

## *Resurrection Faith, and Resurrection Love.*

**W**hat happened, during those hours between sunset on Good Friday and sunrise on Easter Sunday? Men and women have been trying to figure that out for nearly two thousand years. In their various attempts to understand what took place, people have been examining whatever evidence is at hand. One such piece of “evidence” is the Shroud of Turin.

The Shroud of Turin, which has been preserved as a relic since 1578, is claimed by many to be the cloth which wrapped Jesus’ body, as it lay in the tomb. The fabric of the shroud bears the imprint of the front and back of a human body – a body that seems to bear the marks of a person who had been crucified. Extensive tests have been performed on the fabric to determine its age and other physical properties. Although it would be impossible for these tests to determine if it was the actual burial cloth used on Jesus, the hope was we could at least learn if it came from that time period. To my knowledge, nothing conclusive has been discovered to support the claim of its authenticity. And yet, the Shroud of Turin represents, for many people, tangible evidence of what took place in the tomb of Jesus – a tomb discovered empty on Easter Sunday morning.

Now, compare all this attention given to the Shroud of Turin, to what Henri Nouwen wrote in his book, *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. Writing about his thoughts on the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, Nouwen wrote the following:

*I think my hesitation about writing [about the resurrection] is connected with my conviction that the resurrection of Jesus was a hidden event. Jesus did not rise from the dead to prove to those who had crucified him that they had made a mistake or to confound his opponents. Nor did he rise from the dead to impress the rulers of his time or to force anyone to believe. Jesus’ resurrection was the full affirmation of the Father’s love. He showed himself only to those who knew about this love. He made himself known as the Risen Lord only to a handful of his close friends. Probably no other event in human history has had such importance while, at the same time, remains so unspectacular.*

The fact that there was no one on hand to witness the resurrection in process, not only shadows the event, but also our understanding of it. The discovery of the empty tomb certainly raised a lot of questions about the whereabouts of Jesus’ body, but, by itself, it was not proof-positive of the resurrection. Even for the disciples. After they had seen Jesus with their own eyes, clearly, some of the disciples remained unconvinced – why else would they have chosen to go back to fishing if the disciples had been convinced of the resurrection, and understood its significance? Rather than believing that Jesus had been raised, it would have been easier to believe that his body had been stolen, or that he had not died at all. To avoid looking so

ridiculous for leaving their families and jobs to follow a humiliated and crucified leader, it would have been easy to invent a story about a resurrection to convince others that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Or, they could have reasoned that what had happened to Jesus, was one of the most bizarre medical anomalies of all time – similar to what happened to a man named Jim Schaeffer of Reston, Virginia, on November 20, 1994.

Mr. Schaeffer's story began that morning at 11:15 A.M., when he collapsed while attending church and was rushed to Reston Hospital. At 12:46, Schaeffer's heart stopped and the line on the heart monitor went flat. According to the physician in charge of the ER, "He had no pulse, no blood pressure, no spontaneous respirations." At 1:08 P.M., as they were preparing to remove Schaeffer's body, the monitors lighted up again and the room grew quiet. "We were all amazed," his wife Esther said. "All of the medical people came rushing in and started running strips to document the moment," she commented. "I was totally stunned because I didn't know what happened." She told her reviving husband to open his eyes if he could hear her. He opened his eyes, and she said, "I love you," and then told him, "If you understand, blink." At that, Schaeffer looked into her eyes and said, "I love you." He then went on to tell his family, who had gathered at his bedside, how much he loved them. Schaeffer remained alive for another ninety minutes, long enough for him to tell his last son to arrive at the hospital that he loved him. Then Schaeffer's heart began to slow, and he took two shorts breaths. Then his eyes closed halfway, and he died – this time permanently.

Because the resurrection of Jesus was such an unprecedented event, the gospels and Acts tell us that it took more than one appearance to convince his followers of its truth. It's easy to understand why: As with the case of Jim Schaeffer of Reston, Virginia, the resurrection did not fit into any category of natural human events that the followers of Jesus could understand.

If it was hard for the disciples of Jesus to believe in the resurrection, the passage of time only makes it harder still for us to believe. This is why the authors of the gospels took pains to emphasize that the risen Jesus was the same Jesus of Nazareth they always knew – only now in a glorified, imperishable body. In other words, this Jesus, that today's gospel described as waiting on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, was the same Jesus that walked the dusty roads of Galilee with the disciples. John's gospel wants to assure us, not only that the resurrection actually happened, but also that it happened in this world, and not in some spectral, shadowy existence. Jesus is not a ghost, John's gospel assures us, nor a hallucination, and not the result of wish-fulfillment. The resurrected Jesus is real. He stands on the beach, and he speaks to the disciples across the water. A ghost is not likely to give fishing instructions, nor to build a fire and prepare a meal, and a ghost will definitely not eat the meal he's prepared.

And so, what're we to take away from today's gospel reading? Three things, I think. First, it means the resurrection happens to us in the real world. Jesus went to the disciples on the shore of the lake, because that was where they lived and worked. The resurrection, therefore, happens and has its power, in the physical world. There is no need to spiritualize the resurrection as something that has relevance only when we die. Rather, it means, for us, the renewal of our lives, here and now, and not an escape from it.

Second, the power of the resurrection often manifests itself to us in much the same way that it happened to the disciples: That is, in their hour of doubt, difficulty, and disappointment when they have worked all night and have caught nothing. When we have given up on our own attempts at self-salvation, and making it on our own, the power of the resurrection breaks into our lives with its transforming power. We need only to be ready to receive it in faith.

Third, Jesus, in the resurrection, reveals himself to those who love him. Therein lies the hiddenness of the mystery. Only those who have love for Jesus can see his resurrection power at work. Those who do not believe do not see him. That is why proof could never be part of the resurrection story. For the love of God, as revealed in the resurrection of his son, in the final analysis, can never be proven. It can only be accepted by faith.

Will the Shroud of Turin ever be proven to be an authentic relic? I don't know, but I also don't really care, because, for me, the reality of the resurrection of Jesus has already been established – in my relationship with God, and in my relationships with my family and with each of you. Given that, I have all the proof I need. I pray it may be the same for you.