

***Meditation for Easter***  
**John 20:11-18**  
**Sermon by Dan Schrock**  
**April 5, 2015**

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (NRSV)

There's a detail about this story that always intrigues me. It's this: Mary doesn't recognize Jesus the first time she sees him. This is interesting because she had spent lots of time with him during his ministry. She knew the way his eyes twinkled when he told stories. She was familiar with the way his hands danced when he talked. She could pick him out in a crowd by the timbre of his voice and the particular way he walked. She and he were friends who had spent lots of time in each other's company, and as friends they knew each other well.

But here, after the resurrection, she does not recognize him. She supposes he's a gardener, there to pull up the weeds and prune the bushes and pick the olives off the olive trees. It's as if she has never seen him before, as if he were a perfect stranger to her. How could she not know him? How could this be?

The best answer anyone can come up with is that the resurrected Jesus doesn't look like he did before. His appearance changed, though we don't know exactly how. Does he have straight black hair now instead of curly brown hair? Has the color of his eyes changed? Is his nose now curved instead of straight? Is his jaw squared off rather than rounded like it used to be? Is he taller than he used to be, or shorter? Or maybe he looks like he's 20 years old instead of 33 years old. We don't know any of these details, but

we do know he looked different enough that his closest friends couldn't immediately recognize him.

So far, Jesus is the only person in history who has been resurrected from the dead. Others have been resuscitated from the dead, like Lazarus in John 11. But resurrection and resuscitation are different things. Resuscitation is merely coming back to life with the same body. Nothing new has been created—you're just the same as you were before you died. By contrast, resurrection is a new creation. In resurrection God recreates you to be significantly different than you were before. You are still you in the sense there is some continuity between who were and who you still are. At the same time you are a new body that looks different than your first body. Some things are the same; some are different.

We know this because of what happened to Jesus. He is the model, the prototype, the first example, of what resurrection will be like for us. From the death and resurrection of Jesus we can infer at least three things.

1. Because every part of the historical Jesus died and stayed dead during those three days, we can expect that every part of us will die too.
2. In resurrection, God recreates us as new bodies. Our body, mind, spirit, and soul are newly crafted by God. This is tremendously good news for us who die with bodies consumed by cancer, or minds addled with dementia, or spirits wounded by trauma. God recreates us.
3. Our appearance, and perhaps also our nature and substance, will change.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talks about all this with the members of the Corinthian church. It seems that the Christians in Corinth have no problem at all with Jesus' resurrection. They accept the resurrection of Christ as a fact and are ready to run with it. However, they have a problem with their own bodily resurrections. At least some of the Christians in Corinth were sophisticated, well-educated people, and it horrified them to think of dead and decaying corpses rising up from their graves and being reanimated with new life. Greek philosophy had taught them that human souls were immortal—that when

people died, their souls sprang free from their bodies and escaped forever into the heavens.<sup>1</sup>

Paul had a different view. Paul understood Greek philosophy because he too had been exposed to it. But when it came to the resurrection he did not agree with Greek philosophy. For Paul, the bodily resurrection was a cornerstone of Christian faith that had enormous implications for individual Christian believers. To word it simply, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that since Christ was raised from his grave and given a new body, we will also be raised from our graves and given new bodies.

In verses 35-49, Paul tries to explain what kind of resurrected bodies Christians will have. One image he uses is the difference between physical bodies and spiritual bodies. Our first body—the one we were when we came from our mother’s womb—is a physical body. But our second body—the one we become when God raises us from the grave and recreates us—will be a spiritual body. The physical body is perishable, meaning it can die, while the spiritual body will be imperishable, meaning it cannot die. The first body is made from dust, while the second body is made from heaven.

Paul also uses another image. He says it’s like the difference between a seed and a fully-grown plant. The body we have now is similar to a seed, such as a seed of wheat. When you plant that seed in the ground, it dies, just as a human person dies and is buried in a grave. And then God works a new creation. The seed becomes a stalk of wheat. So the seed we are now will likewise “grow” into a new but different body.

These metaphors paint in broad strokes what the resurrection body is like, without giving us all the details. With these metaphors, Paul makes the same point as the writers of the gospels: our second, resurrected body has both continuity and discontinuity with our first body. In some ways our two bodies will be similar while in other ways they will be different.

You might be wondering when all this will happen. When will you and I and all the people we care about be resurrected from death? In 1 Corinthians 15:23-26, Paul outlines

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 253.

the sequence of events marking the end of ordinary human history as we know it. In order, the five events are:

1. Christ's resurrection—this one has of course already happened.
2. Christ's second coming, which will happen at some point in the future.
3. We will then be resurrected.
4. After our resurrection, Christ will destroy every ruler, authority, and power, including death. Death itself dies and will cease to exist.
5. Finally, Christ hands the kingdom over to God.

For Paul these five events signify the end of ordinary human history and the beginning of God's reign. Notice again that one of them has already happened, the resurrection of Christ himself, while the other four have not yet happened. This means we live in an in-between time. The final rule of God began in the resurrection of Christ, but it's not fully here yet since the other four events, including our own resurrections, are still sometime in the future. I said we live in an in-between time, though we could also think of it as an overlapping time. The old age and the new age overlap now; the old one is still hanging on while the new one has not yet completely arrived.

It's worth emphasizing one detail in all this which I learned from Grady Snyder, a New Testament scholar from the Church of the Brethren. Like Mennonites, Brethren come from the Anabaptist tradition which emphasizes the communal nature of Christianity. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Grady points out that Paul thinks our resurrections at the end of human history will be a communal event.<sup>2</sup> That is, we will not be raised from our graves one by one, in a sequence, with some of us on Monday and some on Wednesday and others on Saturday. No, we will all be raised together in a group, at once, as a community. In a grand and mighty act of re-creation, God will give all of us new bodies at once.

Imagine it. On that day you will be raised from death, along with your best friends and your parents and grandparents and great-grandparents; along with Michael and Margaretha Sattler, Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel; along with your first grade Sunday

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<sup>2</sup> Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 196.

school teacher and your high school youth sponsors; along with Paul himself, plus Aquila and Priscilla, Mary and Martha, Peter and Andrew, James and John. All of us will be remade and reunited into God's magnificent future. We may not all immediately recognize each other, but we will all know each other as saints and members of the household of God.

Thanks be to God.