

reflections on Resurrection Sunday, March 31, 2002

In an age of catastrophe, war and terror, who can believe in a God who remains aloof? Without the cross and empty tomb of Jesus, I would find it much more difficult if not impossible to believe in the biblical God.

It's considered a mistake for my Muslim friend to doubt the mercy of Allah. Yet Jesus cries at his extremity, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even in his resurrected flesh he bears the marks that tangibly demonstrate the mercy of the Almighty. Abraham's sworn Shield allowed himself to be disgraced. At the cross, God showed himself unashamed to love the unlovely, to satisfy himself by sacrificing himself to rescue the undeserving.

Some object to the "slaughterhouse religion" in Christians' obsession with the bloody details of Jesus' martyrdom. Was it really necessary? Couldn't God come up with a solution to the human dilemma that didn't involve such gruesome suffering? But which God do we have in mind? The one revealed in the real world of the Bible, or a tame deity of our own imagination? And we underestimate the cost of reconstituting genuinely human life in the midst of our warping existence.

Modern people considering Jesus usually want to examine the historical evidence. Most Jesus-followers too want to know the evidence for or against Jesus' existence, teachings, trial, death and resurrection. Some Christians may dismiss scholarship, but if all truth is God's truth we have no excuse for skipping our homework.

Thankfully, there's both good internal and external evidence for accepting the earliest Christian sources as trustworthy. The Gospel writers benefit us with four digests of Jesus' life and times. Josephus and others acknowledge and confirm key factors. Whenever our contemporaries allow these ancient testimonies fair footing, Jesus still demonstrates his loving leadership. Some of the most unlikely moderns have come around to his way of thinking and living, even at the risk of seeming pre-modern. (C.S. Lewis called himself a "dinosaur," though his faith and apologetic were significantly modern.)

Others — modern, post-modern or whatnot — don't care as much about the basis of Christians' truth claims as about the function of those claims. "If the Jesus story (whatever its historical value) gives you a lift, that's great. If it gives you cause to mess with my plans, it's hate." Suspicion of subtexts runs higher than ever. The cure often starts with experiencing the presence and power of God through a faithful Christian community, which leads at some point to an examination of its origins.

As always, believers long to live out an embodied apologetic for the faith while directing others to the (literally) incredible news of the Suffering God revealed so clearly and finally by Jesus. He does not triumph by bombs or market forces. He relentlessly and disarmingly gives his life away to those who find they can finally trust him and his cross-work once and for all.

*John Egleston
Peoria, Illinois*