**Easter! Upset or Victory?**

Based on [John 20:19-31](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn20.19-31)

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Easter 2

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On Easter morning, Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. **He was raised because death could not hold him**. He was raised because **he is the holy one of God who never sinned, but died for ours**. He **is** raised even now, and he will come again on the last day to raise us. But I want you to be conscious of something. **That on Easter morning, Jesus was raised from the dead, but he wasn't raised to heaven.** He was raised to earth, raised in the very same tomb he was put to rest, so that he could vacate it. And for forty-days he remained on the earth, appearing to his disciples and others showing many witnesses that he who once died...lives.

Jesus was raised to earth, before he ascended to heaven. In that meantime, he was "proving" his resurrection. **It's like this...you can tell people that you can run a five minute mile; maybe you even look fit and healthy.** Maybe you could even sprint to the end of the block keeping pace with the wind. Maybe you believe in your heart you can do it. **Maybe you were alone on the track one day and timed yourself and really truly accomplished the 5-minute mile.** But there is no proof of your ability until you actually "show" somebody that you've done it. Another word for "show" is "prove."

Today's Gospel lesson tells us that on Easter evening, Jesus walked through walls to "show" his pierced hands and side to disciples, showing them that did what he said he'd do--die and rise again. **He had run the five minute mile--just like he said--and he had the trophies to prove it, the wounds he bore from the race, scars that he'd retained even upon his resurrected body.** They are marks of a battle won; marks that he kept and will keep for eternity. For he is the lamb of God who was slain for the sin of the world. And when he comes again on the last day to judge the living and the dead, he will continue to bear these crucified credentials, because he is and ever will be the one who was pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. And his marks that remain on his raised hands and side proves this to be so.

St. Paul writes, "**If Christ had not been raised from death our faith would be in vain.**" You can play the market and trust in this or that investment, but if the stock never rises, your faith was in vain. Even if all of the speculators, and analysts predicted this stock option to be a solid investment, your investment is worthless if it doesn't prove itself. When the team that's expected to win a game loses, they call it an "upset."

*The greatest horse racing* ***upset*** *of all time took place at Saratoga in 1913. One of the most notorious racehorses, Man o’ War, suffered his* ***only*** *career loss at the Sanford Memorial Stakes.* ***While he came close to winning, he still lost by half a length to another horse.*** *And the name of that horse, the unlikely winner..."Upset."* You can't make this stuff up...

When the favored team in a game loses, they call it an "upset**." So it is that you can go to the tracks and bet on the best horse, the horse that never lost a race and you can put your faith and your money on him, but if he loses it's still an "upset."** If that favored horse doesn't win--if he is not in the end "victorious...your faith and your money, no matter how reasonable, was in vain.

Christ was raised from the dead, and before he ascended to heaven, he stayed on earth a while to show his disciples that their faith was not in vain, and that his ministry of salvation was not an "upset." **And in a locked room Easter evening were a bunch of disciples, afraid because they had all seen Jesus die a gruesome death, just as he predicted, but he also said he would rise again.** And his tomb was empty, and they had heard from some of the women that he was raised. But if he was alive, where was he? Why did he delay in coming to his closest followers and friends? Maybe he wasn't really alive; or if he was, maybe he was upset and angry that they'd left him to die on the cross.

And so Jesus comes to them through locked doors. He had already appeared to some women, but that didn't prove much in those days. Women's testimony just wasn't highly regarded. **He had already appeared to Peter, but that's just one man alone.** It could have been a delusion, Peter was, after all, very impetuous and quick to judge and act. **Mormonism and Islam are both based on the words of a single man's vision alone in a cave.** Peter as a single man could have hallucinated the whole thing. This raises doubt. That's why God's Word has always said that every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses...**it's because one man's personal testimony about what he alone saw is suspect.**

Jesus appears to men, not one man alone in a cave. Not only two or three men, which would be enough to establish good testimony. He appeared to ten men who all saw the same thing. Mass hallucinations don't happen. **If I tell you I saw a pink unicorn up at the altar, you'd send me to therapy**. If we were to all walk out of this church today saying, "we saw a pink unicorn", it becomes almost a fact. All ten of these men, eleven when Thomas comes, give their testimony upon which your church is now built. And to prove their sincerity, all died brutal and horrific deaths because of this testimony. **They stuck to their story even through suffering and death, rather than deny what they saw with their own eyes.** They, together, saw Jesus alive, and this gave them certainty about his promises, that he indeed is the Christ, the Son of the Living God who came to save his people from their sins.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is our evangelical duty to testify to Jesus Christ. But we do not give our own testimony, but the testimony of the apostles, of what they saw and heard and believed. **You see, we live in a pluralistic society, and I'll tell you what that means.** We live in a society of many different religions and spiritualities and beliefs about things unseen. **And the way our world has come to terms with that is not good. The best way I can describe it, is that the world has trained us to looks at differences in religion the same way they look at differences in team affiliation.** The world manages to manage multiple religions by treating them as personal preferences.

And that would be alright if no religion was really true try to spread the Gospel of Jesus by saying how much he has done in their life. Or how happy they are now that they've found him. **Or when churches teach that the best witness to Christianity is by being a "good person**." Give me a break. I know a lot of "good people" who are Roughrider fans. Do you think someone would look at such a good person and say, "Now I believe that the Roughriders are "**the one true ball team**."

No that's silly. It doesn't work that way. I**f you want to say that the Roughriders are the one true ball team, you don't prove it by confessing how you feel about them; nor does your opinion hold more weight on the matter because you're a good and hard-working person and you believe**. No...Roughrider can say, "**Our team is the one true team because we have the victory, we have the Grey cup**." The proof of a real victory is proof more powerful and more real than how you happen feel about the Riders, or whether you wear a watermelon on your head, or whether their fans are good people. Bottom line, they won...that is how you prove the greatness of your team.

Ladies and Gentlemen, why is it so popular today to try to convert people to Christianity through good works or personal testimony? We have something far greater...**we have the Word of God that shows us "Christ won." We have the scriptures...documented evidence of crowds of men who saw this dead man alive again**.

He **showed himself raised** so that by *their* testimony we might have faith. Faith in Christ dead, raised, and coming again. But until that time he is still in the the world through the ministry of his church who is called to forgive and retain sins...so that the peace that the disciples knew that evening might be obtained and known by all who would hear and believe what they had seen. **That the death of Jesus Christ was not an *upset*, but on Easter proved to the world a *Victory***. And that victory is yours when you believe his words, I forgive you, Go in Peace.

And so it was that Thomas was not in the room on Easter evening. He didn't believe that Jesus had come because he didn't believe the testimony of his brothers. And so he said, "Unless I put my finger in his wounded hands, and my hand in his pierced side, I will never believe." And so Jesus came, and presented himself to Thomas's eyes and hands, and Jesus did not grudge his doubting disciple. Thomas was right, in order for there to be faith, Jesus has to be present. And Jesus, explains how belief shall happen. "You have believed because you have seen,; blessed are those who have not seen and believed." In other words, blessed are those who have heard my words of forgiveness and believed.