

The Third Turn

Isaiah 65:17-24

John 20: 1-18

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Robert R. Howard

Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Tempe, AZ

See the woman scurry alone through the pre-dawn gloom toward the tomb. What does she think she is doing? I mean, really? He's *dead*. She *saw* him die with her own eyes. Furthermore, she saw them seal up that tomb with a huge boulder. No way she can open it. Besides, think about it – what business does a woman have out alone in the dark? Dangerous business. Even if all she wants to do is pay her respects to the dead, it's just not wise. And then, when she finally gets there, the boulder is off to the side! The entrance gapes wide open, like a missing tooth. What! So she races off to fetch the authorities. What's happened? Where is he? She runs for help.

Almost a century ago, a theologian named Karl Barth opined that on Easter morning, the bells ring, and folks stream in from all directions toward church with but one question on their lips: "Is it true?"(1) Did it really happen? Well, we 21st-century types are wised up. We know what the *real* question is. On Easter morning, folks might flip open their laptops, tappy-tap onto their phones, and watch a live-stream webcast from some church across the continent. But the question for *us* is this one: "So what?" Even if it did happen, even if Jesus did fly out of that tomb, so what? What difference does it make? On that early spring morning in year of our Lord 30, millions of souls woke up, began their work-week, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead just didn't make a real big impact on their day. Like the diary entry rumored of England's King George III on July 4, 1776: "Nothing of consequence happened this day." I mean, look, even the boys just returned home from the tomb. They'd checked her story out, and, yup, nobody home. So what? What difference does it make? Jesus may no longer be at this address, but wars still rage, tornadoes and earthquakes strike, children still go to bed hungry, women still end up in the emergency room with bruises they refuse to explain. Peter and that other disciple race each other to the tomb, inspect the premises like some weird CSI investigation, Teacher's-pet Beloved Disciple even *believes* – something or other – and then they just toddle off home. "Many before," says Auden, "Have wandered in, like her, then wandered out/ Unconscious of their visit *and unaltered*."(2) So what? What difference does resurrection make?

But there's Mary – remember Mary? – still standing by the mouth of the tomb, crying her eyes out, looking for somebody, anybody, who can help her find Jesus. Poor dear. She must have missed the memo. She turns to peer into the tomb, and sees what the guys evidently missed. Nothing much, just a couple of . . . angels. One sitting where the head lay, the other at the foot position. This time when angels speak, there is no "do not be afraid" pussyfooting around. They cut to the chase: "why are you weeping?" Well, duhh! No more Jesus, that's why! Not even a body. Gone! Vanished! Stolen! Whshhht. She turns away from the tomb and sees somebody. Maybe dawn is finally beginning to turn from dark to murky gray. She guesses that it must be the gardener, but no, no gardener this early, not today. No, a gardener he most certainly is *not*. Again, the question, "Why are you weeping?" – and then a bit more this time: "whom are you looking for?"

Again she pleads, “If you have taken him, tell me, and I’ll fetch him.” Persistent she is, persistent, the kind of friend you really want, never giving up searching for her Jesus. When, in point of fact, she is looking straight into his eyes. At last, he gives himself away, with but a single word: “Mary” is all he says. And she, too, responds with a single word, but crammed into her little word is an entire world of searing heartache, and an explosion of joy: “Rabbouni!” “My own precious, beloved Teacher!”

But wait — did you notice, did you catch it? Picture the scene, now: after the guys depart the scene, Mary *turns* and looks into the tomb. Then she *turns* and sees but does not see this gardener who is really Jesus. He speaks her name, and she *turns* and cries out to him. Whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Hold on here. Turn *one*, looking into the tomb. Turn *two*, turning away from the tomb and toward Jesus incognito. Turn *three* is toward . . . what? But look, there it is in black and white: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She *turned* and said to him....” *Just what was that third turn?* Here’s where things might start to get interesting. I’ll tell you what I think. I’m betting that Mary doesn’t turn *toward* anything at all. I’m betting that Mary turned *into* something. When she heard the voice of Jesus say her name, I’m betting that just at that precise moment, Mary the power-less woman, helplessly weeping at the mouth of that tomb, looking only for the dead; turned *into* Mary the power-*full* disciple of the *living* Jesus Christ. I’m thinking that this third turn was the whole point of God’s resurrection power. Not so much, “woo-hoo, we get to live forever and ever, Amen!” Not so much, “Jesus is alive, he’s alive, he is, he really really is, so there!” More like: some day, some time, when we least expect it, the voice of the living Christ might just speak *our* name. Not from the past, but right in front of us. And then we, too, will be changed. Some day, some time, when we least expect it, because, let’s face it, let’s be totally honest this Easter morning: most of us really *don’t* expect anything different tomorrow than we saw yesterday. Truth be told, we’re not really expecting to see Jesus, much less to hear him. I mean, look, Mary was looking straight at him, and did *not* recognize him. Maybe we share her myopia. Because, you see, if Jesus has indeed been raised to new life, he could be *anywhere*. Anywhere! But who of us really expects him? Who of us really looks? Who of us really expects that things can change? Really? We are Mary, all of us. We could be staring straight at him, and totally miss him. The authorities let us down, and we overlook the biggest “Where’s Waldo” in the universe. Until . . . until he calls us by name. Then we’ll see him, all right. Oh, yes. We’ll notice that he’s been with us all along. We won’t be able to *stop* seeing him. We will experience our personal “third turn.” Hearing Jesus speak our name will flat turn us around.

And then Jesus will tell us to get busy. “Don’t hold onto the way I used to be,” he said. “Don’t hold me down, I am *on my way*. I’ve just inaugurated the biggest invasion of love creation has ever seen!” Resurrection power has just kicked in. Heaven has just started invading this earth! And it’s never going to stop! God’s New Reality is on the move, friends. Christ enlisted Mary – and he is signing *us* up as well. “Go, tell!” he said to her. “Tell what you’ve seen; tell what you heard.” Tell everyone who says, “so what?” Sisters! I know a woman who once stood by a tomb weeping, but then rushed back to the guys to give them the early edition of the biggest news flash of all time. From power-less to power-*full*. Somebody called out her name. “I have seen the Lord! And God’s New Reality is on the move!” Brothers! I know some women (men, too) who *every morning*, 9-10, offer sack lunches to unsheltered friends. Every day! Food, clothing, shoes, hygiene supplies, even dog food. Over 5000 lunches last year – and during a pandemic! But, most importantly, they call

each one by name. Take the time to chat with them, getting to know them as *persons*. They did it earlier today. They will do it tomorrow. And the next day. Power-*full*. Somebody called them by name. And every bag they give cries out, “I have seen the Lord! God’s New Reality is on the move!” I know of a woman who led a day-long spiritual retreat for teens in a detention center outside of Pecos, Texas, who have made the long, dangerous trek away from violence back in their home countries, toward safety in the U.S. They’re battered not only by the trauma they fled, but by the guilt they feel for fleeing, sometimes without being able to say goodbye to beloved relatives who raised them — and for having ended up in a place far different from their dreams, with no clear path ahead. But by the end of the ten-hour day, says Lissa Jiménez, the psychologist who led the retreat, she saw them sit up straighter because she encouraged them to trust that they were beloved children of God — *that’s* who you are!(3) From power-less to power-*full*! Somebody called her name! And she is bringing resurrection to those who feel dead. Sisters! Brothers! Non-binary siblings! I know a woman . . . I know a man . . . I know one whose gender-identity escapes our cramped categories. God sent me here today to tell you. Yes, *you!* Doesn’t matter if you’ve been a Christian since the Wright brothers plane wobbled into the sky, or you just now wandered in off the street. I’m talking to *you* now. Jesus Christ is calling *your* name. And that changes *everything*. *That’s* what “resurrection” is all about. Change your outlook, and you can *change the world*. If all you see is an empty tomb, you’ll just head back home to the same old same old. But . . . hear a living voice calling your name, and everything changes! You’ll see a new reality. Gods’ New Reality. On the move. Appearing in *our* world, *this* very zip-code! Get ready, says Jesus. And then get busy!

You want to know what’s the “so what” about the resurrection of Jesus? Take a look at Mary. See Mary run. See Mary run, now *full* of power. Somebody called her by name. She made that third turn. Now she’s on a mission, and *nothing* can stop her. Resurrection power has caught her up. She’s seen the Lord. She’s going to change the world. And, friends, so can *we!* Amen!

Notes

(1) Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 110.

(2) W. H. Auden, “For the Time Being,” in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 358.

(3) “Prayer, worship lift unaccompanied migrant teens in shelters,” by Giovanna Dell’Orto, *APNews*, 4/16/22; accessed online on 4/16/22 at <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-texas-el-paso-religion-easter-baf01916a60393996b488fc74c8431c9>