

A Time When Everything Changes

John 20:1-18

Crossroads Christian Church

Colossians 3:1-4

April 20, 2014

Easter Sunday

There comes times in our lives when our whole way of experiencing reality changes. Our whole frame of reference shifts. Our lives are transformed forever.

Sometimes, these can be very scary moments, and feel a lot like death. A doctor shakes her head, and says "I'm afraid that it's bad news." The boss calls you into the office and nervously starts to talk about organizational restructuring, and you realize that you will be leaving to pack your things and go home for the last time. Brakes squeal, and metal collides with flesh. Your spouse says, "It just isn't working. I want a divorce."

Other times, equally momentous, are filled with joy and life and promise. You stand beside the person you will be spending the rest of your life with, and look into that face, and recite your wedding vows. The dean hands you a diploma. The tiny miracle of new life happens, and you hold a tiny baby in your arms. God's love comes pouring in on you at an unexpected moment, and you stand on the brink of spiritual transformation.

And sometimes, during those moments, whether good or bad, we go numb. We can't absorb it. We just want to say, "huh?" It may take hours, days, months, or years to fully understand what happened at that moment or life changed, if we ever fully understand it at all.

When we saw the Gospel lesson portrayed today, we looked over the shoulder of Mary, a woman of the village of Magdala, at just such a moment—a life-transforming moment when life and death, joy and sorrow, fear and promise, all came crashing in on her at once. Some say that Mary was a woman of a bad reputation, a woman of the streets, although

the scriptures never tell us that. Dan Brown says that she was Jesus' wife, but there is no scriptural evidence for that, either. What we do know about Mary is that Jesus had healed her from some demons that had tormented her, and that she had followed Jesus faithfully after that. We also know that she was one of several women of financial means who helped support Jesus and his followers. We know that she had been at the cross when the male disciples ran away. We know that even Jesus' humiliating death as a common criminal could not sway her allegiance. We know that Mary Magdala went to the grave, seeking to do what she could, seeking to honor the body of the one she had loved. She went in the dark, in the pre-dawn hour. This is significant in John's Gospel, because John often uses the light and the dark as images of good and evil, of hope and hopelessness. Remember how the very first part of John's gospel tells us that the light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it? Nowhere is that more true than this very moment at the tomb's entrance. Anyway, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb in the darkness, so she could not see clearly that the tomb was open, that the stone was rolled away, until she got to the scene. She may have been filled with anger and sorrow. Those who had desecrated Jesus' body on the cross must have come back to desecrate the tomb. She ran to tell Peter and John the distressing news. "The tomb is empty, and we don't know where they have taken him."

They followed her back, but soon passed her, running. It was a little brighter then, but they still entered the shadowy tomb, not knowing what to expect. What they didn't expect was to see grave cloths neatly folded, and no body there. They went away believing, but not sure what they were believing. They didn't really understand what this resurrection business was all about. It was an entirely new situation.

When they left, trying to sort things out, Mary stayed, outside the tomb, weeping. Then something made her look inside, where she saw two figures dressed in white.

“Woman, why are you crying?” they asked.

“They’ve taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they put him!” she cried out in despair and frustration. Then she turned around and saw another figure, outside the tomb. So she assumed he was the gardener and she pleaded with him.

And the stranger in the half-light of the garden said “Mary,” and she knew. Everything changed in that moment. He was alive. He had conquered death. And for her, life was again worth living. And not only for her, but for the disciples, and for you, and for me. Life- is- worth- living- again.

That was one of those times when everything changed—not just for an individual life, or a family, but for the world. God, through Jesus Christ, had taken a curse and made it a blessing. God, through Jesus Christ, had taken bitter hatred and conquered it with love. God, through Jesus Christ, had taken death and replaced it with life.

And there comes a moment in our lives when this all makes sense. There comes a moment when we affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, and is the Savior who gives us the promise of sins forgiven and life everlasting. Maybe it isn’t one defining moment, but a process, like Mary Magdalene experienced, where it doesn’t soak in right away, but finally we realize it. Christ is alive, and because he lives, we live.

A few minutes ago, we heard Colossians 3:1-4, where Paul doesn’t talk about us being raised with Christ after we die, but that we are already raised with Christ after our baptism. “You died and your life is hidden with God in Christ.” Because of that, Christ is revealed in our lives now, and we also will be revealed with him in glory. In other words, eternal life starts now. That’s why in Romans 8 he

says that “for I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Kirk Byron Jones is an American Baptist preacher, and a teacher of preaching, who says, “Resurrection incites laughing aloud because God and good are never dead and done. ... Jesus, who lived, died and lived, signal[s] to us that we can, in time, grab our joy back after it has been snatched by suffering. Though not an easy reaching, it is a necessary one if we are to journey on through our sweet-bitter-sweet world in sacrifice and delight.”¹

Because of what God did in Jesus Christ, we have hope. We are Easter people. We don’t deny the reality of death; we are mortal, we all will die. But we know that death isn’t the answer to life; rather, that life is the answer to death. Frederick Buechner wrote a novel called *Godric*, about an 11th century English monk and mystic. According to Buechner, Godric had a long and difficult life, with many tragedies, but when his own death approached, his last words were, “What's lost is nothing to what's found, and all the death that ever was, set next to life, would scarcely fill a cup.”²

There came a time when death doesn’t have the last word. There came a time when the world was never the same again. There came a time when resurrection hope entered into our lives. And because of that, we can live our lives knowing that God will give us new life through Jesus Christ. Christ is risen. Christ is risen, in truth. And we have been given the gift of new life. That’s the message of Easter. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

¹ Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching*, Abingdon, 2004, pp. 128, 129

² Frederick Buechner, *Godric*, Atheneum, 1980, p.178.