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Christian Perspectives: Understanding the Easter Story

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In the past week or so we have seen almost all the seasons represented.

We have experienced the grey, dull rainy days like late fall, the wind and snow of winter, mild spring weather and even days as warm as summer.

All being well, we should arrive at a glorious spring day to celebrate the key festival of the Christian year - Easter.

Easter is the pinnacle occasion when 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 bible - King James translation ? and read the story in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Hearing the readings a full year apart in church as I was growing up, I had never noticed that there were differences between them.

With a mixture of surprise and something like horror, I remember possibly even saying out loud, ?Well, if they want me to believe this, they could have at least got the story straight.?

That could 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 somewhat different versions of the story instead of just one definitive 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 had seemed so prominent to me at that time.

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 meaning of our lives.

I have found the bible as a textbook to be a lot of help, but it 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.

And it 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 and may vary throughout the life of any person.

I have learned to trust that the authors of the gospels meant only to tell the story as they knew it. Their motive was to record and also to convince their readers of the truth of the story. Telling it would bring them no fame or fortune and might even attract harmful attention. Nevertheless, they felt compelled to write it down. I can only be grateful for their efforts.

As we have the record of the gospels, we are able to retell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection through this Holy Week. It invites us to engage in the journey in a fully conscious way as we work out our understanding.