**Easter sermon 2019 African global perspectives**

**Dealing with a ‘Dead Messiah’ or keeping Jesus mummified in apologetics**

In one of Pastor Jon Ortberg’s sermons he opened with this story:

“ A woman looked out of her window and saw her German shepherd shaking the life out of a neighbor's rabbit. Her family did not get along well with these neighbors, so this was going to be like a disaster.

She grabbed a broom, pummeled the dog until it dropped the now extremely dead rabbit out of its mouth. She panicked. She did not know what else to do. She grabbed the rabbit, took it inside, gave it a bath, blow dried it to its original fluffiness, combed it until that rabbit was looking good, snuck into the neighbor's yard, and propped the rabbit back up in its cage. An hour later she heard screams coming from next door. She asked her neighbor, "What's going on?" "Our rabbit! Our rabbit!" her neighbor cried. "He died two weeks ago. We buried him, and now he's back!"

John Ortberg comments:

People in the ancient world knew dead rabbits tend to stay dead.. A scholar by the name of N. T. Wright notes, "There were many messianic movements in the first century. In every case, the would-be Messiah got crucified by Rome as Jesus did….[But] In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better." *From John Ortberg's sermon, "The World's Greatest Step," Menlo Park Presbyterian Church (4-4-10)*

Modern skeptics today think they know better and dismiss the resurrection as a hoax or a fairy tale. History and the Bible say it is neither. It is fact. But not all God-seekers even believe that. Gandhi said, “I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given and I believe that they are necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed…. Religions are different roads converging upon the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads as we reach the same goal? (*The Words of Gandhi*, Richard Attenborough,, Newmarket Press, 1982, pp.78, 75)

Gandhi’s sentiment is prevalent among many in the world, but his words directly contradict the truth of Christianity and the world-shattering consequences of Christ’s resurrection. Jesus Christ is not one among many great religious teachers. His resurrection and ascension that was witnessed by many is utterly unique.

The resurrection is a paradigm-shattering historical event.

As Dr. Michael Licona in his recent book The Resurrection of Jesus, notes, "No matter how much one may loathe the idea that Jesus rose from the dead and fantasize about other outcomes, the historical bedrock remains the same …. Jesus' resurrection is the best historical explanation of the relevant historical [evidence]." *Michael R. Licona,* [*The Resurrection of Jesus*](http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?item_no=827190&p=1022189) *(InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 609-610*

So how does it become real in people’s lives? By faith.

Author Jonathan Dodson says:

“The resurrection is like a river that parts a road. People are on the road approaching the river. Arriving at the river of the resurrection, you look across it to where the road continues and see quite a few cars are there. In your doubt, you can't imagine how people got to the other side of the river. How did they get across? How can rational people come to the belief that Jesus died and rose from the dead?

Faith is the…ferry… that can take us from the riverbank of doubt … to the other side of belief in the resurrection. [But] it's not blind faith … You don't cross by closing your eyes and wishing Jesus' resurrection was true. No. You cross with your eyes wide open. This is an informed faith, faith in a historical plausible resurrection, attested by hundreds of witnesses, one proven to be worth believing. *Jonathan K. Dobson and Brad Watson, Raised? Finding Jesus by Doubting the Resurrection (Zondervan; 2014), pp. 17, 37-38;*

“The angel at the tomb asked the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?...If only we did not keep Christ mummified in a casket labeled ‘history’ or ‘apologetics,’ he would set our lives and world afire as powerfully as he did 2 millenia ago.”(Wilkes, NIV Application Commentary, Matthew, pp. 968-969) That’s God’s goal and our bottom line at New Hope. My passion is that we live out the implications of our holy faith. Apologetics alone is not enough. So the question is how does what you know transform the way you think and how you act. From that perspective I want to challenge our thinking with two primary insights from some African scholars about the implication of Christ’s historical paradigm-shattering resurrection.

**African Perspectives**

**First, the role of women**

Zambian scholar Joe Kapolyo stressed the importance of God appearing first to women:

“As the women were hurrying away, no doubt filled with all sorts of emotions, Jesus appeared to them in person )Mt. 28:9) and greeting them as if nothing had happened. They immediately showed the proper response to the Lord by falling at his feet in worship. Some of the eleven disciples would doubt the reality of Jesus’ resurrection (Mt. 29:17, but not so the women. This story is a testimony that lifted these particular women, and womanhood in general, to a position of honor in the eyes of the apostles and therefore before the whole world…

[By appearing first to women] The events of this first Easter morning reversed usual assumptions that truth will first come to men, and the men will pass it on to women. It was the women who first saw the risen Lord and told the men about it, and the men only subsequently saw the Lord to confirm the witness of the women. [The women were the truth-tellers.] They were also models of discipleship in their devotion, loyalty and obedience.” Kaplyo adds: “Yet men in general have been very slow to trust women, or to admit them to service within the church. God does not have such problems. He overturns conventions to show His sovereignty and to bestow honor on all of his servants.” (African Bible Commentary, Joe Kapolyo, Matthew, p. 1169).

Many of us women from all cultures heartily agree with Kapolyo’s emphasis. In fact, preacher/teach Dr. Jackie Roese’s excellent book *Lime Green* is based on the cultural assumptions Kapolyo referred to. She notes that for many people around the world the ideal Biblical descriptions of women are those “married with kids. Their work is to undergird their husband and children. They stay at home and create a warm, hospitable space for others. They serve at their church in the nursery, children’s church, women’s ministry or on a hospitality team…They are domestic. They are wives, mothers, supporters. (Lime Green pp. xv,xix,xx.) Jackie calls these women light pink. By contrast, lime green women are warriors, truth-tellers…they have tender-hearted strength, contrite courage, risk-taking decisiveness and readiness to sacrifice for the sake of leading, protecting and providing for the community” – all characteristics more traditionally associated with men. Ibid., xviii, xv).

So why is this theme so important?

Because when “men are called to full-fledged kingdom living but the other half of the church is asked to sit on the sidelines,…we misrepresent God’s oneness... Let’s be real: people are living in hell and are headed straight there for eternity. We can’t afford to have people standing on the sidelines. We need a story where God’s people, male and female, are advancing the Kingdom in full strength. (pp. 57-58, 60, 61-62). Jackie uses the analogy of drowning:

“Figuratively speaking a whole lot of people have sunk under the water, dying little deaths and big deaths all over the place.” [Yet,] ”as I followed my calling to teach the Word of God to those who desperately needed to hear it- to be saved by it- I realized just how many of my fellow believers…were willing to let people “drown” rather than hear the Gospel from the wrong kind of preacher. A preacher like me” (lime green p. 70). “King Jesus had arrived to bring forgiveness, restoration, and transformation to God’s creation. To recreate what God created in the beginning. To restore it back. To make it anew (*2 Cor. 5:17)*… Jesus said this new people would live by a different ethic than the world. Instead of power, position, gender, ethnicity or color being the order of the day, for God’s people it would be love. King Jesus’ kind of love…A gospel-ing kind of life *moves* people towards Kingdom living, a community where people live in “complete reconciliation, a state of flourishing in every dimension- physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual- because all relationships are a gift, perfect, and filled with joy (lime green pp. 102-105).

**The importance of peace among peoples**

This new world ethic in the gospel connects with our second theme stressed by African scholars – reconciliation and peace among all peoples. Kenyan scholar Sam Ngewa says:

“Jesus’ first words to the stunned disciples were “*peace be with you*!” )John 20:19 b). Shalom, meaning peace, was a common Hebrew greeting and a blessing in the first century. It was appropriate given the disciples’ circumstances. They were still recovering from what they had thought was the last of their teacher.” But his words are what “the world in general and the continent of Africa in particular needs to hear…Year after year, African remains a bleeding continent. If there is no war in the south, there is in the north; if not in the East, it is in the West, and in the central region too. May Jesus send peace to our continent!..

Jesus’ words ‘love your neighbor (Lk.10:27b) and his illustration of what this means (Lk.10:29-37) cut across any boundary that has been placed by our differences… Followers of Christ are called upon to promote the ideals of their Master – living together in peace and providing comfort to those who lack it. Those who have been widowed and orphaned by war, people struggling with AIDS, famine, or some other cause need to hear the voice of Jesus’s followers (the church) echoing the Master’s words: *Peace be with you. If* the church of Christ lives up to its Master’s example, people’s needs for food, clothing, counseling, encouragement or a sense of belonging would be met - across any boundary that has been placed by our differences.” (*African Bible Commentary*. John, Sam Ngewa, p. 1294)

And why is this theme so important?

Kenyan Scholar Paul Mumo Kisau says:

The African continent entered the 21st century ravaged by wars both large and small. It knows too much of hate and disharmony. The church in Africa needs to be challenged by the inclusiveness of the earliest community of believers to provide an alternative model. By spreading the gospel to all, we can counter this torrent of evil.” (p. 1297 African Bible Commentary, Acts, Paul Mumo Kisau.) Christ died and rose to make this possible.

**Applying these paradigm-shattering truths today**

I was challenged by these two major global issues raised by our African brethren - the role of women and the need for reconciliation and peace. But both raise the question: how is it possible to reframe traditional concepts of women and stop the current horrors of war and vicious racial animosity? I believe the answer is internalizing the paradigm-shattering truths of the resurrection in our own lives. Tim Keller comments: “The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead …. Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection. *Nancy Guthrie, editor,* [*Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*](http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?item_no=WW501814&amp;p=1022189) *(Crossway, 2009), p. 136.*

We serve the living Christ, beloved. Gandhi never knew Him, but Christ alone is able to help His followers roll off oppressive, condescending and retaliating attitudes that fight against God’s purposes for shalom in this world. As God’s new creatures through faith (2 Cor. 5:17), we can see people differently. We can see God differently and know his heart. We can see ourselves [and others!!] through God’s lens of love and value and honor. Then, “we can fulfill God’s impelling purpose for our lives…to make disciples of all the nations” with God’s resurrection power (Wilkes, Matthew, Ibid., pp.970, 972). We each have a role to play – men and women alike- as Christ’s ambassadors, modeling and telling His good news and bringing reconciliation - God’s supernatural peace and oneness to people throughout the world.

This is the power of the gospel, beloved – the paradigm-shattering realities that can transform the world when we live out Christ’s resurrection truths. But we don’t do it alone! At the end of Christ’s Great Commission – God’s great purpose for each of our lives- Christ promises unconditionally: *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* (Mt. 28:20). We journey together, with believers of all cultures and tribes, under the Lordship of the King of the universe – our sovereign, risen, exalted Lord Jesus Christ! Now that’s good news! Amen? Amen. Leader: The Lord is risen. People: He is risen indeed. Leader: The Lord is risen. People: Alleluia! Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 4 21 19