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## *Easter in 3-D!! (or Believing Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast)*

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**The Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**A Sermon at The Cathedral of St. Philip**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**April 4, 2010**  
**Easter Sunday - Year C**

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?-Luke 24:5*

*(this sermon works better when the preacher wears 3-D movie glasses during the first paragraph!)*

Welcome to Easter in 3-D! Yes, this has been a year in which three dimensional movies are making a comeback. Today some of us come back to church, and what we see is Easter in 3-D!

Like many of you, I had to see Johnny Depp in the new 3-D production of Alice in Wonderland. What movement! What realism! The movie combined all sorts of Lewis Carroll images and quotations, delights and imaginations. At one point, Alice turns to the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) and says, "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Hah! But those lines are not actually in the original book, Alice in Wonderland. Historically, those lines are actually in Lewis Carroll's second book about Alice, called Through the Looking Glass. Alice is actually complaining to the White Queen. "There's no use trying," Alice says to the White Queen. "There's no use trying," she says, "one can't believe impossible things." "One cannot believe impossible things."

But the White Queen responds, "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."1

It's really the White Queen who says these delightful lines, but no matter. The movie takes liberties with the book, and that is fine with me. In fact, it's better that way. Six impossible things before breakfast. The lines are supposed to be non-sensical and illogical. That's their alluring delight.

Six impossible things before breakfast.

On this Easter Sunday, we have something in common with Alice. For one, we, too, will probably see a white rabbit today! But, more importantly, on this Easter Sunday, we are gathering to proclaim something impossible, belief in an impossible thing, belief in an impossible truth.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*  
*The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

A few days ago, we heard Pontius Pilate ask the question, "What is truth?" Or was it two thousand years ago he asked that? "What is truth?"

Some of us ask that question every day. Or every night when we are churning through the television channels looking for something of interest. Many of us have graduated from channel surfing to web surfing. It is the internet, now, that has an answer to every question we can possibly ask. And what a wonderland of truth seems to be out there!

Everybody seems to have some new truth they are peddling. No matter how ridiculous the claim is, someone will justify it by saying, "Well, I read it on the internet," implying that there must be some support for the newest theory on who killed JFK. On the internet, there is a flat earth society on one site. At another site, there are purported photographs of archaeologists examining huge human bones, said to be the actual bones of prehistoric giants, thus proving the Genesis account that giant human beings once inhabited the earth.

The internet reminds me of the old court square surrounding the county courthouse where I grew up. There were all sorts of people, always hanging around there; but not everything said there had the same value. "I heard it at the court square," had about the same value as saying today, "I saw it on the Internet." Or "I heard it at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park."

"What is truth?" Pontius Pilate asked at his court square.

In this world of so many competing claims for truth, what is it that we proclaim today? "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" Is this just another impossible thing we are being asked to believe before breakfast?

Scholars and skeptics have searched for Jesus's historical absolutes for generations. They look for simplistic absolutes. Was there even a historical Jesus? Can we describe exactly the details of the historical Jesus? Did the resurrection happen? Did it happen in the exact way that the gospels say it did?

Well, the best accounts of Jesus and Resurrection"" the four gospels""all have different perspectives on how it happened. Then, St. Paul has even more accounts of how Jesus showed up after he was dead. The texts themselves differ. Can we prove the truth of the Resurrection by studying these texts over and over again?

I believe not. I do not believe the Resurrection can be proven historically, because historical proof is two dimensional. The so-called searches for the historical Jesus are similarly limited, like two dimensional realities. Two dimensional reality is true, but it is incomplete compared with 3-D!

The Resurrection is three dimensional. In fact, the Resurrection is probably four dimensional and five dimensional. The Resurrection is bigger than any dimension we might use to measure it.

When the women friends of Jesus showed up at the tomb on that first Easter morning, they did not see a historical body at all. They saw two men""angels, I believe""in dazzling clothes; and the angels asked them a critical question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

That's the question I ask today. Why do we persist in seeking out life from places that are dead? We wake up lonely in the night and stroll through two hundred television channels. We surf page to page on the internet. We cruise from bar to nightclub to restaurant, searching for the next trendy spot. We buy this car, move to that house, dress in these clothes, go to that school, even give to that charity, thinking that maybe this endeavor will finally offer me truth, offer me satisfaction. Why do you seek the living among the dead?

The Resurrection of Jesus will never be proven by poring back over old literature and ancient texts. Oh, I love those texts as much as the next person; in fact, I probably love them more than most people. I actually love the bible.

But the bible does not prove Resurrection. The bible is only two dimensional. It is not wrong; it is just limited to two dimensions. The power of scripture is that it points to something else. The power of the bible is that it offers something to our imagination. It inspires us to see another dimension.

Are we supposed to believe impossible things? Yes, because what is impossible in one dimension is very much possible in another dimension.

Mathematicians and physicists know this is true. Martin Gardner used to write regular columns about logic and mathematical puzzles in the magazine Scientific American. They were delightful because they pointed to another reality. People may not realize that Martin Gardner is actually a Lewis Carroll scholar, too. In fact, Lewis Carroll, the author of Alice in Wonderland, was himself a mathematics professor, at Oxford.

Martin Gardner, the present-day mathematician, wrote a masterpiece called The Annotated Alice, full of notes and comments about Alice in Wonderland. It was that book and its notes that first pointed me to the old quotation of a second century Christian theologian named Tertullian. Gardner didn't get it quite right: "I believe, because it is absurd," he quoted.<sup>2</sup>

What Tertullian actually said, in the second century, was "The Son of God was buried, and rose again. It is certain, because impossible."<sup>3</sup> It is certain, because impossible. The resurrection of Jesus is impossible in one dimension. But in another dimension, it is certain.

Today, Easter Sunday, we believe an impossible truth: Life comes from death. We are not here merely to say something historical about Jesus, that somehow his body was resuscitated from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus does not mean the Resuscitation of Jesus. We are not here merely to say something about what has happened in the past. We are here proclaiming something about the present, right now, right in front of us.

So, today, we do not say "Alleluia, Christ WAS risen!" We say "Alleluia, Christ IS risen." Right now. Christ is risen!

We are not proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ in the past, based on two-dimensional texts (though we do believe that). We are proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ in the present, in full array before us, in living 3-D!

You ask, Where is this three dimensional resurrection? It is all around you. The living community of faith is the real 3-D. People are the real 3-D. Simply reading about something is two dimensional; living it out is three dimensional. Even seeing a movie<sup>4</sup> even seeing a movie in 3-D!<sup>5</sup> is two dimensional. Even the virtual reality of internet is two dimensional. Living it out is three dimensional.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why do we seek the truth in things that do not give us life?

We find truth in communities of resurrection; and that is the claim I make this morning for the Christian church. At our best, we are a community of resurrection. The best proof of the Resurrection of Christ is not the bible. The best proof of the Resurrection of Christ is the Christian Church, the Body of Christ! We believe in death; and we also believe in life.

Sure, the Christian Church has problems. Sure, we have differences of opinion. We have various perspectives and angles! The very scriptures that we use to inspire our souls are full of various perspectives and differences.

But we live in Resurrection. We believe that Jesus died, and we believe that Jesus is risen. We believe in death and we believe in life. That's why we observe both Good Friday and Easter. That's why we sing hymns at funerals. That's why we search through earthquake debris for signs of life. That's why the Church builds great schools for intellectual achievement and hospitals for the sick. It is the Church who takes dinner to those who mourn.

Today, we do look for the living among the dead. Because we live in another dimension. We have met Jesus our Lord. We have met the risen Christ before, and we will meet the risen Christ again. We have not just read about Easter. We have seen in Easter in 3-D, in living flesh and blood!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

(1) Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, chapter 5.

(2) Credo quia absurdum: "I believe it, because it is absurd." Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, copyright 1960 by Martin Gardner, page 251.

(3) What Tertullian actually said was:

Natus est Dei Filius, non pudet, quia pudendum est;  
et mortuus est Dei Filius, prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est;  
et sepultus resurrexit, certum est, quia impossibile.

(De Carne Christi V, 4)

"The Son of God was born: there is no shame, because it is shameful.  
And the Son of God died: it is wholly credible, because it is unsound.  
And, buried, He rose again: it is certain, because impossible."

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