

He is risen? Who cares!

By [Steve Woolley](#)

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Interesting

conversation in our Tuesday morning lectionary group. It began with the usual quandary about how best to preach to those who come only once or twice a year. One of our group enthused about how when they hear that Jesus rose from the dead it will, or at least can, change their lives forever. He's seen it happen.

I doubt

it. Once upon a time, when I was a child in the 1950s, it could be assumed that most Americans were nominally Christian in the sense that they had been exposed to the basic words and images associated with Christianity that were a part of everyday life. It was also assumed that the large numbers of Sunday school graduates who failed to show up for church the Sunday after Confirmation would return again in a few years with their own children. That did not happen, at least not in huge numbers. In any case, the Easter sermon could assume a shared base of knowledge upon which a greater understanding could be built.

I suppose I could do a little research and tease out the numbers. I'll leave that up to you if you're interested. What you will probably find is that we have a couple of generations who know little of Christianity, other than the dribbles they get from the media, because they have never been part of a church community. Others may know slightly more but were so put off by childhood experiences that it all seemed pointless. Some of them will come to church on Easter, as they might on Christmas, not to touch something familiar from their youth, but as a kindness to a well meaning relative insisting on their presence, or, perhaps, as an interesting adventure not unlike attending an obscure off Broadway show just for the fun of it.

In

other words, we cannot assume anything about what they know or don't know about Christ. We can assume that they are well informed about Harry Potter. The astounding announcement that He is Risen! is just as likely to have no meaning whatsoever. Their lives seem to go on just fine without whatever it is that Christians say is essential to life. A couple of hours in church to satisfy grandma or enjoy the music is not a lot to ask or give, so why not, at least this year.

If we

are going to be serious about bearing the Good News of God in Christ, then, I think, we need to put ourselves into the shoes of Peter, Paul and others who took it into unfamiliar territory. Like Paul, we are addressing a bunch of Athenians who have hundreds of gods, none of which they take seriously, but of whom we are certain they are seeking something that can only be answered by Christ. Who is Christ? That may be one question in need of answer. More important is, Why should they care? What possible difference can it make? And there had better be a better answer than if you don't believe you'll burn in hell.

Crafting

a sermon to meet conditions such as these is difficult. If there is a really good one around, I haven't heard it. Fortunately for me, I don't have to do it. The little, rural congregation I will lead on Sunday may have as many as 25 in the pews, an amazing 78% increase over normal attendance (eat your heart out mega-church), but most will be life long Christians. We will celebrate the Resurrection with all the vigor we can muster. Our greater problem is how to equip these saints to go out into the community to address the Easter and Christmas crowd over the next 363 days. We Episcopalians seem to have a problem with that other E word.

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