

Our youth have been going through Confirmation classes in which we teach the basic beliefs of Christianity. We begin each class by reading the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed is a brief summary of the Apostles' beliefs. If you aren't familiar with it, the Apostles' Creed has three sections, and each section begins with "I believe": I believe in God, the Father, I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and I believe in the Holy Spirit. Each section is developed even further.

The Jesus section is the longest and covers the entire story of Jesus, from being born of the virgin Mary, to suffering under Pontius Pilate, to being crucified, died, buried, and rose on the third day. Under the section of the Holy Spirit, there are several beliefs listed that are works of the Holy Spirit. It reads: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Did I go too far? Did I lose you at the resurrection of the body? Yes, they are referring to the actual, physical body of Jesus. This theological foundation of Christianity is a stumbling block for many people. It just doesn't make sense. It seems impossible. It's a deal breaker for many people. They just can't get passed the plausibility of a dead body coming to life again.

These skeptics are in good company. The apostles didn't believe in bodily resurrection, at first. In this passage, the women went to the tomb and found the body gone. They were perplexed, trying to figure out how this happened. Who rolled that huge stone away? The body is gone -- did someone steal it? How did this happen?

Then, two angels appeared and said, "Don't you remember, Jesus told you like three times that this was going to happen." The women were like "Oh yeah. We totally forgot, but now we remember." They believed because Jesus told them this was going to happen, and when it did, they believed it to be true.

So, the women went to tell the apostles that Jesus has risen from the dead, but they didn't believe the women "because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (v.11). It was just too hard to believe. It was just too good to be true. The apostles knew these women. They traveled with them. They knew they were trustworthy, yet the apostles chose not to believe them.

Peter also didn't believe his own experience of the empty tomb. He went to see it for himself. He looked in and saw the body was indeed gone. He only saw the grave clothes left behind. Jesus didn't need them anymore. He was alive. Yet, Peter didn't trust his own experience, "and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened" (v. 12).

Sometimes we're like Peter and the women who are focused on the wrong questions. Peter was trying to figure out what had happened, and the women were trying to figure out how it happened. These are the questions that stump many people. Many need to have hard, physical proof of the Resurrection, and so they focus on evidence that proves what happened and how it happened.

The real question to ask about the Resurrection is why. Why did the Resurrection happen? The answer lies in the second part of the line in the Apostles'

Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

Everlasting, eternal life is proof of the Resurrection. Jesus conquered death to show that death is not the end, that there is life after death. But we don't have to wait to encounter the Risen Christ when we get to heaven. We can experience heaven on earth when we commit our lives to Christ and receive his radical grace here and now. When we open our hearts to Christ, Jesus lives in us.

The Resurrection is not only important for Jesus who continues to live in us, but also for us, who deal with death on a daily basis. The angels reminded the women that Jesus told them what was going to happen. Jesus told them: "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19b). Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die" (John 11:25-26).

That means that whatever is slowly killing us inside, we can rise above. Whatever has killed us long ago, doesn't conquer us. Because Jesus conquered death, we can too. Whatever has caused our hearts to be covered in grave clothes, God raises us up out of our graves, so that we can live the life he intended for us -- One filled with love and grace, forgiveness and peace.

He has risen! And so have we. Our grave clothes of shame, guilt, brokenness, woundedness, anger, bitterness, addictions, pride, anything that keeps us shrouded in death, are left behind because we are now clothed in the fruit of the spirit. Dazzling robes like the two angels wore are awaiting us -- glistening in love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Why did the resurrection happen? So, we can truly live. So, we can have hope that there's more to this life and that we have the power and ability to rise above it. The resurrection happened because God loves us so much that he gave us Jesus, so that whoever believes in him will have eternal life -- a life worth living, a life filled with his presence, a life filled with the fruit of the spirit.

I can't prove 100% that the physical body was resurrected. No one has ever found the body, but for some, that still doesn't prove the resurrection happened. For me, I choose to believe because I have experienced a resurrection. I have been raised up from what was holding me in my grave. I rise to answer the call of Christ, and I rise with Christ every day. I serve a living God who walks with me and gives me the power to overcome the death of this world. I left my grave clothes in the tomb of my old life, and I am now clothed in God's bling -- his peace-filled presence, his loving spirit, and infinite grace.

What about you? Do you believe? God is calling you out of your grave. God is raising you up. He has told you what will happen. He has told you the truth. Believe him. Choose to believe that God can and will resurrect you. Believe that he already has. Leave your death shroud behind and walk in newness with Christ. He is Risen. We are Risen. Hallelujah! AMEN.

As a response to His Word, let us renew our belief by proclaiming together an Easter affirmation of faith.