

# Opinion

## Easter story is a story of hope

By RICHARD E. RUGGLE  
St Paul's Church, Norval

Utter failure seemed to mark Jesus' last days on earth. Judas was so disillusioned that he betrayed him. The crowds who had cheered him a few days earlier on his entry into the city of Jerusalem turned into a mob who demanded his blood. The governor gave up hope of justice, and washed his hands of responsibility for his fate. His friends deserted him. The passers-by who saw him on the cross made fun of him, and thought themselves big-shots to laugh at this teacher dying a criminal's death. Even nature seemed to echo the sadness of the day he was executed, and the earth was dark.

A few folk were brave enough to claim his body, so they could bury it with some dignity. And that might have been the end of the story — a tragic end to a life that had brought hope to so many people — and a final end. The authorities were anxious to have done with it, for things to quieten down and get back to normal.

It was a sombre "twilight of the gods," like Socrates drinking the hemlock because he questioned the values of the Athenian fellow-citizens, or Pastor Bonhoeffer being shot because he resisted Nazi tyranny.

Now Mary Magdalene came early in the morning to the cave where his body lay, to anoint his body with spices. (The tradition that one of the wise men offered the baby Jesus a gift of myrrh, which was used for embalming, was a reminder that if God chose to share our human life, that also meant sharing our human morality.) Mary discovered that the body was gone, and she thought that Jesus' enemies had taken it. One of the evangelists, Mark, tells us that she and her companion were afraid.

The two women told Peter and John about the disappearance. The two disciples ran to the grave. John got there first, and looked in to see the linen cloths which had wrapped Jesus' body. Then Peter arrived and went in, and John followed. Peter had fallen asleep over and over again that painful night when Jesus had been arrested; and he denied knowing him when people pointed him out as one of the master's disciples. Now he would be the first to start to grasp that something extraordinary had happened here. And on that blustering faltering faith, Jesus had promised to build a church.

But that's still not the end of the story. If it were, we wouldn't remember it today, except, perhaps, in a "Ripley's Believe-it-or-not" sort of way. There were lots of magicians in the ancient world, who claimed to bring people back from the dead, just as there are lots of con artists in the world today, ready to make a fast buck or quick fame by trying to convince you of the inconceivable — of quack miracle cures, or ghosts, or astral travel. And though we almost enjoy flaunting our gullibility, time shows up the ruses for what they are. Today we merely smile at Mackenzie King's spirits, or Hitler's astrologers, or the tales of a re-incarnated Bridey Murphy.

Still, the Easter story retains its hold on us, because it bears the mark of the hand of God. It doesn't just tease our curiosity; rather, the resurrection challenges our outlook on life. The risen Christ is no ghost wafting aimlessly about a world where he no longer belongs. Rather, he shows us God's power over death, and life.

Some disciples were sharing their sadness at Jesus' murder as they walked along the road to Emmaus. They were joined by a stranger who went along the way with them, and only when he broke bread with them, as Jesus had done in the upper room just before he was arrested, did they recognize him. And they remarked how their hearts had burned as they were talking together. When Jesus appeared to the disciples at Jerusalem he filled them with great joy. Saul, was bent on putting down Jesus followers, whom he considered dangerous heretics, until he was confronted by "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and became a missionary for the new faith. The risen Christ was not a mere apparition that boggled people's minds; he was a person who could excite his companions, and fill them with joy, and make them encounter the very glory of God.

The Easter story is a story about life—about Jesus' life and about our own. His followers had every reason to be discouraged and disillusioned; but Jesus turned defeat into victory and despair into hope. And the story is our encouragement, when we are tempted to give in, that God is with us and brings us hope.



## Happy Easter

### Our Readers Write

## Christian-Jewish relationship must be based on respect says rector

Dear Editor:

In your paper early in March, you carried an article on the visit to a local church of representatives of an organization called, "Jews for Jesus".

"Jews for Jesus" is an organization which causes concern for many Jews and Christians, most notably, The Canadian Council of Churches, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Jewish Congress. "Jews for Jesus" is an aggressive group which tries to convert Jews to Christianity. Yet one of the fundamental tenets of Jewish-Christian dialogue in our time is the renunciation of proselytism in any form by Christians of Jews.

The journal, *Ecumenical Review*, Volume 1, 1971, page 11, contains the following statement on proselytism: "Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters." In a World Council of Churches document entitled, "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian dialogue", Geneva 1983, Sections 4.2 and 4.3, it is stated that Christians have often

distorted their witness for coercive proselytism; Christians should advocate respect for the integrity and identity of all persons and all communities of faith, particularly the Jewish people.

Furthermore, if a Jew converts to Christianity, the person is then, no longer a Jew but a Christian. Dennis Prager writes in the *Miami Jewish Tribune*, March 2-8, 1990, that, "Jews for Jesus are probably the only people in the world who take on the beliefs of another religion yet deny that they have converted to that religion."

It is commendable that Christians learn about their Jewish roots and recognize the values and traditions they hold in common with Jewish people, for example, the Ten Commandments. It is imperative that Christians respect the integrity of the Jewish faith. Christian-Jewish relationships in the present and future must be based on mutual understanding and respect and must be different from the tragic past.

Yours truly,  
Thomas M.S. Kingston,  
Rector, St. George's Anglican Church

Halton Hills

# WEEKEND

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KEN BELLAMY  
Publisher

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Staff Writers: Robin Insko, Paul Dorsey, Stuart Johnston, Janet Baine.  
Photography: Ted Brown

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