

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

JESUS CHRIST

SUNDAY SCRIPTURES AND LITURGICAL YEAR CONNECTION

STEP 1. BEGIN WITH PERSONAL, HUMAN EXPERIENCE

What do you know?

Part I: Divide chart
paper in half. List
everything you "know"
about Jesus Christ on
the left side of the
paper.

Appoint a scribe.

After four minutes
scribes stand and
present the answers
from each table.

- Part II: Considering
what you know about
Jesus, what is that
could prompt martyrs
to give their lives in
support of his life and
mission?
- Discuss your answers.
- Write a summary of
your answers on right
column.
- Scribes present each
group's responses.

Who is
Jesus
for you?



STEP 2. UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE

Based on the previous exercise--
what you know about Jesus and
who Jesus is for you--how would
you articulate your basic
understanding of the Christ
event?

STEP 3. PRESENT THE TRADITION

WHAT DO WE OFFICIALLY BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?

CCC: 422-682; USCCA: 77-87; 89-99

- Let us read together:
- We confess faith in Jesus of Nazareth who was born a Jew.
- He was born of a Jewish woman at Bethlehem at the time of King Herod and emperor Caesar Augustus.
- Jesus was a carpenter by trade.
- He was tortured and crucified in Jerusalem at the hands of Pontius Pilate.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God.
- Jesus is "God's Word made flesh and dwelt among us." (1: 14, 16)
- What we believe about Jesus is found in Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and is summarized in the Nicene Creed.

ULTIMATELY...



- Jesus' mission would be to save people from their sins.
- Jesus' had two distinct roles; God's Son and his role as the Suffering Servant who would give his life for the many.

WHY DID JESUS BECOME A HUMAN BEING?

- Jesus became a human being in order to reconcile us with God.
- Jesus became a human being so we might know God's love for us.

THE HEART OF OUR BELIEF

- Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
- Jesus is the second person of the Blessed Trinity (three Persons in one God)
- Jesus established a kingdom of peace and harmony—a new way of living and being in the world.
- Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead in order to save humanity from sin and to open the gates of eternal life.

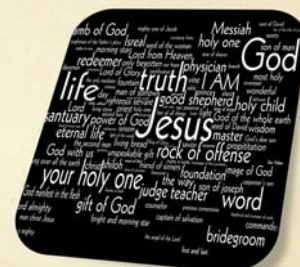


- We can articulate articles of belief, but unless and until we foster an intimate personal relationship with him, what we know about Jesus is simply information, biography and history.
- How do we move from an intellectual understanding of who Jesus is to professing him as Lord and Master of the Universe and of our lives?

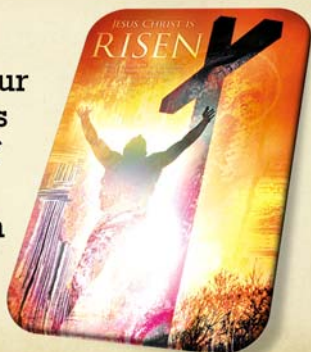
Critical Reflection

- Step One:
 - Consider the Jesus event from an historical perspective.
- Step Two:
 - Pray for the gift of faith and then yield to it—yield to the intimate relationship he invites.

- How do we know that Jesus is who we say he is and he accomplished what he set out to do?



- Crucial to our faith in Jesus is our belief in his resurrection from the dead.



Critical Reflection

- Have you ever doubted that Jesus rose from the dead?
- Have you ever doubted that Jesus is who we believe he is?
- How do you handle your doubts?
- How do you feel about them?

- Have you ever had to explain why you believe Jesus rose from the dead?

- What did you say?

MAKING THE CASE

- Jesus was insistent that he would rise from the dead.
- Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would.
- If it turned out that it was not true, he would simply be another imposter and a religion that has lasted over two thousand years would not have survived if the resurrection were a lie or a hoax.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT CALVARY?



- Jesus was tortured and beaten.
- Iron stakes were driven into his wrists.
- He died at 3:00—the time paschal lambs were being slain for the sacrifice to atone for sin.
- Cataclysmic events followed—sky darkened, earth shook.
- Pilate secured the tomb by placing guards at the entrance in order to insure the body would not be stolen.
- The disciples went into hiding believing Jesus was not who they thought he was. Their dream went up in smoke.

It seemed as though the Jewish authorities accomplished their mission to silence and stop Jesus.

Why did the terrified disciples come out of hiding and risk martyrdom for their faith in Christ in such a small amount of time?



Something happened!

- Five possible hypotheses concerning the resurrection have been presented over the centuries.
- Only one is accepted by faithful Christians.

- 1. Jesus did not really die on the cross.
- 2. The resurrection was a conspiracy.
- 3. The disciples were hallucinating.
- 4. The story is a legend and not factual.
- 5. It really happened.

1. JESUS DID NOT REALLY DIE.

- Medical professionals have argued that the spear that was thrust into Jesus side would have penetrated the right lung as well as the heart ensuring his death.
- Outside sources attested to his death: Jewish historian Josephus, philosophers Lucian and Tacitus
- Even scholars who deny the resurrection confirm that he lived and he died.

2. THE RESURRECTION WAS A CONSPIRACY THEORY.



THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

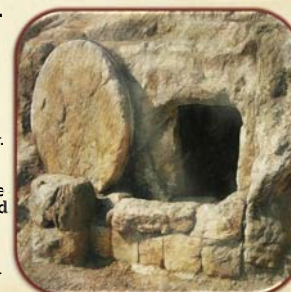
STOLEN BODY THEORY.

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Council.

He offered the use of his tomb which would have been in a prominent place in the cemetery.

Because of that and the many non-believing witnesses at the tomb, the Roman guards would have had to be co-conspirators.

We know the tomb was empty as Jesus' enemies accused the disciples of stealing his body.



- Even though there was no denying an empty tomb that alone would never have convinced Jesus' disciples that he rose from the dead.
- **SOMETHING HAPPENED.**
- **WHAT WAS IT?**

THEY SAW THE LORD

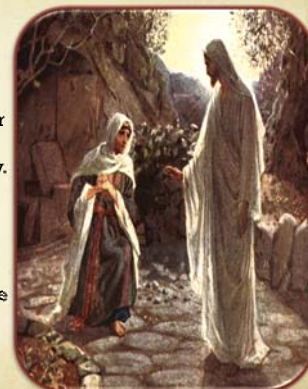


A CASE FOR THE RESURRECTION.

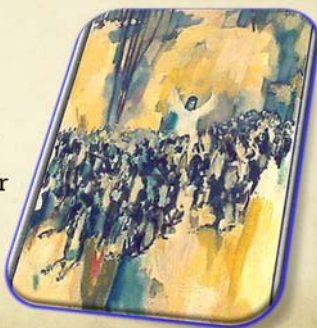
- The disciples saw the Lord.
- An encounter with the risen Lord is the only thing that could have moved them from horrified terror to bold witness.
- There were multiple eye-witnesses.



- Jesus appeared first to the women. Had this been a conspiracy, the conspirators would never have Jesus appear first to witnesses who could not lawfully testify.
- If they were trying to prove the resurrection they would hardly create a story in which the eyewitnesses (women) could not testify to it.



- How does a conspiracy continue when there were hundreds of eye witness accounts?
- Paul mentions over five hundred witnesses at one time.



MARTYRDOM

- The disciples very quickly shifted from frightened cowards to courageous martyr-willing disciples. Would they have done so for a lie? Hardly.
- They acted as they did because of their absolute assurance and conviction that Jesus was alive.

3. THE DISCIPLES WERE HALLUCINATING.

- Preposterous!
- Maybe one person could hallucinate. But it is unheard of for multiple people to hallucinate at the same time about the same thing.

4. THE STORY IS A LEGEND AND NOT FACTUAL.

Legends do not emerge when there are eye-witnesses still alive that can deny the truthfulness of the legend. If it was just a legend it should have died out.

- If the Christ story was just a legend it should have died out.
- The disciples went from coward to martyr in a matter of days.
- They encountered the risen Christ who reminded them of all he had taught them.
- He strengthened them for the new mission.

5. IT REALLY HAPPENED.

- There are no absolute proofs for the resurrection.
- There is ample evidence that events happened the way they are recorded.
- Not one shred of evidence to deny the resurrection has been found in two thousand years of Christian history.

Jesus died and
rose from the
dead as he said
he would.

So what?

So everything,
that's what!

- FOR ME HE IS THE ONE,
- THE ONE AND ONLY ONE!

- He is my All in All!
- HE WANTS TO BE YOURS.

The fact of Jesus' resurrection tells us that everything he promised us is true.

SPECIFICALLY...

- Jesus **IS** God's Son.
- Jesus **did** return to his Father's right hand where he judges the hearts of men and women.
- Jesus **did** open the gates of heaven for believers and paid the ultimate price for our sins.
- God **IS** the merciful Father who loves his children and desires intimate communion with them.

- Jesus **did** send his Spirit to be his ongoing presence in the world until he returns in glory.
- Jesus **does** live within us, his life and his light are what guide and lead us if we but yield to it.
- Whenever two or more are gathered in his name he **IS** present among us.

STEP 4. CRITICAL REFLECTION

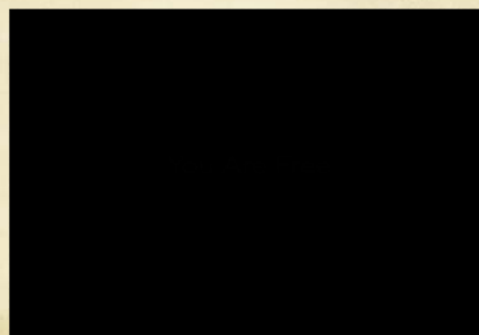
- What did you hear in today's reflection on Jesus Christ that may have strengthened your faith in him?
- Looking back on your life, where do you see the healing, compassionate hand of Christ in your life?

If you were called upon to share your faith in Christ with someone who does not believe in him, what did you hear today that could help you give compelling witness?

IMPLICATIONS

- Jesus invites us to participate in his death and resurrection—to be willing to die for the sake of others and so rise again to new life in Christ.

ARE WE WILLING TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE?



STEP 5. CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

- Is your relationship with Jesus what it could be?
- What needs to happen in your life to grow in intimate friendship with Jesus?

STEP 5. DECISION TO ACT/CHANGE/RESPOND

- What does this reflection on Jesus Christ compel you to do or to become in response?
- Who in your present world needs you to be Christ for them—to lay down your life for them?
- In what way does this teaching specifically exhort you to go out and sacrifice yourself to repair our world?

MINOR RITE