

SO, THE bones of Jesus may have been found. A friend of mine joked that now we can find Jesus DNA and clone him. The world could do with a few more saviours just now.

I've long suspected that I've missed the point of Jesus' life, but it seems to me that the redemption, grace and hope he made real aren't at all dependent on the resurrection.

It's immediately obvious when one reads the Gospels. For example, one day Jesus came across a group of religious leaders who were about to stone a woman caught committing adultery. They couldn't see past her actions. Jesus couldn't see past her worth as a human being. Jesus thought every life was worth saving. He confronted the men and they backed down. This woman's salvation didn't depend on the resurrection.

There's another story about Zacchaeus, who had made his wealth by working corruptly in a despised job. He was ridiculed and hated. Jesus called Zacchaeus by name, and chose his company over that of others who would have been clamouring for it. This offer of friendship, without strings attached was enough to make Zacchaeus begin living differently. He didn't need a resurrection to have his life transformed.

Then there's the story of a woman who we know only by her sinful reputation. Seeing Jesus' exhaustion and stress, she washed his feet with ointment and her tears. The men around Jesus were harsh in their condemnation. They feared she might be diminishing their morality just through her presence. Jesus received her gift as pure love _ he knew she needed to give it as much as he needed to receive it. She didn't need a resurrection to encounter grace.

I recently spent a couple of hours at Port Phillip Prison listening to a group of men talking about their faith, trying to uncover together what it is that restores hope. The men were pretty sceptical about most of the "facts" of faith - the stuff people assume the Christian faith depends on. They didn't care about the virgin birth or resurrection. But when it came to Jesus' life the words tumbled out. He healed the lepers, he was friends with those who had no other friends. He noticed the people society ignored. He spoke of peace and justice. He saw the best in people. He loved. For these men in prison, and for many of us not in prison, thinking these things, daring to believe they might be true, having the courage to think that someone - that *God* - would think they were worth investing friendship in, that they were worth a second chance, takes much more faith than believing in a resurrection.

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