

It's rare, (certainly in one of my sermons) to start quoting Maurice Chevalier but here goes:

We met at nine
We met at eight
I was on time
No, you were late
Ah, yes, I remember it well.

Two people – one event – two different recollections.

It's never easy to be an eyewitness. All too often your perception of events is different from the perception of those of someone else who witnessed the same event. Seen from two different viewpoints the same, single event can appear to be radically different. It's for this reason that criminal cases always require more than one witness – to get as fully rounded a picture of what had actually taken place as possible.

It's been shown that even with two people who have seen the same event from the same angle, different levels of detail will be spotted by each. On top of that, memory also plays a large part as we each remember different events slightly differently – we're not all infallible when it comes to memory.

Every single one of us is a collection of experiences and we can only ever relate them from our own point of view. That can sometimes mean that a shared experience may not be described as the same by two individuals who shared it – sometimes the contradictions may be minor as in Maurice's song, whereas sometimes you would wonder if you were hearing the same event being described.

So when we read the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus as found in the four Gospels, it's little wonder that we should find slight variations in them. It's a good exercise to read all the accounts side by side and look at the similarities and differences. How many angels were present, for example, one or two? Luke and John say two whereas Matthew and Mark only have one. Or you could ask how many women went to the tomb? Who entered the tomb first, one of the Marys or John the beloved disciple? Who was the first to see Jesus: Peter, James, Cleopas, John or Mary Magdalene? It's all a bit of a muddle.

The fact that we have the story from a number of different points of view doesn't mean that it didn't happen but merely makes the description more vivid; primarily because they contain inconsistencies that you would find in any normal eye-witness account. Indeed, it makes it *all the more* believable because had they been identical it would have suggested the Gospellers had colluded to make sure all the facts were identical.

After the resurrection then, the disciples were somewhat confused, but there was another reason for their confusion. They saw (or had heard reports) that Jesus was alive but in what way was he alive? The Jewish view about resurrection was not really clear. They believed (as most religions did) that the dead sleep forever in a vast, gloomy cavern underneath the earth called Sheol.

The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed that God would breathe new life on the Day of the Lord. Now, when the Jews won a battle, they used to describe it as a "day of the Lord" so that gradually a hope emerged that there would be a final battle in which all of God's enemies would be destroyed and that the Jews would rule the earth in what they called "the kingdom of God". This, they argued, was a bit unfair on those Jews who had been unfortunate to die in battle so the Pharisees suggested that all good Jews would be raised from their tombs to share

in this life.

So the disciples were really confused since no-one was supposed to come back to life until this great “day of the Lord” when the Messiah's armies would defeat the Romans and everything that was wrong in the world would be put right. That explains why they were so keen that Jesus should be the Messiah and should vanquish the Romans. That clearly hadn't happened though, and so they were confused as to what Jesus had really been.

Two of them, Cleopas and an unnamed other, are walking on the road to Emmaus when Jesus joins them. It always seemed odd to me that the other disciple isn't named since they clearly were as much a part of this discussion as Cleopas himself. It's notable, however, that there is one group of people who are frequently not named in any of the Bible stories since they were very much an underclass – women. It is not unreasonable to suppose that this was a woman accompanying Cleopas (perhaps even his wife) but, in keeping with traditions of the day, is not specifically named in this story.

Jesus more or less butts in to their conversation and they show some degree of exasperation that there is someone in the area of Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been going on these last few days (remember, this all took place on the evening of Easter Sunday) – not two weeks later as we celebrate it today. Jesus, in turn, is exasperated with them “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have declared!”

It's not until the breaking of the bread though, reminding them possibly of the way he had done so at the Last Supper, or at the feeding of the five thousand, or on some other occasion that they'd shared a meal with him, that they recognise him for who he is. Just at the moment they realise the implications of the person sitting in front of them, he disappears. No wonder they were amazed. And that's the moment that they realise that their original ideas about the resurrection being an earthly resurrection are wrong, but that it is a different form of existence. It was St. Paul who came up with the theology to explain this when he talks of the spiritual body with which we will interact and recognise each other in heaven.

It's not surprising that non-Christians think we are either gullible or completely mad. If we believed in a literal physical resurrection we would be. We need to understand that our physical bodies are spent on this earth but that our Spiritual bodies are the ones with which we will reside with God in heaven.

Jesus, in this one simple act of partaking of a meal with two of his followers demonstrated that he was, indeed, risen – the accounts of his resurrection were, indeed, true. No wonder that they hurried back to confirm the stories that the others were telling. The minor inconsistencies in their stories didn't matter – the truth is that he is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.