

“A Velveteen Jesus”

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Luke 24:36-48 = Jesus is really real!

How many have read bedtime stories to your children or grandchildren? What books do you like to read to them? *Good Night Moon*? We had a whole set of great books, including *The Hobbit* and *Lord of The Rings*.



But one of the most popular with my children was the beloved classic *The Velveteen Rabbit*. If you were lucky you had it read to you when you were young. Childhood is a magical time ~ a time when, as is said in the Gospels, *hearing is believing*.

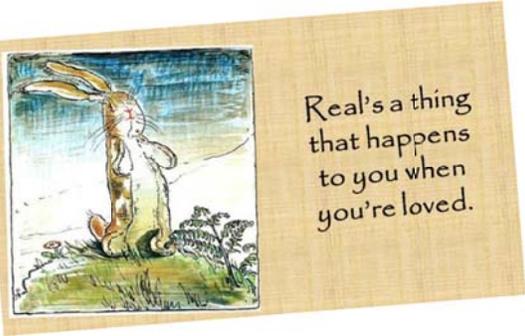
The story of the Velveteen Rabbit explores in a winsome and wonder-filled way one of the most important questions in life, for physicists, philosophers and faith-filled alike:

“What is real?”

You know the story ~ early on the skin horse, the oldest and wisest toy in the nursery, tells the rabbit:



What is Real - The Velveteen Rabbit Told by Meryl Streep Official Rabbit Ears Video.mp4



Real's a thing
that happens
to you when
you're loved.

“[Real]’s a thing that happens to you when a child loves you.”

Better than Kant, Hegel, Sartre, Nietzsche and Camus all rolled together, this children’s story gets to the heart of the matter ~ What is real? What is reality? This simple parable answers the fundamental question of life, the universe and everything:

“[Real]’s a thing that happens to you when you’re loved.”



You know the rest of the story, a resurrection story. The toy rabbit is about to be destroyed, contaminated while comforting the Boy through a serious illness. Yet because the Boy loved the toy so very much, so long, so hard that the rabbit is not destroyed but transformed ~ in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ~ into a living breathing rabbit.

What made him real? According to the story, a child's love. Left unnamed in the story, nevertheless the Boy believes the rabbit into existence, loves him into reality.

Scripture says simply yet so profoundly:
"He took some broiled fish and ate it."



That one act, that one gesture, a single line in Luke's Gospel has profound impact. It proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is really real, that Jesus was dead, but now lives ~ is walking and talking and eating. He is present among us.

Impossible! Nevertheless absolutely and impossibly true: more real than reality ~ more real than real. Jesus lives ~ forever.

What made Jesus real? God's love! Just as a child's love turned the Velveteen Rabbit into a real rabbit.

In contrast to Luke, in John's Gospel the scene outside the empty tomb is a kind of vivid dream.



Have you ever had such a vivid dream ~ one hard to distinguish from being awake? Susan describes one such dream. She is looking into a dim window of a house in search of her dearest friend Kimberley who has passed away. Suddenly and quite by surprise she sees Kimberley there, looking out and waving at her!

At first John's Gospel describes just such a lucid dreamscape where Jesus forbids Mary to touch him. Yet later in John's Gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples in a number of different places. Now just like in Luke, in John

Jesus shares bread and fish with the awestruck disciples. They think him a ghost, until they see him eat and drink.

In the original ending of the Gospel of Mark, the narrative ends at the empty tomb. There are no post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Jesus has gone ahead and will meet them ~ will meet us ~ in Galilee and beyond. In Mark's Gospel, our resurrected Christ exists in an alternate dimension somewhere outside time and space.



Yet all the Gospels' witnesses agree: Jesus is alive!! Jesus was dead, but now lives!! He will live forever and reign eternally.

Not merely a lucid dream ~ more than a metaphor ~ not just wishful thinking, but Jesus is real ~ really real ~ that is the point, the prime fact for all four Gospels.

The pastor was leading a congregation through a discernment and visioning process similar to ours. The pastor asked:

“Why do you come to this church?”



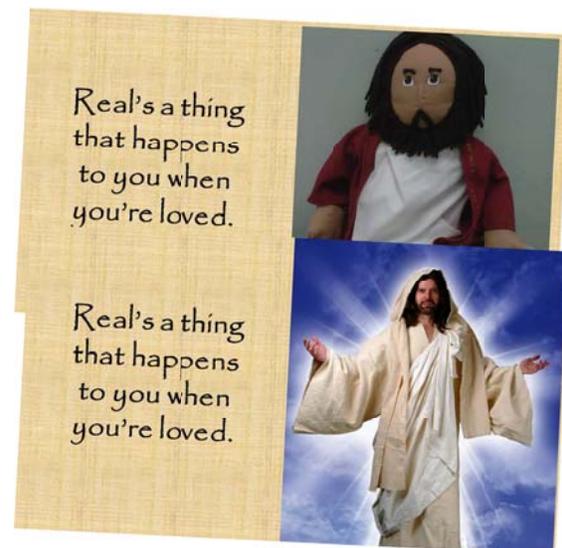
Some said that they enjoyed the fellowship. One said that she loved the music. [Someone else] mentioned the [worship].

Then a Mary said, ‘I keep coming back, have done so for twenty years, because, of all the places in my life, [this is the] place [where] I experience most vividly the presence of Christ. I

have hardly ever come here without feeling, at some point in the service, or in conversations before or after, that Jesus is here. That's why I want to be here.’”

That certainly is the best reason to be in church for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and all points in between. “Jesus is here.”

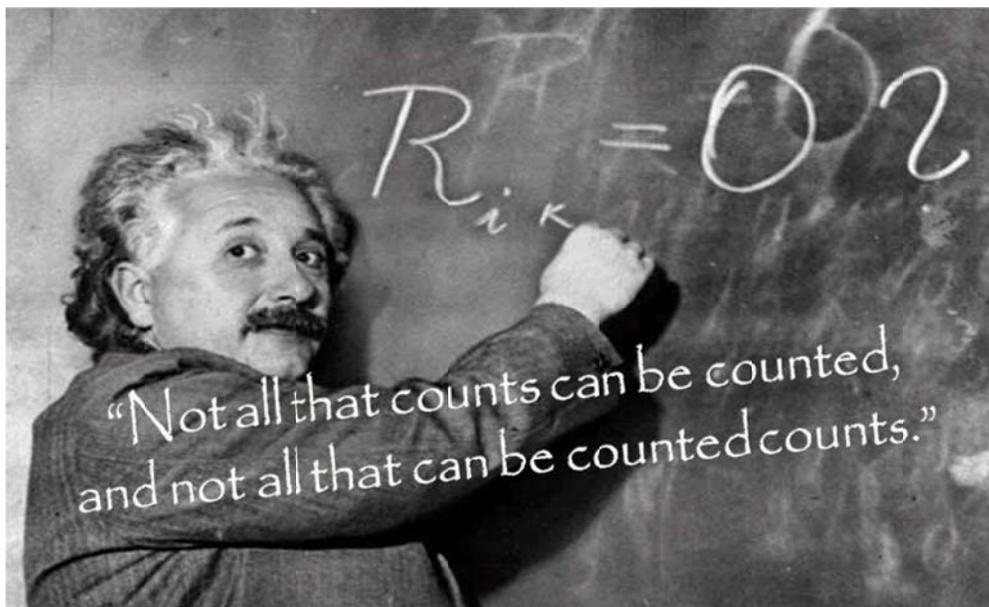
We believe Jesus into reality. Like the velveteen rabbit, who was loved into existence, our love for the risen Christ believes Jesus into reality.



There are truths which cannot be proven ~ truths which have to be taken on faith. We all live by them every day.

Consider these nice moveable chairs we enjoy every Sunday. Reach down and touch it. Bang on it if you like. Feel its strength. We cannot see the atoms and molecules which make up the wood. We can only imagine what the atoms must look like from diagrams in books. Yet we take it as an article of faith that the atoms of these chairs will hold our weight.

There are truths which transcend physical proof. There are truths which undergird and sustain observable truth. Many of those transcendent truths are spiritual. A very wise man, Albert Einstein, said:



Indeed, there are many spiritual realities more real than physical reality, not just lucid dreams, not merely wishful thinking, not some form of virtual reality. There are spiritual realities more real than reality ~ spiritual truths, God's truths, more profound than quantum physics ~ truths not limited to mere provable causation.

As profound as physical reality is, the truths of the Gospel transcend history and what we can see and touch and taste and analyze with electron microscopes or X-ray telescopes. They are more, much, much more.



Truths like:
~ experiencing vividly the presence of Christ in the routines of worship, community, meditation and service

- ~ of lives renewed and transformed, of lives lived in a direction away from God and then suddenly reversed
- ~ of new communities like the one Jesus founded living and loving the words of Jesus into reality
- ~ living hope against hope, loving deep beyond depth, believing faith beyond belief

The essential question of faith is the same as the essential question of life:

“What is really real?”

And back at the empty tomb, as Jesus’ message is just starting to circulate, here at the very beginning is the radically true claim ~ that Jesus is alive, raised from the dead.

Impossible according to physical laws, but true nevertheless ~ radically true. Despite all the doubts and claims and counter-claims, it is true. The one true thing which transcends everything ~ which makes everything different.

We no longer fear death. We no longer cower from evil itself. Our longing for release from ultimate fear has been answered.

Jesus has won the victory, has vanquished the greatest enemy:

“Where, O death, is your victory?”

“Where, O death, is your sting?”

More real than reality.



¹ *Preaching Resource* 4/30/2006, p. 28