

I was sitting in Panera waiting to meet up with someone and this article came across my news feed.

“Everything about the season is worth loving, except eggnog. Eggnog is gross.”

The author is writing a piece to combat those who reject Christmas as an overhyped holiday.

Instead of bah-humbugging our way through the season, the author wants us to embrace everything that is good about Christmas. Instead of being skeptical about the holiday her approach is to find satisfaction in the tradition and all that is whimsical about Christmas.

She said, I do believe in Christmas. I believe in decorations, and sparkles, and cookies, and snowmen, and department store window displays, and tinsel, and presents, and caroling, and gingerbread houses, and fruitcake....

Here is a question - how do you believe in cookies and fruitcake?

She concludes the article with this statement. .. surely you can find a little fun in Christmas. I'm not asking you to believe in Christ. But believe in the spirit of the season, if in nothing else. Be merry.

Be merry about what? Fruitcake and tinsel.

I know she is not saying she “believes” department store window displays.

What I think she is saying that she finds some hope for satisfaction and joy from the “feeling” she gets from Christmas trappings.

I'm with her. I like it too. Well most of it. Fruitcake ? Tinsel ?

In the article, the author is trying to muster up belief. She is hanging her hopes in mid air. She is believing in belief. Trying to muster up a feeling of hope for the holidays in the trappings rather than the substance.

Is that what we are doing here on Sunday morning?

Trying to muster up belief and joy for the week to get us through.

Do we like this writer say, “I believe in church, and I believe in worship songs and I believe in smiling at my friends and carting my kids off to super church. I believe in sitting and listening to a message to get me through another week. I believe in small group. I believe in bible reading. I believe in confession”

All of those things do make a difference and they are good. We do not place our hopes in a meeting or in worship songs. Our meetings, our reading, our confessions point us back to Christ

Today as we end our journey in Mark we find ourselves at the resurrection.

The resurrection confirms, that we are not hanging our belief in mid-air.

Jesus was a person who lived and claimed to be God. He died a cruel, unjust death. He rose from the dead confirming his claim to be God incarnate.

Our belief in Jesus is more than a fading hope. It is not like the hope depicted in the Christmas article. We are not hanging our hope in mid-air but on the person of Jesus.

Jesus proved through his resurrection that our hope in him is not wishful thinking.

My hope for us today is to offer some proof to you of the reality of the resurrection to remind you that we are not hanging our hope in mid-air. We all need to be reminded.

Secondly, I want us to consider how we can live in light of the reality of the resurrection.

PROOF #1 - A bodily Resurrection would not be seen as a good thing.

The Jewish disciples, the Jewish people and even the secular culture of the time would have been appalled at the idea of a bodily resurrection.

I tend think that they would have welcomed the resurrection as some sort of heroic victorious rebirth.

Like Gandalf the Gray coming back as Gandalf the White.

Actually Jews and Greco-Romans alike would not have been attracted to the idea of a bodily resurrection.

If the resurrection were a fabrication, it would have been an appalling fabrication.

If you were going to tell a lie hoping people would believe it.
Would you...

- a. Tell a story that your audience would be attracted to.

EXAMPLE: Story of Santa Claus. It is not conceivable that an ageless old man lives in the north pole with a bunch of elves and travels around on Christmas eve giving out gifts, but I do like the idea of that story.

OR

- b. Tell a story that your audience would find repulsive.

EXAMPLE: Story of the resurrection. It is hard to conceive of a man coming back to life after being murdered and I actually don't even like the thought of that story.

The resurrection would NOT have been a welcome piece of fiction to the people who experienced it first hand.

This fact alone is one proof that the resurrection took place.
Why make up a story that people would not even want to believe?

The disciples were in despair. Scattered. Afraid and rightly so. They wanted to distance themselves from Jesus.

So maybe this is what happened. One of the disciples, let's say Peter, had a brilliant idea.

"Hey guys I know you are scared and so am I but here is what we should do. Instead of hiding and running for our lives let's tell everybody that Jesus came back to life."

"Someone get out a pen and write this down so that we can get our story straight."

"Is everyone in?"

"If you are not in, tell me now because this elaborate myth that we are creating is going to likely cost us our lives."

That is NOT what happened. They were running scared and in hiding.

What really happened is Jesus came back to life just like he said he would.
The disciples were not hanging their faith in mid-air and neither are we.

PROOF #2: The Changed lives of the Disciples.

Jesus resurrection is what turned this scared bunch into a group willing to be persecuted and killed for their faith.

If the resurrection were false, then the disciples would be subjecting themselves certain death for something they knew to be a fabrication.

Surely someone in the bunch would have flipped and ratted out one of their brothers.
Afterall, they have proven throughout Mark that they are not a real stable bunch of guys.

After what the disciples saw Jesus go through in his trial, torture, and death, would they willingly subject themselves to that for something they knew to be false?

NO - They would not.

The disciples later experienced execution and torture, but **NOT** because they were sticking to a story that they had made up.

They held to the story because the story was true. It was not the truth they expected but true none the less.

Let's look to the text in Mark and read the actual account of the Resurrection. We will look for one more resurrection proof and focus our attention on the conversation that takes place in the tomb.

Mark 16

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

Notice a couple of things from this passage.

As I mentioned, resurrection was not a welcomed idea.

PROOF #1 - A bodily Resurrection would not be seen as a good thing.

Their expectation was to find Jesus in the tomb demonstrates that resurrection was not a welcome idea.

They bought spices to anoint his body and they asked who is going to roll the stone away.

How would this scene have looked differently if the resurrection was expected?

It would have been like people camping out for the opening of a chick-fil-a store
Or like lining up for opening night of the new star wars movie
Or the release of the new iphone.

Certainly if the resurrection was expected and anticipated there would have been people gathered to watch it unfold.

Notice another proof for the resurrection from this passage.

Who were the first witnesses among Jesus' followers to the resurrection?

Three women. PROOF #3 Women were first witness to the resurrection in all the gospels

Women had no credibility in court during the time of the resurrection.

If the disciples were going to fabricate the story of the resurrection they would **NOT** have built the story on the witness of three women.

One way a lawyer argues his case in court is to discredit the witnesses.

In the case of the resurrection, these witnesses would have been easily discredited.

Women during this time had no credibility in legal matters.

Why did the disciples choose women as witness to their elaborate resurrection myth?

The disciples did not choose women as part of their myth, because the resurrection actually took place. It was a real event in history. The resurrection is not a myth.

We are not hanging our hope in mid-air

Let's go back to the narrative and read a bit more paying careful attention this time to the conversation in the tomb.

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

The man dressed in white said,

"Don't be alarmed", he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

Still you can see from the narrative. Resurrection was not on their mind. Even after they saw the proof and heard from the man in white, they were still afraid and did not believe.

Later verse 9 and 10 says,

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him they did not believe it.

Notice two things from the conversation in the tomb.

The man in white said to the women.

He is risen -- Just as he told you.

The resurrection was not a classified mission. You did not need top secret clearance to be privy to the plan of Jesus death and resurrection. He made plain what was about to happen.

Mark 8:31 says, He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Mark 14:58 the testimony against Jesus at his trial.

“We heard him say, I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.”

Matt 27:63 The Pharisees talking to Pilate

Sir, they said, we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again.

The disciples and even Jesus’ enemies knew that he claimed to come back to life.

Why did they doubt? Why did they not believe?

Probably because they are a lot like me and the rest of humanity. Sinful, broken, twisted against trusting God.

It is natural for us to not believe. Because of our sin nature it is hard for us to take God at his word.

Look at the story of Adam and Eve. How did the serpent tempt Eve?

The serpent said - “Did God really say that?”

Look at the story of Abraham and Sarah when God promised an heir to be borne to Abraham through Sarah. This heir is going to be a blessing to all people.

How does Sarah respond? She laughs. “Really God, in our old age, we are going to have a child. No way!!”

The man in the tomb says, “**He is risen - Just as he told you.**”

How would these scene have looked differently if they had taken Jesus at his word?

There would have been a watch party at the tomb and not mourning.

They did not believe what Jesus said. They did not take Him at his word.

Secondly, notice that the women are given an assignment.

He is Risen -- Go tell his disciples and Peter.

I tried to put myself in the place of the women at the tomb.

If I was just given that assignment, what would I have said? I would have probably said...

“Why me? Why don’t you go and deliver the news about the resurrection? You are obviously a more qualified than we are. You are sitting in the empty tomb all dressed in white. Why are you wanting us to deliver the message?”

I don’t know why God chose to use these women. He did.

God chose to use unlikely witnesses to the resurrection to begin the spreading of the news.

Who is the message to be delivered to?

The disciples and Peter. It is encouraging to me that Peter is singled out.

Remember Peter, is the one who said.

Jesus I will never leave your side even if everyone else does

Jesus replies - actually you are going to deny me three times.

Peter does deny Jesus.

Rather than rejecting Peter, God makes sure that Peter knows the news of the resurrection.

Peter is still part of the plan.

God reaching out the Peter, the one who openly denied Jesus. God is saying, Peter. I want you to be in on what I’m doing.

The man in the empty tomb says, Listen ladies - Don’t be afraid. He is risen, just like he said.

Now I have a job for you to do, deliver the message to Peter and the boys.

Transition: What does the reality of the resurrection mean for us on December 27, 2015?

It means, this morning, and each morning as followers of Christ we are not hanging our faith in mid-air.

We are placing our hope in the Objective reality of the resurrected Christ.

Timothy Keller said this about the resurrection. The Reason for God

His first hearers knew that if it [the resurrection] was true it means we can't live our lives any way we want. It also meant they didn't have to be afraid of anything, not Roman swords, not cancer, not anything. If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything."

If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything.

What does it change? What does that mean?

It means I can **R-E-L-A-X**

I know that might seem like an odd word to use for an "end of the year", "end of year long series", "beginning of a new year" sort of message, but it was what God kept speaking to me as I considered the resurrection these last few weeks.

When Jesus said, "It is finished" it is really finished.

He proved that the work was done, the curse is broken when he rose from the dead.

We are not trying to muster up a feeling of hope. If I trust in Jesus, I am really secure.

Think of a batter going up to the plate in the bottom of the 9th inning.

Bases are loaded, two outs, we are down by a run. Runners in scoring position.

My tendency in that situation would be to squeeze the batter a little tighter.

"Oh man... I gotta get a hit or the game is over!"

It is not all on me. RELAX.

Relax is not be passive, but rest in the finished work on the cross and be faithful at your post.

We are not spinning our wheels this morning, going through religious activities. Paul said, if the resurrection were a myth, then our faith is futile and we should be pitied above all.

It is not a myth. This faith we live is not futile.

The resurrection is not a myth, so we can **RELAX** and **take God at his word**.

Notice the man in the tomb said - **He is risen - just like he told you**.

How would the resurrection story have looked differently if the disciples had taken Jesus at his word?

How would my life look differently if I would take God at his word?

I am not promoting a name it claim it gospel.

Rather I want the reality of what God has said to us and about us would penetrate deeply

We have a script that plays in our mind or script that Satan likes to read to us to convince us that we don't "measure up". We don't measure up, but that it not the end of the story.

I think that is why God singled out Peter in the resurrection narrative.
Peter don't listen to those thoughts rolling around in your mind. I still want you.

I can still remember being in this room when the truth of God's love for me hit me deep. People would say, "Rodney I love you." "Rodney I appreciate you." "Rodney, I glad you are my friend."

I would re-write those words in my mind.

"They don't really mean that, they are just saying that."

One day my shields were not up and those words penetrated deep. God said, Rodney I love you. I am glad that you are my son. You are a welcome part of what I am doing. I received those words in a new way.

How would our lives look differently if we would take God at his word?

As I considered that question, here are a few ideas that came to mind.

If I could learn to take God at his word I would not continually question my worth.

Matthew 10:29-32 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

If I could learn to take God at his word I would not worry about the outcome of circumstances I cannot control.

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

If I could learn to take God at his word I would not wallow in pity when I sin.

1 John 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness

If I could learn to take God at his word I would not question whether God could use me.

He gave an assignment to these women at the tomb. He wanted Peter to be in on the news and in on the plan for the church to be established.

Ephesians 2:10 We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Like the women in the tomb I question and I doubt. I struggle with belief.

Our natural tendency is not towards trusting God but away from trusting God.

That is why we meet together and we re-orient over and over.

We have to come back to the truth over and over.

God is not surprised when we walk away or when we fail.

God expects us to need him, need each other, need his word to stay on course.

He is not threatened when we doubt or when we get off course. He is not surprised.

Consider the nation of Israel. Deuteronomy 31 They are about to enter the promised land and God said to Moses: When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their ancestors, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant.

He is not surprised when we turn from him. We have to come back to him over and over.

How would my life look differently if I would commit to taking God at his word?

Coming back to the truth over and over again.

Letting a different script play in my mind.

He is risen --- Just like He Said. You can trust him to do what he says.

Finally,

He is risen -- Go tell his disciples and Peter.

These women had an assignment. We have an assignment. It is a similar one to the gals in the tomb.

Go and tell. Remind each other of the good news and tell those that don't know about the good news.

Not hope hung in mid-air good news, but good news about the objective reality of the gospel proven in the reality of the resurrection.

We have an assignment. Be faithful to point our kids to Jesus, point each other to Jesus, our friends to Jesus and remind each other of the truth.

It is a big assignment. Remember - R-E-L-A-X. Not be lazy but rest in his finish work and trust that he knew what he was doing when he entrusted us with this assignment.

As we turn the page on Mark and turn the page to 2016

Let's RELAX and rest in the finish work of Christ proven in his resurrection.
Let's RELAX knowing that we can take God at his word. He is risen - Just as he said.
Let's RELAX and lean into the assignment that God has for us.

Let's pray

Forgive me, trendy holiday cynics:
Christmas brings me great joy

Mikki Halpin

Everything about the season is worth loving, except eggnog. Eggnog is gross



“I do believe in Christmas. I believe in decorations, and sparkles, and cookies, and snowmen, and department store window displays, and tinsel, and presents, and caroling, and gingerbread houses, and fruitcake....”

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...surely you can find a little fun in Christmas. I'm not asking you to believe in Christ. But believe in the spirit of the season, if in nothing else. Be merry.

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I believe in church, and I believe in...

Proof for the Resurrection

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- a. Tell a story that your audience would be attracted to?
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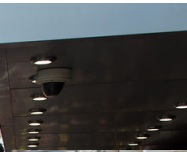
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Proof #2 - The changed lives of the disciples.

Mark 16:1-3

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Proof for the Resurrection

Proof #1 – A bodily resurrection would not be seen as a good thing.

Proof #2 - The changed lives of the disciples.

Proof #3 – Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.

Mark 16:4-5

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

Mark 16:6-8

“Don’t be alarmed”, he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

Mark 16:9-10

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him they did not believe it.

He is Risen – Just as He told you.

Mark 8:31

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

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Mark 14:58

The testimony against Jesus at his trial.

“We heard him say, I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’

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Matt. 27:63

The Pharisees talking to Pilate

“Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again.”

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How would this scene have looked
differently if they had taken
Jesus at his word?

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Go tell his disciples and Peter.

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Timothy Keller
The Reason for God

R - E - L - A - X

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How would my life look differently if I would take God at his word?

- I would not continually question my worth – Matthew 10:29-32
- I would not continually worry about the outcome of circumstances I cannot control – 1 Peter 5:7
- I would not wallow in pity when I sin – 1 John 1:9
- I would not continually question whether God could use me – Ephesians 2:10

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