

AUGUST 2016

OUR FAITH IS HISTORICALLY VERIFIABLE — OR IT'S NOTHING

BY KATHY KELLER

Doveryai, no proveryai is a Russian proverb that is probably more famous in translation than in its original language. “Trust, but verify” was used extensively in various international negotiation settings, and continues to be trotted out as needed. It’s not a bad idea. Trust is good; proof that your trust is not unfounded is even better.

Where does that apply in the life of a people of faith? Some people equate faith with the phrase “leap of faith,” or, as Mark Twain is reputed to have said, “Faith is believing in what you know ain’t true.” Though cleverly put, I doubt that is true of any person of faith, however untutored. There is nothing to be gained by clinging to a myth, a falsehood, or a lie. When life is raw and wretched, the only stability to be found is the truth, wherever that may lie.

I was thinking of this today as I mused on the necessity of historical, verifiable fact as the foundation for the Christian faith. Of all belief systems, Christianity is the only one that insists that its truths must be founded on the historical existence of a person named Jesus, and that further, he historically said and did the things claimed of him. Most im-

portantly, if Jesus did not die (really die, dead-as-a-doornail-die) and then rise again (in a physical body, one that walked, talked, ate, and resumed relationships with his friends), then, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17, *...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Why pitied? “If believing in Jesus is what gets you through the day,” as many a skeptic has told me, “then good for you. We all have our lucky rabbit’s foot to comfort us; if Jesus is yours then, fine. Just don’t push it on me.” The problem with that argument is that our faith is in things that Jesus *did*; or, if he did not do them, then the whole thing is useless. Every other faith system, even faith in science, or education, or political power, draws its significance from the good advice it provides to its adherents. If you live a certain way, observe a number of important rules, act in accord with these precepts, well, life will be good to you. You will be respected, possibly revered, for making a difference in the progress of civilization. If not now, definitely later, in another realm, where you will get your reward (Islam) or in another incarna-

tion (Hinduism) or in the peace of non-existence (Buddhism) or in your laudatory obit in the *NYTimes*.

The faith of a Christian believer, however, is not in the ethical teaching of the Bible (though it is there, and not wildly different from that of other faiths, as C. S. Lewis demonstrated at the end of his brilliant book, *The Abolition of Man*.) Rather, the Christian places his faith, his hope of renewal, her confidence in forgiveness, in the actions of someone other than him or herself ... in Jesus, in fact. If he did not live as he lived and die as he died, and rise as he said he would, then we Christians are spending our lives chasing a fairytale. Childish! Stupid! Pitiably!

It is for this reason that Paul, in that same passage of Corinthians, lists the eyewitnesses of the resurrection as his sources. He was a hardheaded, Roman-educated Jew, conversant in philosophy as well as the scriptures, but he relied on none of that. He drew his assurance from the people who saw with their own eyes.

Interestingly, as I was considering these things, my Bible reading took me through the end of Matthew, the resurrection

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2016 FAITH & WORK CONFERENCE: THE WONDER AND FEAR OF TECHNOLOGY

The Center for Faith & Work is excited to announce our 2016 Faith & Work Conference: The Wonder and Fear of Technology.

Technology has dominated our cultural moment. It's abstract and specific, tangible, ephemeral, and pervasive. It's what we're both afraid of and in awe of. Despite our misgivings, we put a lot of faith in technology. It isn't just the device in our pocket. It's the mechanism that shapes our knowing and learning. It's the system we unwittingly trust and rely upon in the most basic daily decisions.

So it's no surprise that we're obsessed with the tools we invent. Yet often lost in our grand impressions is this: technology exists for humanity. And not the other way around. The central question we ask of technology ends up sounding a lot like a spiritual one: who is ruling whom?

This fall's Faith & Work Conference will be a small attempt to reorder what we've disordered, to realign invention with hope. We'll explore some difficult questions: How does technology square with tradition? What has been coded into

humans that we now so often greet technology with fear? Is humankind's future bending towards doom or promise?

Our hope is to develop new thought on the intersection of faith and technology, to wisely examine the future of work, and to replace current normative models that spawn fear with a fuller notion of the divine signature that has authored us all.

We hope you'll plan to join us this November! Additional information and registration is available at faithandwork.com/conference.

REDEEMER CITY TO CITY ASIA INTENSIVE GOES LOCAL

BY KATIE ELLIS

In late April, 13 church planters participated in the International Church Planting Intensive in Singapore and Hong Kong. This group reflected the widest array of cities and cultures of Asia Pacific's five Intensives to date with church planters from Bangalore, Bangkok, Canberra, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne, Phnom Penh, Seoul, Singapore, and Tokyo.

This year we made several key changes to the Intensive. We condensed it from four weeks to

seventeen days, visiting two cities rather than three. More importantly, we empowered local leaders to teach the Intensive, rather than bringing all the main trainers from the US. These local leaders have been through our training and shadowed past trainers.

We certainly felt your prayers and support throughout this Intensive as we encountered many hurdles, including multiple staff members getting sick and some visa issues with a participant.

Still, God was faithful and created time for rest and help to clear up the visa troubles. With the training of local leadership and the diverse group attending the Intensive, we were reminded of all God is doing in Asia and are thankful for the strong support that so many of you provide through your giving, prayer and friendship.

Katie Ellis is Redeemer City to City's Program Manager for Asia Pacific.

REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium
E. 69th St.
(between Park & Lexington)
Services: 10:30 a.m. & 6 p.m.

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services: 9:30/11:30 a.m., 5 & 7 p.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

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HELP START 10 NEW CHURCHES WITH JUST \$10: THE 10X10 INITIATIVE

How far can you stretch a dollar? Or ten dollars? We want to find out. If you weren't able to make a pledge to Rise, we have a special opportunity.

Redeemer Church and Redeemer City to City have launched an initiative we're calling 10x10 during the first ten days of August. The goal is to fund the launch of 10 new churches in New York City in 10 days, with gifts of just \$10 or more. We're asking people who haven't pledged to the Rise campaign to join us in this sim-

ple practical way to create seed funding for these churches that Redeemer City to City will help launch in the coming year.

How will \$10 gifts, even thousands of them, be enough? Through multiplication. **A donor has offered to give \$100 for every gift of \$10 or more through August 10!**

Since it's founding, Redeemer has worked to spark a movement of the gospel that begins in New York City bringing renewal to it and through it to cities throughout the world. We've seen the gospel bring about personal con-

version, renewed communities, greater mercy and justice, and renewal of the arts and workplaces. We believe this movement will only grow and persist if, through God's help, we start hundreds of new churches all across the city. That's been our dream for some time. Now, with the way God is working through the Rise campaign, we believe we could actually see it happen.

Please visit **rise.redeemer.com/give** to make a gift. When you give \$10, the match will multiply it to \$110 (in total) to help grow this gospel movement.

OUR FAITH IS HISTORICALLY VERIFIABLE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

of Jesus, a story that is so familiar that I thought I couldn't learn anything new from reading it. However, (and I apologize in advance for the digression) I have been listening to Beethoven's Egmont Overture as I walk on an older treadmill (one that doesn't have a TV screen to distract me with mindless cooking shows during my 40 minutes of walking-to-nowhere!) The Egmont is one of my favorites. I have always imagined that the triumphant conclusion of the piece would have been a good sound track to the resurrection — the angel rolls away the stone, and Jesus walks out, joyous, in his resurrected, glorified body, the savior of mankind and the first fruits from the dead. Cue the brass.

However, this time through Matthew I noticed something. Chapter 28:2 does indeed say that an angel came and rolled

back the stone (it would have been several tons, designed to roll into a declivity in front of the tomb entrance and therefore unmoveable by human agency), but to my surprise, it does NOT say that "then Jesus walked out of the tomb"! The angel informs the women who have come to visit the tomb that "he is not here" v.6. and, in fact, is already on his way to Galilee ahead of them v.7.

In colloquial terms, Elvis had already left the building! Jesus did not have to wait for the angel to move the stone to let him out ... he was a real, physical being but one who could pass through grave clothes without disturbing them, as well as through locked doors. He would not have needed angelic help to get out of the tomb.

Why, then, roll away the stone at all? Well, imagine if the angel

had just arrived and sat on the stone, but without moving it, and delivered the same message. "He is not here; he is risen, just as he said." Would the women have believed him? Maybe, maybe not. An angel is probably pretty persuasive. But what about everyone else? Without an open, visibly empty tomb the resurrection was not verifiable. People who claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus could have been hallucinating. After all, the body was still in the tomb, wasn't it?

To my surprise, I realized that the stone needed to be rolled away NOT to let Jesus out, but to let US in!! Trust, but verify. The resurrection needed to be verified by eyewitnesses, who could testify to the empty tomb and empty grave clothes. Ours is a faith founded on an event that took place in space, time,

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2016 VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL CAVE QUEST

The week of July 11-15, the W83 Ministry Center was filled with the sound of 292 children singing, dancing and worshipping during Redeemer's annual Vacation Bible School (VBS). This year's theme took kids on a journey underground: "Cave Quest: Following Jesus the Light of the World." The children explored how in our darkest times Jesus gives us hope, courage and powerful life changing love. Through crafts, songs, skits, immersive Bible lessons, and small group discussions, they focused on seeking Jesus, our light, when the world is often filled with darkness.

Every summer the week of VBS reminds me why each

of us who make up our Children's ministry staff and volunteer teams dedicate ourselves to teaching the next generation of New Yorkers the amazing things God has done. To hear an auditorium full of children reciting John 8:12, "Jesus said I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life," with excitement brings joy to my heart. Watching the children search through the Bible to learn about the hope they have in Jesus and watching them place their thumbprints (in red) on the cross as a reminder of Jesus' sacrificial love brings tears to my eyes. Witnessing them fall in love with our savior brings

me to my knees with gratitude to our Father.

It was an amazing week that could not have happened without the hard work and dedication of a huge team of volunteers. This year we had over 270 volunteers working to decorate, teach, lead small groups, prepare snacks, set up crafts, and even serve pizza and pop-sicles at the Friday night family "Cave Rave." It takes all three congregations working together seamlessly, and a whole lot of prayer, for the week to happen. Thank you to everyone who joined the quest for this week. You were a beautiful reflection of Jesus' light for the next generation.

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and history, and it began with an angel politely opening the tomb so that we could look into the empty space and see that he was

no longer there.

So, ask your questions, raise your doubts. Christians have nothing to fear from questions,

however searching, or doubts, however scathing. History is on our side. It really happened. That changes everything.