

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

When it happened, Easter was a quiet, but significant event. The Friday on which Jesus was crucified, was quite literally an earth shattering event - an earthquake rattled Jerusalem, and the heavy curtain in the Temple¹ which shielded the "Holy of Holies" behind which the Priest met with God to plead His forgiveness on behalf of the people of Israel, was torn in half from the top.

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) do not provide us with details of this curtain, but it is found in the historical records of the time. The Roman historian Josephus, and several others noted, the **veil** measured 60 feet high, 20 feet wide and 4 inches thick, was woven of seventy-two cords, and each cord consisted of twenty-four strands. It was changed every year, but during the year, when it became soiled, it took 300 priests to immerse and cleanse it².

I mention this bit of detail to highlight the significant amount of social, political and economic history which endorses and corroborates the events in the Bible.

Scholars and historians³, using rigorous criteria of historical investigation, all agree that Jesus certainly did exist and lived in the region of Palestine/Galilee. They may hold differing opinions about the teachings of Jesus, they may also question the accuracy of the details of His life as described in the gospels, but they are of one mind that He did indeed live, and had a significant impact on all segments of society, and they are all agreed on the details of major buildings and features in the landscape of the region, which are now archeological sites.

¹ <https://cbumgardner.wordpress.com/2010/04/06/the-thickness-of-the-temple-veil/>

² *Chullin* (Harris, pp. 195-96) (as noted the weblink on the previous page)

³ Josephus and Tacitus to name only two

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

The focus of the Bible's account of history is to demonstrate God's promise that His Son would crush the head of satan⁴, which was achieved by Jesus' resurrection as the Christ.

We often believe, the Easter narrative recorded in the Gospels, is about Jesus' conquering death, ***which it is***, but there is a narrative we miss, and that is, each of the twelve disciples had a distinct life-changing encounter with the risen Christ. The disciples had great difficulty understanding Jesus' references to His death; when Jesus told them He must go to Jerusalem and face the priests and leaders, Peter famously said, *"Far be it (death) from you Lord! This shall never happen to you"*⁵, implying he would do everything in his power to stop Jesus' death. During their last meal together Peter said, *I will lay down my life for you!*, only to deny Him three times, as Jesus predicted he would. Yet his repentance was so sincere and total, Jesus restored Peter to His calling, *Upon this rock (Peter), I will build my Church*, by giving Peter three opportunities to declare his love for Christ: *Do you love me more than these? Then feed my sheep.*

Three years with Jesus, transformed the lives of 11 disciples, except Judas' life, which sadly ended horribly, but that was His choice. Having spent three years immersed in Jesus' ministry, seen all His miracles and heard all His teaching, Judas could not bring himself to put aside his love of money and his trust in wealth, and put his faith in God's redeeming love. Judas was there on the mountain when Jesus taught, *No one can serve two masters. He will either hate the first master and love the second, or he will be devoted to the first and despise the second. So it is in your relationship with God: You cannot serve God and wealth (money) at the same time. Both require your total attention, and you must choose whom you will serve*⁶, but he chose not to heed the teaching.

⁴ Genesis 3:15

⁵ Matthew 16:21-23

⁶ Matthew 6:24 and Luke 6:13

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

In Judas' life, as does in our lives, the absence of trust in God and faith in His plans and purposes, opens the door to disbelief and mis-belief. Without the anchor to a firm moral standard, a person falls prey to conflicting beliefs and priorities, which ultimately destroy the person.

Mary Magdalene's life was turned around as she sat sobbing away beside the empty tomb, believing with all her heart and mind and soul, someone had stolen Jesus' body, wanting desperately to serve her Christ by wiping clean the blood-stained wounds.

Three days prior, in the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *Father, may they (the eleven disciples) be one, as You and I are one.* In the Garden Tomb, Jesus entrusts Mary to convey to the 11 disciples, His first resurrection message, *My Father is now your Father, and My God is your God. Hallelujah! We are ONE as God intended we should be!*

Isn't it interesting, Jesus prepared us for this **"being ONE"** with Him, when He taught us to pray, **Our Father** - My Father and your Father is our God! We are ONE as God intended!

The lives of Cleopas and his wife Mary, were transformed after their encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Later that night, as Jesus broke bread at their table, they recognised Him as the risen Christ. *Didn't our hearts burn with excitement when He taught us the Scriptures?*

The disciple Thomas' life was totally transformed. *Unless I see for myself, he said, the wounds on Jesus hands and the wound made by the spear puncturing his side, I will not believe,* only to say when Jesus invites him to place his finger in His wounds, *My Lord and My God!* So deep was Thomas' transformation, that he travelled as far as southern India to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, where there are millions of people known today, by his name *Mar-Thoma*, St. Thomas. We have in our congregation, two who are descendants of Thomas' pioneering work.

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

The lives of the disciples meeting in the upper room with the doors firmly locked, were transformed when Jesus appeared and breathed on them His peace - *Do not live in fear. As the Father sent me to be with you, so I send you into the world to forgive those whose lives*

Which brings us to the crucial question, ***what do you really believe about Easter?*** For many of us, it is easier to believe in a miraculous virgin birth, than it is to believe in resurrection after death.

My own life story reflects this. Most of you know, I was born into a family with a rich Christian heritage starting six generations ago, when a Hindu Brahmin priest, on reading the Gospel of John then published by the pioneering Baptist missionary William Carey, was convinced Christ was the answer to the question, *does this life have any meaning?*

I grew up reading my Bible and praying as I was taught, but it wasn't until my late teenage years, I felt my worship of God was inadequate. At the time I was confronted with two worlds - a world of rebellion against the *status quo* represented by the hippie movement of the late 1960s, and the world of apparent calm, quiet Christianity, where people found peace and their lives went on seamlessly undisturbed.

Strangely, it was the radical 1970 rock opera written by two young men in their late teens, Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tim Rice, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which set me on the right track.

It wasn't a magical moment in time, but it started with the realisation, the Gospel Truth can be presented in any contemporary form, as did Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tim Rice in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, as long as it did not dishonour God.

When Mary Magdalene, a prostitute whose life was transformed by an encounter with Jesus, sings the song, *I don't know how to love Him*, I realised, this relationship with God is not about my heritage and what I do

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

to demonstrate and maintain my Christianity, its about my relationship with the One who loves me and invites me to love Him. Mary puts into words what I was finding difficult to express:

I don't know how to love him
What to do, how to move him.
I've been changed, yes really changed
In these past few days, when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else.
I don't know how to take this
I don't see why he moves me
He's a man. He's just a man
And I've had so many men before
In very many ways, He's just one more.

... ..

Yet, if he said he loved me
I'd be lost. I'd be frightened
I couldn't cope, just couldn't cope
I'd turn my head, I'd back away
I wouldn't want to know
He scares me so
I want him so; I love him so

The last few lines of this song reflected my own struggle: I was scared to walk away from a relationship with God because I truly loved Him, which is the relationship Mary so desperately wanted for herself. Her quandary was, *how do I relate to an alpha-male who stirs in me the very emotions that*

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

left me feeling empty, yet I am strangely drawn to Him and want to know Him more?

My predicament was, *How do I relate with and worship God who stirred in me a passion for life, of whom I was taught, I had to demonstrate my love for Him with actions and deeds, for the world to see and agree that my love was real?* Sayings like, *Actions speak louder than words*, really didn't help!

The world around me was saying, *You need a scorecard on which the world approves your actions with gold star-stickers, and when you filled the sheet, present yourself to God and say, **Here, I've done it! Will you now accept me?***

I was trying to **earn** God's love through sheer willpower, instead of trusting Christ's finished work on the cross and living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The world said God loved me, but never really, *how much* He loved me. The world around me said I had to live in obedience to God's laws, but could not give me a foundation for my obedience.

Many of us are taught in this way. We read the Scriptures as a collection of moral tales, a means of helping us live as good people, so the big bad witch wouldn't get us! We fail to understand that our behaviour is not the standard by which God measures us; it isn't the reason He loves us.

Easter beckons us to consider our personal faith: ***do I REALLY believe in the resurrection?*** If I do, then I must accept, Jesus' Resurrection opens the door into **Our** Father's presence, to enjoy a personal relationship with Him.

If we accept this Truth by faith, we won't be weary trying to earn, what can only be given.

Easter makes this truth come alive:

Please click your browser's back button to return to the Church website (or click [HERE](#)).

By Jesus' death, we are freed from the sin of this world; the sin of this world no longer holds us back from Our Father in Heaven. Jesus paid the ransom price for our freedom from sin, by His life on the cross.

By Jesus' resurrection, for those who by faith accept it as true, God welcomes us back as His children, His sons and daughters, in the same way God welcomed Jesus back into His presence.

AMEN