note that there were no witnesses to a lifeless corpse coming back to life. No hidden cameras. But maybe answering "the *how*" is not the main point. Suffice it to say that I don't believe that the disciples – or anyone else, for that matter – stole Jesus' body. There is just no way the first Christians would have been willing to die for something based on a hoax.

Secondly, there is something just a little bit "otherworldly" – for lack of a better word – with *all* of Jesus' appearances. He was not immediately recognized for who he was. He suddenly appeared in rooms that were locked. At the same time, he did eat. You could touch him. So there is something physical going on, yet something more than physical. I also note that there is a degree of selectivity about *who* Jesus reveals himself to. The appearances were not designed for wide scale shock and awe.

\* \* \*

OK. My goal is not to answer all your detailed little questions (as if I could), but more so to give you a big picture framework of wrapping your imagination around this extraordinary story. A way that you can begin to say, "*Maybe* I get it." Maybe the news really *is* bigger than I thought. I want to weave together a couple of basic thoughts that will leave you both saying, "Yeah, I guess I heard that before," along with, "I never heard it quite that way before!"

I have mentioned this before, but I need you to reflect on the way that some people talk about Jesus Christ. You would almost think that "Jesus" was his first name, and "Christ" was his last name. If pressed, I know that technically you are aware this is not the case, but I want us to think about this for a bit.

Shortly after Saul's conversion we read that he confounded the folks there by "**proving that Jesus was the Christ.**" (Acts 9:2) Now in fairness, you could read this verse two different ways. You could say that he was trying to prove that Jesus was "the Messiah," which maintains the home-court advantage of keeping this within the Judeo-Christian framework. However, this morning I would like to plant in your mind the challenge to think of the "the Christ" as a kind of Cosmic Christ, thereby putting the scope of this as something far bigger than a score for the home team.

I think it is vital to understand this, because as Christians, when we focus too much on Jesus of Nazareth *without* an understanding of a Cosmic Christ that transcends time and religions, we limit our ability to really understand Jesus, *and* we limit our ability to really understand the resurrection. Sometimes during Advent churches read of the lineage of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew that makes a big deal of tracing his lineage all the way back to Abraham. I would invite you to see the Christ story not as something with roots just in Abraham, but with roots in the very fabric of the universe – a spiritual reality that is just as real now as with the moment of the Big Bang.

At this point some of you are starting to wonder what I was smoking for breakfast. That's proprietary information. The fact is that you have all been exposed to this thinking before, but you never were quite able to put it all together. Here, then, is your Easter homework assignment:

Re-read the first chapter of John where it says **"All things came into being through [the Cosmic Christ], and without him not one thing came into being."** (v. 3) **"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him."** (v.19)

Re-read Ephesians 1 where Paul talks about a **"plan to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."** (v. 10)

Re-read Colossians 1 where it says **"He is the image of the invisible God. . . . He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** (vv. 15, 17)

Re-read I John, **"We declare to you what was from the beginning . . ."** (v. 1)

So when I think of Easter, I think of news that is much bigger than you thought. I think of a Spirit that has *always* been alive in the world, that *all* religions are tapping into in various ways. I think of a Spirit that permeates Creation itself. The news is bigger than you thought. Jesus is the historical figure, and Christ is the Cosmic figure, and their stories have come together. But we have made Christ into Jesus' last name instead of realizing it was the description of his universal role in history and in all world religions.

Richard Rohr writes: **"Christ is eternal; Jesus is born in time. Jesus without Christ invariably becomes a time-bound and culturally bound religion that excludes much of humanity from Christ's embrace. On the other end, Christ without Jesus would easily become an abstract metaphysics or a mere ideology without personal engagement."**

But in his most recent book, Richard Rohr writes: **"I want to enlarge your view of the resurrection – from a one-time miracle in the life of Jesus that asks for assent and belief, to a pattern of creation that has always been true, and that invites us to much more than belief in a miracle. . . . Resurrection is just incarnation taken to its logical conclusion."**

There is no clear indication that Paul ever met the earthly Jesus, but he sure as heck had an encounter with the living Christ. If that could have happened at all, surely it could then happen anywhere, and at any time. In this vein I was recently reminded of something David Steindl-Rast said. **"A mystic is not a special kind of human being; rather every human being is a special kind of mystic."**

What kind of mystic might you be this Easter? Might *you* encounter the universal Christ?

Amen.

## John 20: 1 – 18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 1 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 2 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 3 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 4 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 5 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 6 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 7 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 8 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 9 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

### Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

10 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look 11 into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 17 "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 18 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 19 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.