



**A New Relationship in God**  
**Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4;**  
**Matthew 28:1-10**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (April 9, 2023)**

Nearly 2,000 years after the event, we still struggle to absorb the breadth, height, and depth of Easter. Despite Peter's astonished declaration in Acts 10 ("I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him") and our catechetical (dogmatic, cerebral?) assent to the same, we still seem to need to rectify that through a hearty faith. We need to be surprised again by God's presence in unexpected places.

Peter's wonder that gentiles could be accepted by God in Christ without the need to adopt Jewish practices is worth trying to translate. This is an extreme act of hospitality. We (the Church) welcome people in; we don't require them to become like us. The repercussions of this new Petrine insight, and the insistent advocacy of Paul, give birth to Christianity as a faith where you do not have to become someone you are not—ethnically, culturally, sexually, or linguistically—to be at peace with the God known first by the people of Israel. Because moralistic and judgmental attitudes remain the norm in the church, this can be as shocking today as it was in the first century.

Do we "truly understand" that God shows no partiality, that everyone who trusts in Jesus receives the peace of reconciliation and might join in the victory song of God's Easter people?

2.2 billion Christians around the world have just gone through the Passion and death of Jesus Christ in services this Holy Week. Today, Easter Sunday, and for the next few weeks, in every church around the globe the story of the sightings of the simple worker from Nazareth after his crucifixion will be retold. We are familiar with the astonishing account of his resurrection.

Do we believe it? Can we?

When thinking about the events of the first Easter Sunday—namely Jesus' resurrection and the disciples' reactions to it—it's important to understand that the disciples had no way of expecting the resurrection. Nothing in their understanding of the Scriptures and their rich religious tradition prepared them for a savior who would die for them and be resurrected. It's true that Christians now read some Hebrew scriptures (like Isaiah 53) to be prophecies of Jesus's sacrificial death. However, they were not understood in that way during Jesus' earthly ministry. And even though Jesus told them he would die and be raised again, the disciples clearly did not understand what he was saying and did not accept his statements until what he told them had taken place.

Believers have the whole story now and have heard it numerous times. But for those first witnesses it would have been a brand-new concept. So, it was a shocker then. Is the meaning of Easter still shocking us today? Should it not?

When the angel told the women about Jesus' resurrection, something started to click in their minds. This was what Jesus had said would happen. Now they could see that his body was no longer in the grave. They were still afraid, but joy began to take hold.

Then, as the women went to tell the other disciples what they had seen, Jesus came and met them. Now they understood. Divine help is often necessary for us to gain an understanding of God's ways. When we try to understand deep matters of faith with only our own strength and intellect, we just can't do it.

The resurrection is important because it demonstrate that no evil thought, no evil action can defeat the God of Life. With our distorted and fragmented relationship to one another and to the planet, we assume control over people's lives, we put ourselves in charge, we think we can abuse nature to no limit, we think we can impose on others our worldviews, our religion, and our life preferences. As Pope Francis preached on Palm Sunday: "Entire peoples are exploited and abandoned; the poor live on our streets and we look the other way; there are migrants who are no longer faces but numbers; there are prisoners who are disowned; people written off as problems."

Suffering people are clearly out there: the ill, the lonely, the frightened individuals of every age, race and gender. They may or may not be recognizable; they may or may not be in the news. But their empty faces are out there, somewhere, filled with fear and doubt.

That is where the Easter promise comes in. The Christians who sometimes wonder where Jesus is, or if he does exist at all, can look to find him everywhere, anywhere. Because he does exist, right there in front of us all. He is in the face of the frightened child in the classroom, cowered behind a desk as gunshots are taking out classmates. He is in the transgender youth who commit suicide because too many "Christian" bullies of any age make their life unbearable.

The resurrection is important because there is no cruel action and no evil thought that is permanent: God has the final word, and God's word is always a word of life, of justice, or restoration, and of reconciliation.

The resurrection is important because it shows that because Jesus defeated death, we can also defeat death by putting our faith in him. Just as some theologians have said the crucifixion is important because there we see the kind of forgiving love God has for us in Jesus, the resurrection shows death defeated once and for all. And with death God defeats all that which separates us from God and one another.

So, why not surrender to Love? Why not renounce all evil forces that only carry suffering and death? Why not carry the mark of God's Spirit in our heart? Why not live as children of the Light? Why not work for the well-being of all, including nature?

The Resurrection of Jesus has no meaning at all unless it takes hold of our lives and transforms the places of death into life. Easter has a life-changing meaning or no meaning at all. Without victory over hatred, crucifixion, and death, Easter loses its power and is reinterpreted as a mere festive time for family picnics where we to hunt for eggs and chase Easter Bunnies.

We see resurrection lived by people out there helping others. We need look no farther than our own cities, towns or villages to see the resurrected Christ.

As the disciples encountered the risen Jesus, it soon became clear to them what had happened. They joyfully and practically shared the truth about Jesus with the rest of the world with such conviction that, nearly 2,000 years later, billions around the world believe it. Now, the challenge to act on it remains.

Christ is risen—he is risen indeed! A most blessed and meaningful Easter to you.