

Matthew 27:57-66

Good morning and it is so good celebrating Easter Day with you today.

May we pray.

Father God, your word is powerful and I pray that as we spend time considering it this morning, we will see you more clearly and love you more dearly. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

So, how easy is it to tell the difference between things that are true and things that are fake or made up?

How good are you at telling the difference?

Can you tell – what is true and what is not? What is real news and what is fake news?

Have you seen the BBC quiz show...Would I lie to you? Where contestants tell a story about their deepest secrets... Well, I'm not going there but

I do have a short quiz inspired by a previous vicar of mine, thanks Jay! –

I would normally give prizes – but these are different times.... So you'll get brownie point for all the right answers today. Store up your Brownie points and I'll give out prizes when we're no longer in lock down.

So, is it fake or true? There are just 4 of them. Are you ready?

First one - Emirates Airline is designing a triple decker plane, not just a double decker, but triple decker plane....

The report says that along with usual first class, business and economy class seating, there will be privileged access (I think that means you'd have to pay more!) to a small pool, games room and gym. They hope to have this operational by 2021 when flights should be back to normal and people will want to fly in style.

Is that fake news or is that true – what do you think?

Yep that was fake!

Ok next one...

1st of April, is International Pillow fight day, although unfortunately it had to be cancelled this year.

The website read....'Fellow warriors of nap-time shenanigans, that day where you raise your fluffy pillows high and charge into the streets. Together you will carry your bolsters and duvets, and bed pillows of all sizes and meet in noble combat with those heretic inhabitants of the wrong side of the bed.'

This increasingly popular event started in London and Vancouver and has spread to many other cities like San Francisco, Boston, Copenhagen, Paris and even Hull.

Is that fake news or is it true?

What do you think?

Yes it's true

Next one: The Google Gnome

Looks like one of those Gnomes you put in your garden....The website reads....The Google Gnome is like having a tiny, little meteorologist at your beck and call. It can let you know the difference between cirrocumulus and cumulonimbus clouds, it can assess humidity and, for windswept hair in summertime photo shoots, can tell you which way is the wind blowing". It will answer all your weather-related questions. A must for the summer.

Is that fake or is that true?

Yes, that's false...

Ok last one....

There's increasing evidence that Baboons kidnap puppies and raise them as pets, playing with them and grooming them., They become part of the Baboon pack, part of their families.

Is this fake or is that true?

Well, it's sort of true – Baboon have been known to kidnap puppies – but they raise them to be guard dogs for the pack rather than pets.

This is where truth becomes a little grey...

Sometimes, it's not as easy as you think, to identify the difference between truth and fiction.

And so we turn to the Easter story. The story of Jesus dying and more incredibly, rising from the dead.

Do you think it is real or is it Fake? Did it really happen?

Because you see...

If we don't believe in the resurrection – our faith is futile – we may as well give up now. As it says in 1 Cor 15:14 'If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'

No resurrection – no hope.

We can know that Jesus was a real character in history **and** there's evidence both inside and outside the bible that Jesus was crucified. So, we can be sure that he lived and died.

But how can we be sure that Jesus was resurrected?

The event – was reported to have happened over 2000 years ago. So, how can we be sure?

Let's take a look at the bible – at this ancient book –

You see - most of the New Testament was written by people who were there at the time – not only present but these eyewitnesses recorded their accounts, only a few years after the events themselves. And there's not just one account, there are many, by different writers. All recording what they saw, what they

experienced – writing it down so it wouldn't be forgotten. Writing it down so it wouldn't become hearsay, like Chinese whispers

Luke said 'in chapter 1 verses 1-2

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those, who from the first, were eye witnesses and servants of the word.

So let's read this book with confidence....

We heard in our reading that

Jesus had died, been placed in the tomb and now we're on the third day since his death....
Day three – the body would have started to decay. Palestine is a hot country.

But then it says in chapter 28 v2

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men....

And the angel said to the women ...do not be afraid...he is not here, he has risen...the body of Jesus was not in the tomb..

And soon claims that he had been resurrected began to circulate

It was such an extraordinary story even at the time....so extraordinary that the Roman authorities and the Chief priests wanted to shut it down as soon as they heard it. We read on in Matthew

*the chief priests **devised a plan**, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." If **this** report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' (cos you should have been guarding the tomb...!) So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

You see fake news was around a long time ago....

Both the Romans & the Jews wanted to shut down any rumour that Jesus had been resurrected– but they couldn't. Why? Because Jesus' body wasn't stolen, He had come back to life...

And, as the famous detective, Hercule Poirot said - truth has a habit of revealing itself...

There are so many conspiracy stories about what did happen to Jesus's body...So many people saying – of course he wasn't resurrected, that's can't happen – there must have been another logical reason....

So here are a few....

There's one that suggests Jesus only fainted on the cross, he didn't die in the first place.... which is positively ridiculous because the one thing the Romans knew how to do was execute people....

How about - the disciples going to the wrong tomb, I think someone would have gone back and checked.

Someone even suggested that Jesus was a twin..but that doesn't explain the post- resurrection stories and there was no record – in any literature – in or out of the bible that could substantiate this....Jesus did not have a twin.

There are three other conspiracy theories that are worth having a closer look at...

Firstly

Did the disciples actually steal the body?.... to make it appear like Jesus had been resurrected.

This seems highly unlikely, we read that after Jesus's death the disciples were a scared, frightened group of people who hid themselves away, terrified that their fate would be the same as Jesus's.

It was only after they saw the risen Jesus that they became bold.

Also, it was the proclamation that Jesus was resurrected that got them into trouble, that got them persecuted and murdered in the weeks and months ahead...– Do you really think they would have carried on and risk death.... for a lie? For something they made up? – no, they would have produced the body.... if there was one....

Second conspiracy theory was that the Jews stole the body.

Again, this is highly unlikely... Once the Christians started talking about the empty tomb being proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God – don't you think they would have produced the body to shut them up?

And finally, What about the Romans? Did they steal Jesus' body?

Again, this seems highly unlikely – they had got their troublemaker killed, the little sect of Christ followers was defeated and deflated – not likely to cause them any more trouble.

And then when the stories of the sightings of the risen Jesus began and the disciples started talking about resurrection – they could have quickly shut them down again – by producing the body– nope it makes no sense...

The only viable explanation of why there was no body in the tomb - is that Jesus came back to life – that he was indeed resurrected.

And then we have loads of recordings of people seeing Jesus alive after his crucifixion – Luke, the chap who made a careful record of all that happened, writes, at the beginning of Acts

After he suffered and died, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

So, the tomb was empty.... and there is no other logical explanation other than he came back to life and it is recorded that he was seen by over 500 people over 40 days.

This is the truth – This is pivotal... It's really important to get this.

If you have any questions about it – anything at all - ask any of us – because

No Resurrection – no hope...

But, the clever ones among you – the ones that are still with me and following this, will be thinking – yes, but...

There are **other** stories of people being resurrected in the Bible, why is this different...

Ok, more Brownie points...on offer

Who can name some people in the Bible who were brought back to life?

We heard Brian talk of Lazarus who was in a tomb for 4 days and was brought back to life...

Any more? I've found 8 more.....I'll post them on the notice sheet for next week...see if you can find them, see if you can find any more than that.....

So, what is the difference? What's the difference between Lazarus coming back to life after he was well and truly dead, and Jesus?

The difference was Lazarus would die again and Jesus wouldn't

That's the difference between resuscitation and resurrection.

Firstly **resuscitation**....

These people who were resuscitated:

- looked just the same as they were before they died,
- They weren't changed physically.
- They did the same things as they did before they died
- Their life carried on much as it had been before
- They were all recognisably the same, human being

Resuscitation – the bringing back to life of a person - to be the person they were before.

Secondly – **Resurrection**

Jesus' body was somehow different...

Mary in the garden – thought he was the gardener until he said her name

The couple on their way to Emmaus – didn't recognise him until he broke bread

He could walk through walls

He still had the scars of his crucifixion

He was still Jesus, but somehow his body had changed.

He was not a ghost, not a free-floating spirit but **a body who ate fish** and allowed Thomas to put his fingers in his scars.

When Jesus came back from the dead – this was a different order of miracle...

That's Resurrection.... Those who are resurrected will never die again....

One of the conspiracy theories about Jesus's body was that he only rose spiritually and his body disappeared perhaps eaten by dogs...

Jesus has a body, there is a human in heaven. Yes, there was something extraordinary, supernatural, spiritual about Jesus's body but it is still a body.

And after our death, those who believe in Jesus, will too have bodies....It says in 1 Cor 15

For our dying bodies must be transformed, not replaced, not left behind, but transformed into bodies that will never die;

And also in Philipians 3Jesus will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

How are we assured of this resurrection body when we die?– by believing in Jesus. It's that simple.

Know resurrection – Know hope

Because Jesus was resurrected, it vindicates everything he said and did

It proves that he is the Son of God –

- He has victory over death
- He has taken all our mistakes and our bad stuff and dealt with it
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it says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus was the first fruit – an arable picture but implying that there are more to follow – that those who believe in Christ will also be resurrected.

As we heard when Brian talked about the death of Lazarus two weeks agoIn John 11 we read of a discussion between Martha and Jesus after Lazarus had died.

Jesus was teaching her about resurrection - cos although Lazarus was about to be resuscitated, he was indeed, assuring her of his eternal resurrection.

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me, will never die. Do you believe this?'

As Christians, as followers of Christ, we believe that we will be resurrected, as Christ was - that death is not the end. We will have a physical life after death – one with love, hope and joy, one in close relationship with others and with the author of life itself.

But more than this future hope.

The fact that Jesus is alive gives us confidence for the future that makes a difference now. We can experience his **extravagant grace.... now,**

we can experience his **unlimited love.... now,**

and we can have a **sense of peace** that we can't explain - **now..**

Know resurrection, know hope.

Praise the Lord, Bwana Asifiwi
Amen