

EASTER SUNDAY

Can you really tell the difference between truth and nonsense? I have, here, a random mixture of short stories. Are they true or nonsense? Think about it!

A bus went the wrong way down a one-way street causing traffic chaos – because the driver needed to relieve herself. Police had to set up a road block when they spotted the woman steering the double-decker bus into oncoming traffic in Lower Regent Street in London. When the bus stopped, the driver jumped off and said: “sorry I needed the loo!”

An answering machine message:

“Hi I am probably at home, I’m just avoiding someone I don’t like. Leave me a message and if I don’t call back, it’s you.”

A boy’s answer to an examination question: ‘I’ve said goodbye to my boyhood, now I’m looking forward to my adultery... and another boy’s answer..

‘I always know when it is time to get up when I hear my mother sharpening the toast.’

Commenting on a complaint from a Mr Arthur Purdey about a large gas bill, a spokesman for his gas company said, “We agree it was rather high for the time of year. It’s possible Mr Purdey has been charged for the gas used up during the explosion that destroyed his house.”

Former President George Bush was visiting an old people’s home. After speaking to a few of the residents the president asked of one old lady, ‘Do you know who I am?’ ‘No’, came the snappy reply ‘but I’m sure if you ask at reception they’ be able to tell you.’

A crab is sitting on the ocean floor when a lobster comes up to him dragging a half dead octopus. The octopus is coughing, very pale and has a nasty rash. The lobster says to the crab: ‘Alrite mate, here’s the sick squid I owe you.’

The Sunday School teacher was describing how Lot’s wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. Young George was most interested. “my dad looked back once,” he said, “while he was driving and he turned into a lamp post.”

When it comes to it, it is difficult to see the difference between truth and nonsense and it is more difficult to define them. In our daily lives, we come across stories, events and facts that are clearly nonsense, some should be nonsense but are in fact true, some seem to make sense but are pure nonsense, some are nonsense taken literally but make sense if viewed in a different way and some make perfect sense as they stand.

In the Good News version of Luke's Gospel (Chap 24) we read: "but the apostles thought that what the women said was NONSENSE and they did not believe them." These were the women returning from the empty tomb after being asked why they were looking for someone alive among the dead. It is easy to empathise with these disciples. It wasn't that they didn't want to believe; it all seemed too good to be true - truly nonsense. They were beaten and demoralised. Their hopes had been buried in the tomb. We know why the tomb was empty now, but Mary, Peter and John did not. They were living in the past, miles from home, their leader savagely killed; their future and way of life had all gone in one disastrous week. It is no wonder they greeted the news of the resurrection with the word NONSENSE. Yet immediately it became clear they believed. Not just because they had seen Jesus. John was the first one to believe in the resurrection without seeing the risen Jesus. All he had was the evidence of the empty tomb. The change a few weeks later is staggering. The determination to spread the news of the living Jesus was immovable. Something big had happened and that something was the resurrection. Yet at first they called it NONSENSE; they had been so amazed they couldn't say it was true.

Millions of people continue to claim Jesus' resurrection to be nonsense. They do not believe. We cannot prove them wrong anymore than they can prove themselves right. No one can prove the resurrection. But the disciples, demonstrated that the real truth about the resurrection is only discovered through personal experience. Wherever we look in our world, we see unfairness. We see inequality, injustice, arrogance, callousness, hunger, anger, ingratitude, hatred and greed. Every day, it seems, we hear of kidnappings and violence, intolerance, murder, torture and terrorism. Yet Jesus planted his cross in the middle of our world, as he did in the world of Mary, Peter and John. If we are prepared to experience the risen Lord, then Easter makes us totally rethink our future.

Tony Campolo, in his book, 'Let me Tell You a Story' (A True Friend pp 17-18), retells the World War 1 story of the lieutenant who commanded his men to sneak across a field and attack the enemy. The men obeyed and crawled out of the trench. Suddenly gunfire rang out! The frightened men scurried back to their trenches. When the gunfire ceased, it was quiet, except for the moaning and groaning of one man who had been left on the field, wounded. The man kept crying for his friend George, begging him to come and save him. George pleaded and pleaded with his officer to let him go. But George's officer kept saying: "I've lost him I do not want to lose you too". But the young soldier kept on and finally got his way. He sneaked over the trench with his officer's words ringing in his ears: "Go out and get yourself killed if that's what you want to do!" George crawled to his friend, grabbed him and slowly pulled him back. He got his wounded friend back and after pushing him over the edge of the trench, George fell on top of him. But it was too late - he was dead. The lieutenant yelled: "George, I told you there was no point in your stupid bravery. Why did you risk your life? You put all our lives in jeopardy. And for what! You stupid fool." In his sadness, George answered: "No, I am not a stupid fool. You see, when I got to him he was alive and the last words he said were, George! I knew you would come!"

Jesus came - into the midst of our despair and hopelessness, not risking his life but actually dying on a cross. And he came again to beat death and be with us forever. Easter

provides us with the certain knowledge that in the new heaven and earth, there will be no fences, no barriers, no prejudices, no injustices, no inequality, no knives, guns and bombs, no hatred and conflict, no poverty and hunger, loneliness and misery in old age, no rejection or destruction, no pain and death. It takes every gram of our faith to come close to understanding even a part of the true impact of the resurrection. But that should not stop us shouting for joy that Jesus has beaten death, giving us hope of eternal life and is alive and with us NOW. At the first Easter Jesus came and invited us to come, see and experience the true resurrection. Matthew tells us: “The angel spoke to the women: you must not be afraid, I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, he has been raised just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying.”

The first Easter changed the world forever. Thinking of the disciples who shouted out, “nonsense” to the women, we can feel the change in their emotions, from fear, and confusion mixed with despair and shame to hope and discovery and surprise and joy in the garden at that first Easter daybreak. Every Easter morning should be one of great surprise because we are celebrating something massive. If we expect the good news of the gospel to be familiar and understandable expect to be disappointed. I am reminded of the argument when father says to daughter: ‘I want an explanation, and I want the truth’ and daughter replies: ‘Make up your mind, Dad. You can’t have both!’

Springtime is a time to be positive, a time of new beginnings – eggs, new lambs, new flowers, leaves and blossom on the trees, sunshine and warmth after the winter, a time to wake up from winter, when new life dawns. Easter itself is a time of waking up to something big, something exciting, something amazing.

There is that lovely story of Dad kneeling down beside his little girl's bed. It was time for prayers, hugs and kisses, and tucking in. The little girl began the childhood prayer she had repeated so many times before: ‘Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray you Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray you Lord, my soul to take.’

Only, tonight she got a bit mixed up. She prayed, "If I should wake before I die." Embarrassed, she stopped. "Oh Daddy, I got all mixed up." But Daddy responded, "Not at all! In fact, that's probably the first time the prayer has been properly prayed. You see baby, my deepest wish for you is that you may wake up before you die."

Today this simple story offers a powerful message. What is important to me is knowing Jesus, not knowing about him. What is important is not arguing over the truth or nonsense of what happened at the resurrection and how, but believing in the certainty of the experience that Jesus is alive. Whatever we are dealing with at the present time and wherever we are on our journey of faith, whether we are thinking about possibly starting, just at the start, tentatively a little way, or a way along, think about accepting Jesus’ invitation to come and see the empty tomb, come and experience the living Lord. Easter has dawned again, full of amazing opportunities, full of new beginnings. Let us wake up and experience them.