

Response to the Resurrection

Easter Weekend, April 16 & 17, 2022 | John 20:1-18

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WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Unexpected twists leave us with that question all the time.

When life is going along fine or at least as expected, we know what to do and how to respond.

Then something comes along that upsets our expectations and plans.

At that point, the question becomes, "What are we going to do?"

Spencer Silver ran into an unexpected twist in 1968 when he was developing a new adhesive.

Silver and a team of five researchers needed to create an adhesive strong enough to be used in the aerospace industry. Plus, it had to be activated by pressure. When two things were pressed together with the adhesive in between, they needed to stick.

This led to some interesting chemistry which ended up producing microspheres.

These microspheres were very sticky, but they also peeled away easily.

It was a dead end. Silver and his team needed an adhesive strong enough to stick and keep aircraft components together. Their attempt failed. What would he do?¹

Jesus' crucifixion presented his followers with a dramatic, unexpected twist.

They had been following Jesus, learning from him, and expecting that his ministry would start something fundamentally new in the world, perhaps a Kingdom of God on earth.

Then Jesus was arrested, condemned, and quickly crucified. That was an unexpected twist.

On Good Friday, most of Jesus' followers fled. Then as Friday turned into Saturday, they mourned and asked the question, "What are we going to do?"

As we gather this weekend, we too are confronted with an unexpected twist. Jesus (God in the flesh) died to pay the price for our sin. Then three days later, he rose again from the dead just as he had promised and as the prophets had foretold. People don't usually claim to be God in the flesh, nor do they rise from the dead. It's an unexpected twist, so we face that question, "What are we going to do?"

Today we're going to look at how Jesus' followers answered that question.

As we do, we will gain insight into how we can answer that question ourselves.

PETER LEFT THE EMPTY TOMB UNCERTAIN WHAT TO THINK OR DO

Peter heard about the empty tomb from Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning, around dawn. It was still dark.

Before dawn, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. An angel came down from heaven, caused the ground to shake, and rolled the stone away that covered Jesus' grave.

¹ <https://www.thechemicalengineer.com/features/cewctw-spencer-silver-and-arthur-fry-in-search-of-an-application/>

So, when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb, she found it open. Mary assumed that someone had broken into Jesus' tomb and taken his body.

She returned to where the disciples were staying and told Peter and John what she had found.

Peter ran to the empty tomb after Mary had told him about it.

Peter, always a man of action, went straight into the tomb.

He found Jesus' burial clothes on the bench inside the tomb where he expected to find Jesus' body. The burial clothes looked like the body inside them had just disappeared. However, the cloth which would have covered Jesus' head was neatly folded and placed to the side.

Peter left the empty tomb uncertain what to think or do.

He (like the other disciples) probably assumed that Jesus' grave had been robbed.

He likely went back to the house where he and some other disciples were staying to mourn some more and continue rethinking his future.

Uncertain what to think or do, Peter went back to what he had been doing.

JOHN LEFT THE EMPTY TOMB UNCERTAIN WHAT TO DO

John was faster than Peter.

I'm assuming that John, the son of Zebedee, is the beloved disciple mentioned and anonymously repeatedly in the Gospel according to John. That's the conclusion that makes the most sense.

After Mary Magdalene told John and Peter that Jesus' tomb was empty, John left immediately with Peter to look for themselves. They started running.

John mentions that he ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first.

It wasn't a competition, of course. But if it were, then John reminds us that he won.

John held back at the tomb and didn't go inside.

Instead, John stood at the entrance and looked in. He saw the burial clothes abandoned.

Peter plunged into the tomb to investigate as soon as he arrived. Eventually, John followed.

John believed. He believed that Jesus was somehow risen from the dead. He didn't understand why it had happened or that it was all in fulfillment of prophecy. Nor did he know what it all meant. He just believed that Jesus was risen from the dead.

John left the empty tomb believing something but uncertain what to do.

His heart was lighter, and he was vaguely hopeful.

However, like Peter, he seems to have gone back to the place where the disciples were staying to process what he had seen. John left the empty tomb uncertain what to do.

MARY MAGDALENE LEFT CERTAIN ABOUT WHAT TO THINK AND DO

Mary Magdalene stayed behind when Peter and John left.

She stood at the entrance to the tomb crying. She was still grieving Jesus' loss and the way her world and the future seemed to change when Jesus died. She was convinced that someone had opened Jesus' grave and had stolen his body, so now she was grieving that loss as well.

As she wept, she finally decided to look into the tomb. She saw two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. They challenged her for mourning. Why was she mourning? She told them that someone had stolen Jesus' body.

That's when she sensed that someone was standing behind her. Startled, she turned around.

Mary had an encounter with the Risen Christ.

She didn't recognize him at first.

He asked her why she was weeping and whom she was looking for.

Mary assumed Jesus was the gardener and asked him if he had moved Jesus' body.

That's when Jesus called her by name, "Mary." Immediately, she recognized that voice.

She called him "Teacher!" and seems to have fallen down before him, clinging to him.

Jesus told her not to cling to him then. They both had work to do.

Mary left the empty tomb clear about what to think and do.

Mary had seen and experienced the Risen Lord!

She knew that the world had changed again! The Lord was back, the Kingdom of God was back, and the future was back. She knew instinctively what to think.

Just as importantly, she knew what to do. She went straight back to the other disciples and told them that Jesus was risen from the dead. She had good news to announce.

Mary left the empty tomb clear about what to think and do.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Spencer Silver's response to his unexpected twist reminds us that what we do matters.

Silver was convinced that his adhesive had a use.

He ran seminars at his company, introducing product designers to this adhesive.

The adhesive caught the eye of Arthur Fry whose product line included Scotch Tape.

Fry thought and thought about what he could do with the adhesive.

A thought came to him during choir practice at his church. During choir practice, Fry put bookmarks in the music. But the bookmarks would fall out, and he would lose his place.

The next day, Fry tried Silver's adhesive. It took a little tweaking, but he was able to create pieces of paper that would stick to other pieces of paper and then peel off again.

Eventually, Post-It Notes were born. What we do with unexpected twists matters.

We have three very different responses to the unexpected twist of the empty tomb.

Peter couldn't put the pieces together. He saw the tomb and that it was empty. Jesus was gone. He simply didn't know why or what it meant. Peter left Jesus' empty tomb not sure what to think or do.

John came away from the empty tomb believing. Believing something. Believing in Jesus. Believing that Jesus was risen from the dead. Still, he didn't know why or what it all meant. He was uncertain what to do.

Mary Magdalene left the empty tomb with the Risen Christ in her heart. She understood that what happened had changed the past, present, and future. She believed and walked away with a mission. She walked away certain about what to think and do!

Like them, we are all deciding what to do with the resurrection today.

We are confronted today with the news that Jesus' tomb was empty. Absolutely nobody denies that fact. The tomb was empty. We have to deal with that fact.

We are confronted today with the proclamation of the Good News that Jesus is risen from the dead and is Lord. The Bible is proclaiming it. We are proclaiming it in song. I am proclaiming it to you now. Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, died on a cross to pay the price for our sin. Three days later, God the Father raised him from the dead. He is alive now and Lord. Someday, he is returning to judge the world. We are proclaiming that Good News today.

We are all deciding what to do with the resurrection today.

What are we going to do?

Some of us will respond like Peter. Like Peter, we have questions we can't answer. But we will dismiss those questions we can't answer because we don't like questions we can't answer. Like Peter, we don't know what to think.

Some of us will respond like John. If people ask us if we're Christians or if we believe in Jesus, we check the box for "yes" instead of "no." But we don't know what to do with that belief. We don't want it to change anything. Not yet. Like John, we don't know what to do.

Then there are those of us who will respond like Mary Magdalene. We believe and have experienced the presence of the Risen Lord. He has changed our lives. He has forgiven us for our past, he is Lord of our present, and he gives us hope for the future. We are ready to live for him. Like Mary Magdalene, we know what we think and what we are to do.

We will probably react like Peter, John, or Mary Magdalene in John chapter 20.

What are you going to do?

Say "yes" to believing in Jesus. Peter did. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly when, but before the evening of Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared personally to Peter. Jesus would not let Peter leave not knowing what to believe. He really is alive. Even someone who was initially skeptical came to realize that Jesus was risen and Lord. Say "yes" to believing in Jesus.

Say "yes" to living for Jesus. John did. John quickly learned what Jesus' resurrection was all about. Through the Holy Spirit he remembered what Jesus taught about his life, death, and resurrection. John wrote it down in the Gospel that bears his name. He went on to spread the Good News and serve the Church, probably until the day he died. Say "yes" to living for Jesus.

Say "yes" today. Mary Magdalene did. Mary quickly saw her risen Lord. She recognized him as the one who forgave her of her past, ruled as Lord of her life, and gave her hope in a glorious future. She said "yes" immediately. Say "yes" today.

CHRIST IS RISEN! What are you going to do?