

“The Butterfly: God in Christ Through You”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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John 20:11-18; Luke 24:1-12; Luke 24:13-34; Luke 24:35-53  
“...[*Mary Magdalene*] turned round and saw Jesus standing,  
but she did not know that it was Jesus.

John 20:14

Let us pray... O God,  
Help us to recognize you –  
not just in the ways we would like you to be, but in the ways that you are;  
and may we be transformed and accepted in the same way –  
not limited to what others expect, but unfolding into the best we can be  
for each others' sake.

Amen

Why didn't Mary Magdalene recognize Jesus standing there?  
Later that same day, why didn't the two disciples on their way to Emmaus,  
recognize him either?  
As it says in the Gospel of Luke: *While they were talking and discussing together,  
Jesus himself drew near and went with them.  
But their eyes were kept from recognizing him...*

In the Gospel of John,  
the disciples had gone fishing in Galilee after Jesus' death and caught nothing;  
The next morning, Jesus was on the shore, calling to them  
and they didn't know that it was him either – until he did something.

When he spoke Mary Magdalene's name, she instantly knew it was him.  
When he broke bread with the two disciples at Emmaus, they knew.  
When he told the disciples at Galilee where the fish were  
and they brought in a huge catch, they knew.  
But at first, they didn't recognize him, and somehow this was a characteristic  
of his Resurrection appearances.  
Perhaps this was because he was changed somehow –  
Jesus hadn't quite 'ascended into Heaven', as he told Mary Magdalene  
when she tried to touch him.

In his book, *Zorba the Greek*, Nikos Kazantzakis describes finding a butterfly  
just as it was beginning to emerge from its cocoon.  
The narrator held the cocoon in his hand, breathed on it to warm it, to hurry it –  
but this was too fast, and the butterfly could not properly open its wings  
and it died.  
I don't think Jesus was at risk by being touched,  
but perhaps he was not fully transformed.

Willard, p.2

I once told this story at my home church in Plainfield, NJ,  
such that Jesus prevented Magdalene from touching him  
because he was still in some transformative stage.  
Afterwards my mother said to me that she was troubled by this –  
saying Jesus would never turn anyone away, refusing to give them a hug.  
It made me think.

At the time I was working at Greystone Park State Psychiatric Hospital  
in upstate NJ.

There was a woman patient on one of the wards,  
who would come up to me every now and then and open her arms  
for me to give her a hug.

She was always saying and doing things that were inappropriate,  
so, I was very wary of her, limiting my contact to just  
offering a handshake or a “fist-bump”.

I would do this and she would give me a wild-eyed stare  
and whisper a nasty expletive!

My mother’s reminder about Jesus’ openness and willingness  
to accept people who came to him as is, was on my mind  
when this woman came up to me again  
after a game of Bingo on the ward.

She had her arms outstretched and this time I hugged her,  
and she became so quiet and peaceful...

Then she stepped back, gave me a wild-eyed look and whispered,  
the usual, nasty expletive!

I am inclined to believe that Jesus was telling Mary Magdalene  
not to hold onto him – not to hold him back,  
that she was literally clinging to him, and he was gently telling her  
he had to leave and she needed to let him go on to Heaven.

Still I think there is something to this notion that  
he was in the process of being physically transformed.

What makes me think this is that angels in the tomb wore garments  
that were of a dazzling bright light.

This was how Jesus was described at the Transfiguration –  
which took place before he decided to go to Jerusalem.

His appearance had changed such that his garments had become  
whiter than any earthly bleaching could make them –  
yet the disciples still recognized him!

Willard, p.3

What this suggests to me – what I think it means, is that it was not because Jesus had become something new that the disciples didn't recognize him right after the Resurrection, but that he was still becoming who he really was as a Heavenly being – the HUMAN One in whose image we were also created.

Like caterpillars emerging to become butterflies,  
Mary Magdalene and the other disciples themselves were not quite ready to see Jesus in his transfigured form of glory.  
They had to be eased into it with patience on Jesus' part and a little humor, too.

We are creatures of light in the form of God we know of as Christ;  
and for us, as people of Christ, Easter is a day for believing the impossible such that death is not the end, that God knows and loves each one of us – all people who have ever been, and that we can become like him, just like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.  
May we recognize God at work in Christ –  
not just in the ways we would like God to be, but in the ways that Christ is;  
and may we be transformed and accepted in the same way –  
not limited to what others expect, but unfolding into the best we can be for each others' sake.

Amen

From Zorba The Greek, by Nikos Kazantzakis

*I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the back of a tree just as a butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited awhile, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened; the butterfly started slowly crawling out, and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath, in vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand. That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm.*

<http://earthrenewal.org/bfly.htm>

Inspired by John 20:11-18

LATER, MARY WAS STANDING OUTSIDE,  
IN FRONT OF THE TOMB, CRYING,  
STILL WEeping, SHE KNELT DOWN BY THE GRAVESIDE...  
AND SAW TWO ANGELIC BEINGS, CLOAKED IN RADIANCE,  
SEATED AT THE HEAD AND FOOT OF WHERE  
JESUS' BODY HAD BEEN!  
AND THEY SAID TO HER,  
"YOUNG WOMAN, YOUNG WOMAN,  
WHY ARE YOU CRYING, WHY ARE YOU CRYING?"  
SHE SAID TO THEM,  
"BECAUSE MY LORD HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY  
AND I DO NOT KNOW WHERE HE HAS BEEN HIDDEN!"

SOMEONE WAS SPEAKING BEHIND HER;  
SHE TURNED AND LOOKED.  
IT WAS JESUS STANDING THERE,  
BUT SHE DID NOT RECOGNIZE THAT IT WAS JESUS.  
JESUS SAID TO HER,  
"YOUNG WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU CRYING? WHOM DO YOU SEEK?"  
SUPPOSING THAT HE WAS THE GROUNDSKEEPER, SHE SAID TO HIM,  
"SIR, IF YOU HAVE TAKEN HIM, TELL ME WHERE  
YOU BURIED HIM AND I WILL CARE FOR HIM!"  
HE SAID TO HER,  
"OH, MARY!"  
SHE WHIRLED AROUND AND SAID TO HIM, 103  
"RABBOUNI!" – WHICH IN ARAMAIC MEANS,  
"MY DEAR RABBI!"

JESUS SAID TO HER,  
"OY! DON'T HOLD ME SO TIGHT!  
I STILL MUST GO UP TO HEAVEN!  
YOU HAD BETTER GO –  
AND TELL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
THAT I AM GOING UP  
TO MY ABBA, MY FATHER, MY HEAVENLY GUARDIAN  
AND YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN,  
TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD!"

MARY MAGDALENE WENT FORTH FROM THERE  
TO PROCLAIM THIS TO THE APOSTLES:  
"I FOUND THE LORD AND HE SPOKE WITH ME!"  
[AND GOD IS STILL SPEAKING]

## Luke 24

<sup>24:1</sup> Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb,  
carrying the spices that they had prepared.

<sup>2</sup> When they found the stone rolled away from the entrance,  
<sup>3</sup> they went in. But they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus,  
<sup>4</sup> and they did not know what to think.

Suddenly two men in shining white clothes stood beside them.

<sup>5</sup> The women were afraid and bowed to the ground. But the men said,  
“Why are you looking in the place of the dead  
for someone who is alive?

<sup>6</sup> Jesus isn't here! He has been raised from death.

Remember that while he was still in Galilee, he told you,

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners  
who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will rise to life.’

“<sup>8</sup> Then they remembered what Jesus had said.

<sup>9-10</sup> Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,  
and some other women were the ones who had gone to the tomb.

When they returned, they told the eleven apostles and the others  
what had happened.

<sup>11</sup> The apostles thought it was all nonsense, and they would not believe.

<sup>12</sup> But Peter ran to the tomb. And when he stooped down and looked in,  
he saw only the burial clothes.

Then he returned, wondering what had happened.

<sup>13</sup> That same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to the village of Emmaus,  
which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> As they were talking and thinking about what had happened,  
<sup>15</sup> Jesus came near and started walking along beside them.

<sup>16</sup> But they did not know who he was.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus asked them,

“What were you talking about as you walked along?”

The two of them stood there looking sad and gloomy.

<sup>18</sup> Then the one named Cleopas asked Jesus,

“Are you the only person from Jerusalem  
who didn't know what was happening there these last few days?”

<sup>19</sup> “What do you mean?” Jesus asked.

They answered:

Those things that happened to Jesus from Nazareth.

By what he did and said he showed that he was a powerful prophet,  
who pleased God and all the people.

<sup>20</sup> Then the chief priests and our leaders had him arrested  
and sentenced to die on a cross.

<sup>21</sup> We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free!

But it has already been three days since all this happened.

<sup>22</sup> Some women in our group surprised us.

They had gone to the tomb early in the morning,

<sup>23</sup> but did not find the body of Jesus.

They came back, saying that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive.

<sup>24</sup> Some men from our group went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said.

But they didn't see Jesus either.

<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus asked the two disciples,

“Why can't you understand?

How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said?

<sup>26</sup> Didn't you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets.

<sup>28</sup> When the two of them came near the village where they were going, Jesus seemed to be going farther.

<sup>29</sup> They begged him,

“Stay with us! It's already late, and the sun is going down.”

So Jesus went into the house to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup> After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread.

He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them.

<sup>31</sup> At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared.

<sup>32</sup> They said to each other,

“When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us, didn't it warm our hearts?”

<sup>33</sup> So they got right up and returned to Jerusalem.

The two disciples found the eleven apostles and the others gathered together.

<sup>34</sup> And they learned from the group that the Lord was really alive and had appeared to Peter.

<sup>35</sup> Then the disciples from Emmaus told what happened on the road and how they knew he was the Lord when he broke the bread.

<sup>36</sup> While Jesus' disciples were talking about what had happened, Jesus appeared and greeted them.

<sup>37</sup> They were frightened and terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

<sup>38</sup> But Jesus said,

“Why are you so frightened? Why do you doubt?

<sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet and see who I am!

Touch me and find out for yourselves.

Ghosts don't have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

<sup>40</sup> After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

<sup>41</sup> The disciples were so glad and amazed that they could not believe it. Jesus then asked them,

“Do you have something to eat?”

<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of baked fish.

<sup>43</sup> He took it and ate it as they watched.

<sup>44</sup> Jesus said to them,

“While I was still with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms<sup>[a]</sup> had to happen.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he helped them understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them:

The Scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer, then three days later he will rise from death.

<sup>47</sup> They also say that all people of every nation must be told in my name to turn to God, in order to be forgiven.

So beginning in Jerusalem, <sup>48</sup> you must tell everything that has happened.

<sup>49</sup> I will send you the one my Father has promised, but you must stay in the city until you are given power from heaven.

<sup>50</sup> Jesus led his disciples out to Bethany, where he raised his hands and blessed them.

<sup>51</sup> As he was doing this, he left and was taken up to heaven.

<sup>52</sup> After his disciples had worshiped him,<sup>[a]</sup> they returned to Jerusalem and were very happy. <sup>53</sup> They spent their time in the temple, praising God.