



**Padiham
Parish**

Text for 2024

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint.”

(Isaiah 40:31)

April 2024

Dear Friends,

Evidence for the Resurrection

It's generally accepted that there are three major pieces of evidence for belief in the resurrection of Jesus. First we have the fact that his tomb was empty on Easter Sunday morning and neither his followers nor his opponents knew of the whereabouts of his body. If either group had moved his dead body (presumably at least four men would have been involved?) you'd have thought that the truth would have come out sooner or later.

Secondly we have the evidence of the appearances of Jesus. There's no avoiding the fact that his disciples were convinced that they had seen Jesus alive. Sometimes the appearance involved one or two of them, sometimes it was a larger group or even a crowd. And what's striking is that the first few appearances happened independently of each other – it's impossible to claim that the disciples steadily jumped on a rumour bandwagon that got rolling because of just one person's wishful thinking.

And then we have the evidence of the existence of the church. At the time of Jesus it wasn't unusual for Judaism to throw up charismatic leaders who would cause a stir and gather around themselves large numbers of excited followers. A typical example was a man called Theudas. Josephus an historian who lived in the first century mentions Theudas in his book, “The Antiquities of the Jews” and describes how his movement came to a brutal end. We're told that Fadus, the Roman Procurator of Judea, sent a troop of horsemen and many of Theudas's followers were killed or captured. And Theudas himself was brought to Jerusalem and beheaded.

And so Theudas's movement melted away with the death of its leader. The story is even referred to in the New Testament. A Pharisee called Gamaliel was heard to say this at a meeting of the Jewish Council: “Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred man rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing,” (Acts 5:36)

Gamaliel's point was that these new religious movements always fizzle out when they lose their leader.

But Jesus's movement – the church – stubbornly refused to fizzle out even when it lost its leader through death. In fact it grew and spread to the ends of the earth and today it is made up of millions of followers. And the only explanation must be that death was not the end for Jesus its leader. He was raised from the grave and still leads his people.

I wish you a joyful Easter as we worship and follow our risen Lord.

Yours in Christ

Mark

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