

"Tell me about Easter!"

...the true story told by those who saw it happen:-

Jesus was a man born in Palestine 2,000 years ago. He lived a quiet village life until he was thirty but then he began to travel about telling people about God's Kingdom, healing people and doing amazing miracles. He gathered together some followers and taught them about God. All through his life, Jesus followed the plan God had set out for him. He followed God's plan right through to his death and then God made him alive again and took Jesus back to be with him in heaven.

PETER

Peter was a fisherman in Galilee in Northern Palestine in the first century AD.

I first met Jesus when he came to Galilee teaching the people and healing those who were ill. He called me to follow him, so I left my work and my family and travelled with him for three years. As we lived with Jesus and heard his teaching and saw all the things he did, we became more and more convinced that Jesus was from God. I soon realised that he was not only a prophet. I recognised that he was the one God had promised all through the Bible. He was the one God had sent to be with us. In the end, I admitted,

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."*

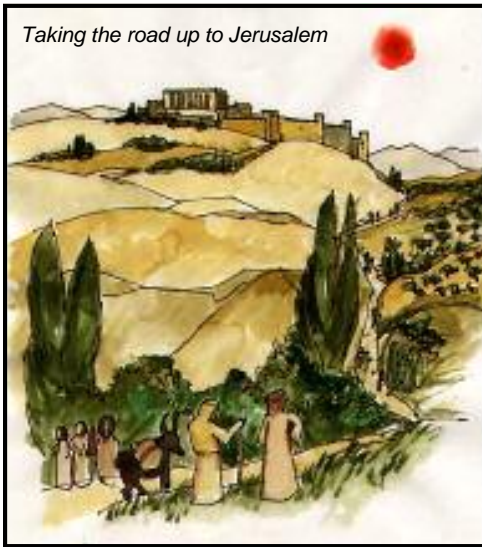


I wanted Jesus to be a great leader, but he kept warning us that he was going to be killed. It made me angry to think he would allow that. He said he had to suffer but that God would raise him back to life. We did not understand. In spite of the danger, Jesus was determined to go up to Jerusalem for the feast.

friends
INTERNATIONAL

*Messiah = "The anointed one." Oil was poured on the head of a new king to show that he was the person God had chosen. The name means that Jesus was the one God had chosen, the one God had promised.

Son of God - Jesus called God his Father. In this way he described the closeness of the relationship he had always had with the Father. The Bible says there is only one God and Jesus did not claim to be another god. Christians believe that Jesus is one with God and that he has God's nature.



At first the people welcomed him as a king. They waved palm branches and shouted to welcome him as he rode into the city. They threw down their coats as a carpet to welcome him. Jesus surprised everyone. He went straight up the hill to the temple. He turned out all the traders, throwing over their tables,
“The Bible says, ‘My house should be a place of worship.’ But you have made it a place where robbers hide.”

Jesus knew his enemies wanted to put him to death but we went ahead and celebrated the Jewish festival when we remember how God set our people free.

When the time came for Jesus and his close friends to eat, he told us that he very much wanted to eat the meal with us before he suffered and died. He turned to me and said,

“Peter, I have prayed that you will be strong.”

I said I was ready to go with him to jail and even to die with him.

“Peter, I tell you that before a cock crows tomorrow morning, you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

Jesus took us to the Mount of Olives, as he often did. He walked on a little way by himself before he knelt down and prayed,

“Father, if you will, please don’t make me suffer. But do what you want and not what I want.”

He had to wake us up because we were tired. While he was still speaking to us, a crowd came up. Jesus was arrested and led away to the house of the High Priest for a secret night time trial. He was questioned and tortured by the soldiers. His friends did not stay with him. I followed, at a distance.

Some people built a fire in the middle of the yard and they were sitting round it. I sat there with them. A servant girl looked at me carefully.

“This man was with Jesus!”

“Woman, I don’t even know that man!”

A little later, someone else saw me.

“You are one of them.”

“No I am not.”

About an hour later another man insisted,

“This man must have been with Jesus. They both come from Galilee.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

While I was still speaking, the cock crowed. Jesus turned and looked at me and I remembered that Jesus had said,

“Before a cock crows tomorrow morning, you will say three times that you don’t know me.”

I went out and cried hard.

The men who were guarding Jesus made fun of him and beat him. They covered his eyes and insulted him.

In the morning there were more questions. Jesus simply told the truth.

“Tell us! Are you the Messiah?”

“Are you the Son of God?”

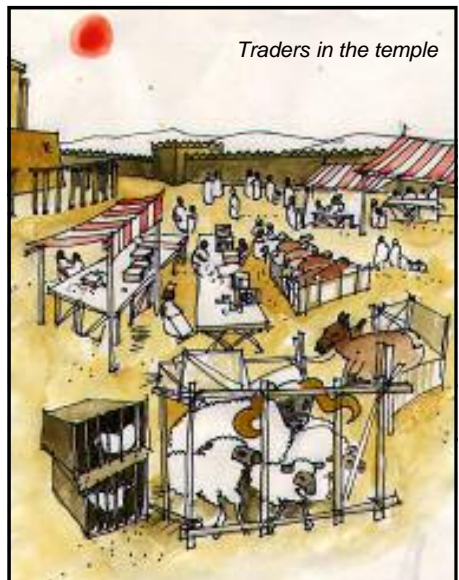
“There – he said it himself!”

I am sure the leaders were jealous of Jesus. The people listened to him. He challenged the teaching of the religious leaders. It seems clear from the trial that what really worried them was that people claimed Jesus was from God and that Jesus did not deny it.

One thing is sure, Jesus did not die because of anything he had done wrong.

They led Jesus off to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Jesus’ trial was not conducted fairly. The Jewish leaders insisted he should die but the Roman Governor could not find anything he had done wrong. He sent him off to Herod who ruled in Jesus home town but Herod just sent him back. Pilate asked the crowd,



“What crime has he done? I have not

found him guilty of anything for which he should be put to death.”

But the crowd kept shouting,

“Kill Jesus! Nail him to a cross! Nail him to a cross! He should be put to death.”

Finally, Pilate agreed. He freed another man, who was in jail for rioting and murder. He gave Jesus to the crowd.

“Do what you want with him.”

The soldiers dressed Jesus as a king with a crown made from sharp thorns.

They pretended to worship him.

“Hey you! King of the Jews!”

They led him off to be nailed to a cross outside the city.

SIMON OF CYRENE

Although Simon came from Northern Libya, he lived near Jerusalem and worked on a farm. On the Friday morning, after Jesus was condemned to death, he was coming up to Jerusalem, from the fields.

As I got near to Jerusalem this morning I could hear a lot of shouting. I didn't know what it was about but when I came into the city there was a huge crowd all walking together along the streets. Everyone was staring at a man. The Roman soldiers had him. He was badly beaten but still they were making him carry his cross out of the city to Golgotha. I knew there would be a crucifixion. There were two others to be crucified.

Suddenly someone saw me. The soldiers were shouting at me. I knew it would be a mistake to run away. They forced me to carry the cross for him, for Jesus. I had to follow behind him all the way. Behind us came a crowd of women, crying and weeping for him. I was afraid. I wondered what would happen to me.

When they came to Golgotha, the place called “The Skull” they nailed Jesus to the cross.

I heard Jesus say,

“Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they are doing.”

The soldiers played games to win his clothes, the leaders shouted insults at him. It was a long morning. Around noon, the sky turned dark and stayed that way until the middle of the afternoon. Jesus shouted,

“Father, I put myself into your hands.”

Then Jesus died.

THE ROMAN CENTURION

This Roman commander had come to Palestine from Italy as part of the occupying Roman army and it is his men who were so cruel to Jesus.

When I saw what had happened, and when I heard Jesus speaking to his Father, I praised God. Jesus must have been a really good man. When I saw how he died, I realised, this man really was the Son of God.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Joseph was known as a good and honest man from the small Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the Jewish leaders' Council.

Yes, but I did not agree with what the Council decided to do to Jesus. I am eager for God's kingdom to come. I went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. I took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in fine cloth. I put it in a tomb cut out of solid rock that had never been used. We hurried away to prepare because the next day was our day of rest. The tomb was closed with a large stone and two Roman soldiers guarded it.

CLEOPAS

Cleopas was someone who knew Jesus, but we are not sure of his identity.

Jesus had told his friends he would come back to life again but we did not understand. When Jesus died, we thought that was the end; the end of all our hopes. The next day was Saturday, God's special day, so we stayed in Jerusalem. On the Sunday morning there was a lot of confusion. I set off home to Emmaus with a friend. You'll never guess what happened.

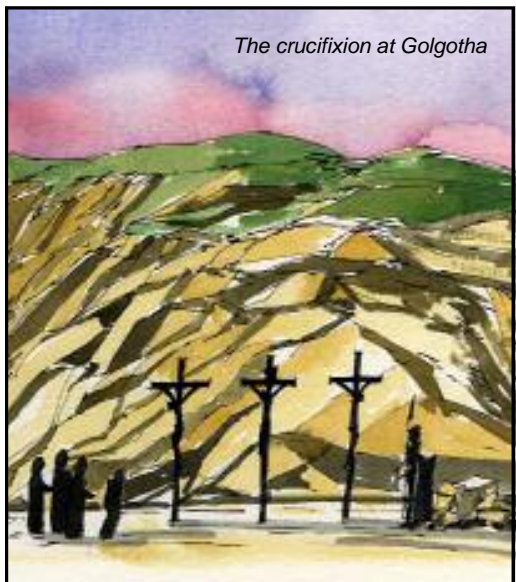
As we were walking and thinking about what had happened, Jesus

came near and started walking along beside us. But we did not know who he was.

"What were you talking about as you walked along."

The two of us just stood there, miserable and sad.

"Are you the only person from Jerusalem who does not know



what has happened there, these last few days,” I asked.

I explained what had happened to Jesus.

“By what he did and said, he had showed us he was a powerful prophet who pleased God and all the people. Then the Chief Priests and our leaders had him arrested and sentenced to die on a cross. We had hoped that he would be the one to set us free from the Romans! But it has already been three days since all this happened.”

That morning, some women in our group had surprised us. They had gone to the tomb very early in the morning, carrying the spices that they had prepared. The Roman Soldiers had closed the tomb with a big stone. When the women came to the tomb, they found the stone rolled away from the entrance and they went in. But they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus and they did not know what to think.

They said that, suddenly, two men in shining white clothes stood beside them. The women were afraid and bowed to the ground. But the angels asked,

“Why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive?”

The angels explained to the women,

“Jesus isn’t here! He has been raised from death. Remember that while he was still in Galilee he told you he would be handed over to people who would nail him to a cross. But three days later, he would come back to life.”

When the women returned from the tomb, they told us what had happened. We thought it was all nonsense and we would not believe. Some men from our group ran to the tomb. When Peter stooped down and looked in, he saw only the clothes Jesus had been buried in and he wondered what had happened. They didn’t see Jesus.

When we left Jerusalem in the morning, we had heard from Peter that the body was missing but that only added to our deep sadness. We did not expect to see Jesus again. What we did not know was that, after speaking with Jesus’ friends and telling them what she had seen, Mary had gone back to the garden to the tomb to weep. Mary had seen Jesus, alive! He had spoken to her. When he said her name, she knew his voice and she knew that it was Jesus.

As we walked along the road with Jesus, we still did not recognise him. We told him the whole sad story.

“Why can’t you understand?” Jesus asked. “How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets have said? Didn’t you know that the Messiah

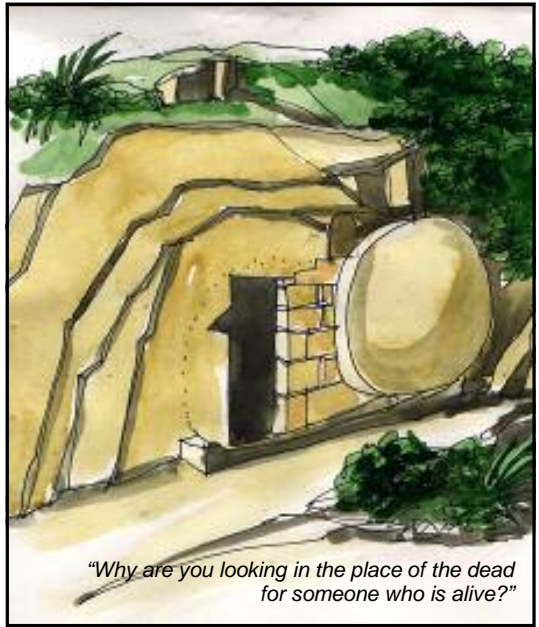
would have to suffer before he was given his glory?"

Jesus explained everything written about himself in the Bible.

When we came near the village where we were going, Jesus seemed to be going further. We begged him to stay with us,

"It's already late and the sun is going down."

As Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread, he blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to us. At once, we knew who he was but he had left us.



When he talked with us along the road and explained the Bible to us it had warmed our hearts. We hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

PETER

You will remember I had said that I did not even know Jesus. I was glad that Jesus was alive but I was desperately sad about the things I had said. One day, I thought I would go back to my old job as a fisherman. The others came too. We went out in the boat, but we didn't catch any fish that night.

Early next morning, Jesus stood by the shore, but we did not realise who he was.

He called us,

"Have you caught anything?"

"Let down your net on the right side of your boat and you'll catch some fish."

The net was so full of fish; we could not drag it up into the boat.

Then we knew,

"It is the Lord. It is Jesus!"

When I heard that it was Jesus, I jumped into the water. The boat was only

about a hundred yards from the shore, so the others stayed in the boat and dragged in the net full of fish.

When we got out of the boat, they saw some bread and a charcoal fire with fish on it. Jesus called us over,

“Bring some of the fish you just caught. Come and eat!”

None of us needed to ask Jesus who he was. We knew.

Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave some of it to us all. He did the same with the fish.

When we finished eating, Jesus asked me,

“Peter, do you love me more than the others do?”

“Yes, Lord, you know I do.”

“Then feed my lambs.”

“Peter, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep.”

“Peter, do you love me.”

“Lord, you know everything. You know I love you.”

“Feed my sheep.”

Jesus told me that later in my life I too would be led out to die and bring honour to God. Then he called me again,

“Follow me!”

So what happened then? Did Jesus live to be an old man?

Jesus stayed on Earth for forty days after he was raised from death and then he went to be with his Father in heaven. Jesus is still alive with his Father today and will be for ever. God had defeated death. We know Jesus and follow him still. I can follow Jesus all through my life, and then follow him to heaven.

So how can I find out more about him?

We can read his story in the Bible. But don't just find out about him, get to know him and speak with him each day. Because he is alive, we can know him. Lots of people still go to Jerusalem, where this happened, searching, looking for something. Jesus is not just to be found in the ruins of the city where he died. As the angel asked the women who had gone to the tomb, “Why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive?”