

Christian Perspectives

Wasn't this past Easter Sunday a glorious spring day? It was the perfect day to celebrate the key festival of the Christian year. Easter Day is the occasion when the good news or gospel is proclaimed ? the good news that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a human life and died a cruelly human death, has risen from the dead and leads the way for us to follow. It is indeed good news but for many of us it comes with as many questions as it does answers. In 1970, as I recall, I didn't go to church at Easter. So, I thought perhaps it might be a good idea to at least read the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. I dug out a King James translation of the Bible and read the story in all four gospels. In church each Easter the story is read from one of the four gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Reading all of them consecutively I noticed that they were not exactly the same. I remember possibly even saying out loud, "Well, if they want me to believe this, they could have at least got the story straight." And that might have been the end of it. I could have closed the Bible and never opened it again. But it wasn't the end. Instead I was curious to learn why there were four versions of the story instead of just one. I wanted to know why generations of people had responded to the core message that Jesus rose again and not to the differences in detail that at that moment seemed so prominent to me. It started me on a life long journey to first learn about faith in Jesus Christ, to seek to embrace and deepen in that faith and to struggle to decide what I was meant to do with it. I am still on that journey. Whether we engage in it consciously or not, we are all on a journey of trying to understand the world and the meaning of our lives. I have found the bible to be a textbook that is a lot of help although I now prefer to read a more recent translation than one in Shakespeare's English. However, the bible is not like a geometry or algebra text. I cannot find in it exact formulas for living a satisfying and productive life, formulas that fit everyone and every circumstance. Rather it invites me into the story of the people of Israel who saw themselves as beloved of a wonderful and powerful, creative being whom they did not even dare to name. (Hebrew texts use the capital letters YHWH to indicate the Creator God; in English Bibles it is often written LORD and there it is read aloud.) The Bible also invites me into the story of a man so in tune with the mind of the Holy One that he could show us the heart of God's love. What each of us draws from that story to believe is difficult to define. There can be as many theologies as there are people even among those who have formulated creedal definitions of faith! Moreover, what we can take from the Bible does not remain static throughout our lives. It can change with the ages and stages through which we pass and as we accrue more knowledge and understanding. In reading the bible and meeting in groups, Christians go through the process of trying to reach an understanding that satisfies the big questions of life. The story of Jesus' death and resurrection invites us to engage in the journey in a fully conscious way ? not ignoring the part of ourselves that longs to relate to the divine, not keeping so busy with the activities and acquisitions of life that we block the necessity of dealing with our own impending deaths. We are invited to work out our understanding. Only then can we come to fully appreciate the way in which the life, the teaching, the death and the resurrection of Jesus brings us access to abundant life in this world and the promise of peace and unity with the Holy One in the next. Rev. Stephanie Pellow St. Paul's Anglican Church Shelburne