

## **NO FOOLING!**

A media article<sup>1</sup> published just two weeks ago described a man trying to prove to a judge in court that he was still alive. He had left his homeland of Romania in 1992, travelling to Turkey to look for work. Having not heard from him again, his wife had a Romanian court declare him dead two years ago, in 2016. This year, 2018, Turkish officials discovered that the man was living in Turkey with expired papers, and deported him back to Romania. He then went to a Romanian court to prove he was still alive, but the court said he had waited too long to appeal, and thus he could not have his death certificate overturned. The man lamented that “I am officially dead, although I’m alive.

It reminds me of the time I graduated from University, and my family planned a celebration party for me. In the invitations, I asked that in lieu of gifts, people make a donation to their favourite charity instead. One of the guests made a contribution to a local health charity in my name, but the charity mistook it as a memorial donation. Shortly afterwards, my parents received a note from the charity expressing its condolence in the loss of their son Brian, and to rest assured that this donation would be put to good use. Having assured my parents that I was still alive, which wasn’t hard because I was still living at home, I contacted the charity myself. I assured them that I was indeed alive and that my name could appropriately be removed from their Memorial records. Thankfully, they agreed with me, and I didn’t have to prove myself any further.

As we hear in the Resurrection stories, Jesus was faced with the challenge of convincing his followers that he was no longer dead. Mary mistook him at first for the cemetery gardener before the new reality settled in. The disciple Peter who

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in New York Times March 16 2018. By the Associated Press.

denied knowing Jesus when questioned went on to become an advocate for the risen Christ. Jesus' challenge of convincing his followers paralleled his experience in the Lenten desert where the devil was asking him to prove his divinity. He resisted pulling off any type of magic trick, staying true to his conviction that this type of behaviour would sully the message of *true faith*. Even when he healed the afflicted, he often asked viewers not to tell anyone what they had seen. He wasn't that kind of Messiah. He didn't want to be the *focus* of faith, but rather the *conveyor* of it. He wanted the *Creator God* to be the centre of people's attention. He did make one exception for Thomas who refused to believe, by letting him out his hand in the wound created when he was pierced by a sword before the crucifixion. For all others, the implications of the Resurrection would need to be molded into their own personal faiths.

So what's it all mean for us today? Is it just one more historical piece that we read about once a year and then put it back into our memory folder until the next Easter? And if we accept the possibility of new life after death, so what? Are we just supposed to sit around and wait for our physical death to experience it? Or is there perhaps a more current and relevant way to experience Resurrection in the here and now? Well, I would say, *yes, there sure is*, and we all have had some experiences with this concept. If we hadn't, we'd not likely be attending church much longer, not that attending church is a prerequisite, because it isn't. But our liturgy has matured and evolved over time to encourage us to ask questions, to experience our doubt, moving toward a more real and practical faith. Old beliefs have died out over time because they did not sustain us through difficult life experiences. New beliefs and attitudes have formed, borne from our experiences, and our old unsatisfying faith has made way for something more real and life-affirming. We experience Resurrection all the time in our living if we are open to

receive it. It's the knowing and re-knowing that we are not alone in this world, that our lives have meaning which we'll find when we truly seek it. It's the acceptance of the fear and uncertainty that can arise when we're being called in a new direction. It's the acceptance of the chaos of living over stagnation. It's being OK to live with life's unanswered questions and to let others live with theirs. It's our becoming *less inhibited* and more open to *joy*. It's endless!

The Resurrection of Jesus is long behind us, but our own resurrections are always ahead of us. Jesus doesn't want to keep proving his own...he wants us to experience ours. The call of Resurrection for us in the here and now is to open up to it all, and to simply live it. And the more we allow ourselves to be open to *our* own Resurrection, the more we'll experience it in this life, and you'll always know it when it comes...no fooling!

**Brian Stocks. Westminster United Church. April 1, 2018.**