

A number of years ago my son and I celebrated his birthday in Portland where we spent 4 days watching the World Indoor Track and Field Championships. It was phenomenal; we saw some of the best athletes in the world.

In between the morning and evening track sessions, Luke and I explored Portland. It's a great city to visit; there's lots to see and do, there's great food, and it's easy to get around—but it's a bit of an odd city, and by odd, I mean weird. And apparently calling Portland “weird” isn't considered an insult. All over the city you will see signs that read, “*Keep Portland Weird*”.

On the Saturday, Luke and I explored Portland's Waterfront Market— there was music, food trucks, and market stalls everywhere. As we wandered through the market, we began to pick up on one aspect of the Portland vibe—they have a deep affection for mythical creatures. In celebration of St. Patrick's Day, there were dozens of people dressed up as Leprechauns, and market stall after market stall displayed items featuring Sasquatches and Unicorns.

At one point we found a market stall that featured greeting cards that aligned with the “Keep Portland Weird” vibe. Many of the greeting cards featured Jesus, and strangely, dinosaurs. I've displayed two of my favourite cards for your viewing pleasure.

The first card features Jesus, friend of children, and dinosaurs; both find room on Jesus' lap. The second card features Jesus riding into Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday, on the ever-popular Velociraptor.

When we saw the cards, Luke and I laughed, but later that night these images got me thinking. In a church like ours, we talk about Jesus in reverential terms: fully God, fully man, Jesus came to rescue and save, to demonstrate God's love for the world. But these greeting cards are a reminder that not everyone sees Jesus the way I do. There is a skepticism about Jesus: *is He real, or does He belong in the same category as the Sasquatch and Unicorn? When we talk about Jesus, are we dealing with fact or fairy tale?*

More than 100 years, a German Philosopher by the name of Friedrich Nietzsche uttered the following phrase—“**God is dead.**” He wasn't suggesting that God had had taken ill, and died suddenly. He was making the point that Western society had outgrown the myth of God, much like a child outgrowing the myth of Sasquatches and Unicorns.

Nietzsche suggested that we no longer need the concept of God to give order or meaning to life. Nietzsche, and many after him, have suggested that the human need for a higher power is essentially absurd.¹

¹ <http://www.philosophy-index.com/nietzsche/god-is-dead/>

But I'm not here to tell you what Nietzsche believed, I want to share with you the perspective of the first eyewitnesses—those who watched Jesus die and three days later saw His resurrected body. They believed—as I do—that God is very much alive. At this time I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 28:1-10.

*“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. **2** 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. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

***5** The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”*

***8** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do*

not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

On a number of occasions, Jesus said that He would die, and three days later be raised from the dead. But in spite of this forewarning, the two Mary's were not walking to the tomb saying, “Wouldn't it be great if we arrived and Jesus was alive?” The 11 disciples weren't expecting a resurrection either. That first Easter Sunday morning, those who knew and loved Jesus, woke up—gutted, confused, and afraid.

In his book, *Questions of Life*, Nicky Gumbel writes, “In a communist Russian dictionary, Jesus is described as ‘a mythical figure who never existed.’ No serious historian could maintain that position today. There is a great deal of [historical] evidence for Jesus' existence. This comes not only from the [Bible] and other Christian writings, but also from other non-Christian sources.”² The 1st century, non-Christian historians, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus wrote historical accounts about a historical Jesus.

The historical evidence is clear, Jesus did exist, but there is debate about whether the Jesus of history has been **“super-sized”** in order to create the Jesus of Christian faith. *Who was Jesus? Why did Jesus die? And why does the*

² Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 23.

resurrection matter? In the time remaining, I want to answer these three questions, beginning with the nature of Jesus.

Q 1: *Was Jesus merely human, or was He something more?*

The apostle John writes the following, *"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God...the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son...No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us."*³

Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus in the following way, *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."*

Philippians 2:5-8 says, *"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."*

³ John 1:1-2, 14, 18, New Living Translation

⁴ John Stackhouse, Web-blog, <http://www.johnstackhouse.com/2011/04/22/why-didnt-god-just/>

The words Jesus spoke, the way He lived, the miracles He performed...was Jesus merely human, or was He something more?

The witness of the Scriptures and the testimony of those first eyewitnesses is that Jesus was God, and, fully human. Christians make much of this point; as we turn our attention to the second question, I trust the "why" will become more clear.

Q 2: *Why did Jesus die?*

This question falls into the "why didn't God just..." category. Why didn't God create the world without the possibility of sin, or pain? Why did God the Son become human? Why did Jesus die?

John Stackhouse, a Christian theologian, writes the following, "In each of these cases, the Christian answer is the same: God elected either the best of the available choices or, indeed, the *only* choice available for God to pursue his purposes."⁴

Why did Jesus die? Atonement was not possible in any other way. "**Atone**" is a crucial word. To atone for one's

misdeeds is to “*make amends for, to make restitution for, to compensate for, to pay for*”. Some people say, “*We’re only human, we’re not perfect, we make mistakes; why doesn’t God just forgive and forget? Why did Jesus have to suffer?*”

From a biblical perspective, sin causes a break in our relationship with God and others; this breaking requires forgiveness and reconciliation. But the Bible also describes sin as fundamentally affecting (**and ruining**) the order of things. Once again quoting Stackhouse, “Sin...makes a mess, incurs a debt, infects a soul...[which] all points to a problem in the nature of things that needs solving.”⁵

Stackhouse uses the following analogy. “Five-year-old Billy uses his crayons to decorate Mom’s heirloom Irish linen tablecloth. He has been told not to do so, and he does it anyway. When Mom calls him to account, Billy sees how sad she is and repents. Mom forgives him. All is well—except that the tablecloth still needs washing. The relationship of Mom and Billy is restored by forgiveness, but someone still needs to take care of the objective state of affairs caused by Billy’s sin.

I owe you a thousand dollars. It’s time to pay up, [but] I tell

you that I [still] need the money...You compassionately see my side of things, and you decide to forgive the loan...We thus remain friends. But the fact remains that you are out a thousand dollars. Either I pay it, or you do—no matter how we feel about each other.”⁶ When it comes to sin, God’s forgiveness restores the relationship, but something more is required to heal the disorder sin has caused.

Hebrews 2:14, 17, “*Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death...Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.*”

Stackhouse concludes, “In the Cross of Christ there is a disorder that is rectified, a stain that is removed, a disease that is cured, a penalty that is paid, *something* wrong that is made right by Jesus’ sacrifice...Jesus anticipates that horrible reality in the Garden of Gethsemane and acknowledges that the “cup” of suffering must be drained

⁵ John Stackhouse, Web-blog, <http://www.johnstackhouse.com/2007/04/05/whats-good-about-bloody-good-friday/>

⁶ Ibid.

by someone—either us or him. However we feel about him and however he feels about us, the cup is still there. And he chooses to drink it on our behalf.”⁷

Let me now turn your attention to the final question:

Q 3: *Why does the resurrection matter?*

There’s a few things to be said here. **First**, the resurrection was the vindication of Jesus’ identity. Dead people don’t raise themselves. With the resurrection of Jesus, God the Father was declaring, *“This is my Son, whom I love—listen to Him!”*

Second, the resurrection is the guarantee that Jesus’ sacrifice accomplished what He intended. Jesus died bearing the weight on the world’s sin, but three days later He rose victorious.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we read, *“Christ has been raised from the dead...just as death came into the world through a man [Adam], now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.”*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 91.

Through the resurrection of Jesus, death has been defeated and we have been given the promise of new and eternal life.

Third, the resurrection of Jesus is **the** defining event of the new creation.

The early Christians did not subscribe to a form of evolutionary optimism—the idea that the world, and humanity with it, would simply get better and better on its own. Those first Christians knew that God needed to act within history in order to rescue, heal, and transform humanity. They believed that what God had done for Jesus on Easter Sunday, He would do for the entire cosmos.⁸

The Christian hope is not that we will be whisked away to heaven when we die, and sentenced to a life of eternal robe-wearing, cloud-riding, and harp-playing. No! The Christian hope is for God’s return, for restoration, for a united heaven and earth, and for a new and eternal life. The resurrection of Jesus points forward to these realities, and so, we rejoice in the present even as we look to the future.

Worship

Benediction: In just a moment I will speak a final word of blessing, but first, I want to invite you to join us after the service in our virtual foyer. If you go to our website, nsac.bc.ca, and go to the Events page, you will see a link to the virtual foyer.

And if you would like someone to pray with you this morning, when you join the virtual foyer, let the host pastor know and they will send you into a private Zoom room. After the 9 am service, Clive and Debbie Harvey will be praying with you

Now for the benediction...