

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

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The final scene in the Jesus story is the resurrection. As we've seen, with many of the key scenes in the life of Jesus, each of the gospel writers has a different viewpoint, and that's true of the resurrection as well. I want to look at the resurrection as Mark depicts it.

THE MYSTERY OF THE RESURRECTION

The Gospel of Mark contains a very short description of the resurrection, one with a rather abrupt ending. Though the text does continue with stories about Jesus meeting with his disciples after he arises, this material—from Mark 16:9 onward—is considered a later addition intended to explain the original version of the resurrection as Mark depicted it. I believe this additional material lessens the impact, so I'm going to stick with the original version as Mark wrote it.

Jesus has been taken down from the cross and buried in a cave, and a large stone has been rolled in front of the cave so no one can enter. And then Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome show up. This is how Mark depicts this scene:

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place

where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. [Mark 16:1–8, ESV]

This is how the resurrection ends in Mark. It’s a very brief, very intense scene. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome return to the cave where Jesus was entombed. An immense stone had been rolled in front of the cave entrance, so they’re wondering how they will move the stone in order to anoint him with oils and spice. You can imagine their astonishment when they get to the tomb and discover that this great boulder has been rolled away from the mouth of the cave. Who did it? How had they done it? The stone was much too heavy for one person to move.

Their second surprise was to find this young man, clothed all in white, sitting quite peacefully, quite tranquilly inside the tomb. We don’t know who he is; Mark never says who he is. This same man—or perhaps angelic being—is found on the periphery of some earlier scenes in the story. In Mark’s description of Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, there is also a mention of this man clothed in white who runs away, but he isn’t identified. There’s much speculation among scholars about who he might have been, but I think it’s left ambiguous for a reason. This mystery adds to the dramatic flair of the story—and after all, this story is the unfolding of a spiritual mystery.

Now, these three women are deeply rooted in a compassionate, openhearted femininity. They’ve come as an act of love and devotion to anoint Jesus’ body with oil and spices. Even though he’s dead, they remain devoted; they haven’t abandoned him, as his disciples did. Entering the tomb, they meet this strange young man clothed in white, and he assures them that everything is perfectly fine. He tells them Jesus has risen and gone to Galilee, and he instructs them to tell his disciples.

You can imagine the shock they must have felt. First the giant boulder is moved, and then in the empty tomb—where they didn’t expect to find anything inside but the body of Jesus—they encounter this young man clothed in white, almost like an angel, sitting there beatific, calm, and unafraid. It’s a shocking moment, and these three women are astonished and afraid. They flee from the tomb, trembling with fear.

Jesus’ absence is miraculous, but it’s miraculous in a terrifying way; they don’t know exactly what has happened. The mysterious man alludes to the resurrection. He says that Jesus will meet the disciples in Galilee, and the other gospel writers

will take up this theme and add many stories about Jesus and the disciples after the resurrection. But in Mark we get the shortest, most intense version.

Of course, Mark always goes for the surprise; he turns corners in his storytelling that you don't expect, and this is the beauty of Mark. Mark doesn't always read eloquently; he's not a poet like the writer of John's gospel. He's more interested in exploring the unexpected shifts and turns of the story, and I think he does this because it opens the mind and heart to the mysteriousness of life. When we keep reading things that are unexpected and encountering scenes that sometimes end almost before they've begun, it leaves us in a mysterious state of *being*. And I think this state of openness is where the writer of the Gospel of Mark wanted to leave us. This is the state in which we can recognize the radiance, and when we're open and caught off guard by the winds of spirit, we can be transformed into its shining.

As the Bible says of spirit, it comes like a thief in the night, when you least expect it. Mark's gospel is literally constructed to put you in these moments of strange turns of scene that abruptly end without an ending. But if you really embody the story, if you really let yourself go into the story, then you too may come into that state of openness. You too may come into that place where time stops and the spinning world aligns with eternity. From that state you can open to your own presence of *being*, the divine *being* that we all are.

LIFE AFTER RESURRECTION

There are other reasons why the resurrection is such an interesting part of the Jesus story. While the theme of resurrection is an ancient one, Jesus' resurrection and what it means have no exact parallel in spiritual literature—especially in contrast to many forms of Eastern spirituality, where the whole idea is to awaken from the world of time and space, to get off the wheel of karma, to arrive at a state of spiritual enlightenment so you will no longer be reincarnated. The goal in these forms of spirituality is literally to leap off of the wheel of the dualistic world and transcend it, so you don't have to come back into form.

Jesus' story is just the opposite. Jesus descends directly from the Kingdom of Heaven; he descends from enlightenment into the human condition. This signifies a way that spirit, rather than trying to escape the dualistic world that we live in, is *giving* itself to the world. Spirit is relinquishing itself, out of love, back into the world, to bring forth the light of radiance into the world and reveal that nothing is separated from divinity; nothing is actually other than the divine itself.

We find the same emphasis on embodied spirit at the very end of the Jesus story. Jesus' life ends on the cross; that death is the great release, the great transcendence

of time and space. But of course, his life doesn't really end with the crucifixion; it culminates in the resurrection, as once again Jesus comes back to the world of time and space. In the journey of awakening, when self has been annihilated and dropped away, we experience a kind of resurrection. We realize a new orientation. In other words, we are no longer the center of our individual lives, and life is no longer about satisfying oneself, not even in order to arrive at some spiritual state of development.

I'm not saying that there is no more spiritual development beyond, but that the self-oriented life is over. That is what has died. The resurrection depicts what comes after that—after the destiny of one's personal story is lived out, yet there's still a life to live. This is where the resurrection provides a mirror that something does come back; something survives the death of self. Now, in the Gospel of Mark it isn't made clear exactly what survives, what actually resurrects. Individually, what comes back to life out of the ashes of the death of self is something that's really quite simple, but quite poignant. From that place, the only thing left to do is to be a benevolent presence in the world. I don't say this because one wants to do it or tries to do it. All attempts to be spiritual or pure or compassionate or loving, all of that striving is just what the ego or self tries to do or to be. But when all that falls away, there's literally nothing left to do; there's no life orientation that makes sense other than to be a selfless and benevolent presence. This may happen on a big stage, but it may just mean being a benevolent grandmother or a mother or daughter or son or business owner. It doesn't have to look any particular way, and in fact the resurrected state can actually look quite normal.

Of course, when we look at the life of Jesus, we get the impression that the spiritually awakened state always looks impressive and charismatic, but that's just what makes good storytelling. The resurrection within oneself is something far quieter. When self is annihilated, there is often a temporary sense of living in ashes, living among the dead. The new orientation isn't immediately or intuitively recognized. In the same way, when you were a baby, you had an innate capacity to walk and later to run but didn't yet have the capability developed. You didn't really know how to do it; you had to stand up on your feet and take a step and fall down and get up and take another step. Even though you were born with innate capacities—to walk, to run, to use language—each capacity doesn't immediately come online. We have to orient ourselves around them and develop into them. Our capacities are there in potential but take a little while to come into bloom.

Part of the resurrection occurs when what is left in the wake of the crucifixion opens its eyes and discovers that everything it ever thought itself to be—not only ego, but all the spiritual experiences and definitions—is dead. It's not immediately

clear what life is going to look like. One's whole sense of passion and of drive belongs to the self, to the ego, even when it's very positive or for the benefit of all beings. It's very hard to convey what moves you when all of that is gone. It comes from a place that is very, very simple. In the Zen tradition, they say, when you're hungry you eat, and when you're tired you sleep. That doesn't sound very exciting, but it's pointing to the simplicity of a life no longer driven by the inner forces of desire and aversion—by wanting to accomplish, or to escape, or even to convey something.

What remains is a great heartfulness, a great sense of compassion for the world. Even though the word *resurrection* implies a rising, it's not as if we rise above everything and everyone. Resurrection is the rising from the death of self, but there's no hierarchy in it. There's no sense of being better than, or nobler than, or more elevated than anyone else—all of that belongs to ego and self. There's just a simple, profound intimacy with all things, and with all beings, and with that which transcends all things and all beings. Life is experienced in all of its original completeness and unity.

That intimacy *is* the resurrected state. We see that all that we perceive is actually our own *being*. I recall one Zen master saying, "My true personality includes the entire universe." That's a big statement, and if that were said from the ego, it would point to a frightening self-inflation. What this saying really conveys is an intimate way of experiencing each moment in all of its completeness and divinity.

When Jesus appears, he's not immediately recognized; people don't really know or trust who he really is—including some of the disciples. All this is just part of the storytelling, an attempt to convey what it is to live from a state of *being* that's not of the world of time and space. As Jesus said, "I'm in the world, but not *of* it." I think this is the best possible description of the resurrection: to have an absolute intimacy with the world of time and space and things and people and events—but not be *of* the world. You are *of* the world of eternity, the Kingdom of Heaven.