

“Christ’s Resume”

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Lawrence Park Community Church
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John 20:1–18

Most of us have prepared a resume at one time or another. When you have a job for a long time it can gather dust in the drawer or get lost in the files on your computer. But, when it is time to get a new job or join a new organization, sometimes you need to bring it out and show someone who you are. Resumes tend to show our best face. We list the positions we have held, the awards or successes we have achieved, and maybe at the end, we list some of our hobbies so we don’t seem like a workaholic. Finally, we may say that references are available upon request.

There are very few people who list their failures on a resume. If we want to get a job or to impress people, we gloss over the failures, and just stick with our greatest hits. When people lie on resumes, they list fake accomplishments and bogus degrees.¹ Jobs they never had, scholarships they never won. Most employers don’t ask for university transcripts, so it can be easy to get away with this kind of thing. But it can catch up to you – a CEO at RadioShack² was fired some years ago for this, and senior leaders at corporations like Walmart³ have been ushered out the door when their exaggerated accomplishments have been discovered.

This is Easter Sunday, when we celebrate Christ’s greatest achievement, being raised from the dead. If Christ were to have a resume, this would be his crowning achievement. His CV would probably list his profession as Messiah, faith healer, rabbi. But, resumes didn’t exist back in Jesus’ time, so the way people learnt about Him was through personal stories told by the disciples, and then what they wrote down. In fact, the gospels are really Christ’s resume, the story of his greatest accomplishments. And it is easy to read it that way, as one triumph after another. Jesus never does anything wrong, so in a way, this is the best resume ever.

Except for one thing: this resume includes details that should have been left out. If resumes are a list of our greatest accomplishments, then we have to ask why in John’s gospel he told the story of the resurrection the way he does today. Like a c.v., the gospel writers choose what they leave in, and what they leave out. They want Christianity to get the job as a new faith, to attract new believers. So, when they tell the story of Christ’s life, it makes sense that they would have presented it all in the best light. But in today’s story, we don’t see that. The leaders of the Jesus movement at this time are Peter and John. When Mary of Magdalene sees that the tomb is empty, she runs off to tell them. They come racing back. They both take a look in the tomb.

¹ <https://blog.careerbeacon.com/man-fired-for-lying-on-his-resume-hiding-education/>

² Amy Gillentine, "Keep your fingers crossed if you lie on your resume," *The Colorado Springs Business Journal* Mar. 6, 2009

³ Benjamin Snyder, "Lying on resumes: When business execs go rogue," *Fortune*, Sep 16, 2014

They can see that Christ's body is no longer there. They see that his burial clothes have been folded. That's weird, they think. They shrug their shoulders. They don't try to find the body; they – just head home.

This is a supremely embarrassing moment in their lives. Had they stuck around, they probably would have seen the angels, and then the resurrected Jesus Himself. But instead, they go home and miss the key event of the faith. This was, in modern parlance, an epic fail. Yet, here it is in the gospel that John wrote. This is not the kind of thing that usually gets left in a resume.

The story gets even stranger. Mary Magdalene is distraught with grief. She desperately wants to find Jesus' body and take him somewhere safe. This is the first time that Mary Magdalene is mentioned in John's gospel. In the other gospels we learn that she was a loyal and close follower of Jesus. In Luke we hear that she had been healed of seven evil spirits ([Luke 8:2](#)). This suggests she was in an extreme mental health crisis which no one else could cure. John seems to assume that readers will know who she is already. This means that everyone agrees she was the one to see Jesus first. This is a detail John cannot omit or gloss over.

But this detail is embarrassing. It shouldn't be on the resume. Jesus should have appeared to John and Peter. They were the leaders of this movement. They were men, they were the ones that society would take seriously. Back then, in court, a fact was only established as true if two or three witnesses could provide matching testimony. What's more, women were not allowed to testify in Roman or Jewish courts since they were considered the weaker sex and unreliable.⁴ So, here at the most important event in Christ's resume, the two male witnesses have gone home, while the only person left to see the risen Christ was a sole woman, who had suffered from mental health problems. And yet, here she is, the one person Jesus chooses to be seen by.

When scholars talk about whether events in the Bible can be considered factually accurate, they include the criterion of embarrassment.⁵ Few people try to promote themselves by including embarrassing details on their resume. If they are going to lie, they are going to embellish their CV with details that make them look better than they are. Christian scholars have used the same principle with regards to the gospels. If John wanted to lie about the resurrection, to make it up, the last thing he would have included would be a story of woman with mental health problems being the first witness to the risen Jesus. This detail is so embarrassing in a world dominated by men that it should have been left out.

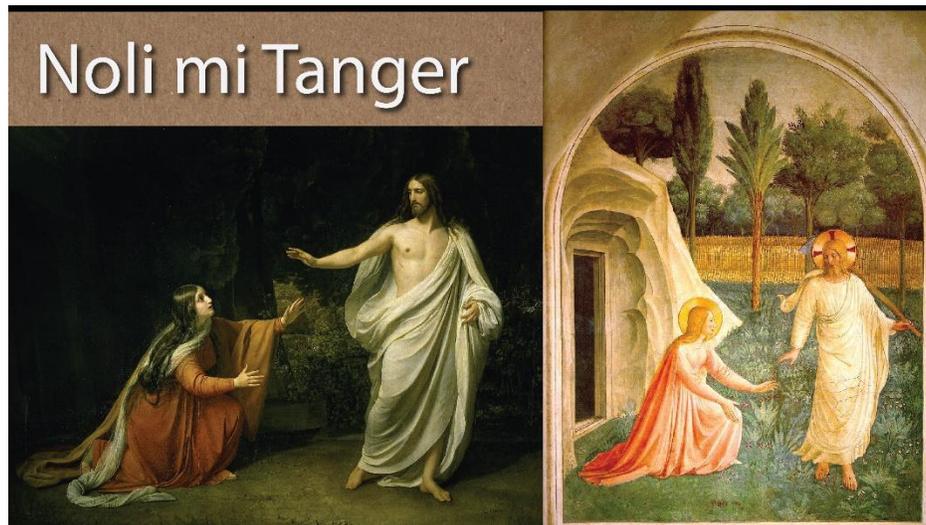
Mary's encounter with Jesus did ruffle feathers. Roman critics of early Christianity dismissed it as the faith of the ignorant and the vulgar.⁶ How could anyone believe in a God who allowed himself to be killed, and whose witnesses to his resurrection were a bunch of women? Even within the Christian movement, there was a concerted effort to discredit Mary. She was

⁴ <https://staatsbuergerschaftundgeschlecht.wordpress.com/2013/02/07/history-and-law-status-of-the-women-in-the-ancient-rome/>; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/witness>

⁵ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/criterion-of-embarrassment>

⁶ *Origen Contra Celsus*, Book 3, Chapter 18.

accused of being a sex worker by a Pope⁷. They also pointed to the fact that Jesus told Mary not to touch him.



In Latin, this was translated as “Noli mi tanger,” and became a key moment captured in Christian art over the centuries. It may seem like a strange detail to inspire so many paintings.

However, in the 4th century, Christian male theologians argued that because Jesus did not want Mary to touch his resurrected body, this meant that women were unqualified to hold the host during masses.⁸ Only male priests could hold up the wafer that was turned into Christ’s body during the eucharist. At that time, being able to conduct mass was considered the key qualification for a priest. Therefore, this one sentence in John’s gospel was used to justify the disqualification of women being priests in the Catholic faith, a ban that continues to this day. Even a progressive Pope like Francis refuses to change this tradition.

Throughout Christianity’s history, the fact that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene has been a problem. This is a detail they would have liked to omit from Christ’s resume. But there it is. Christ chose to appear to someone who was considered a non-person in that society. Since this wasn’t what the men wanted, we can reasonably ask why Christ wanted it this way. Why He wanted this encounter with this woman on his resume.

The Christian story of humanity begins with the Garden of Eden creation myth. This is where God creates the first human beings, Adam and Eve. They are meant to tend the plants, like gardeners. But that bucolic time comes to an end when Eve is deceived by the serpent. She reaches out and takes fruit from a forbidden tree, and eats it. This creation myth says that the

⁷ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/who-was-mary-magdalene-and-why-do-people-think-she-was-a-prostitute.html>

⁸ Barbara Baert, “An Odour, a Taste, a Touch,” in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Wietse de Boer, Christine Göttler, (Brill, 2013),p.147.

knowledge of good and evil changes human consciousness. Humans receive the desire to divide the world into good and evil without God's wisdom. We lack the wide perspective needed to do this fairly. So, humans are kicked out of the garden, and we have been judging people unfairly ever since.

In today's gospel reading we see that story replayed, with a dramatic twist. A man and a woman are alone in a garden. The woman, Mary, mistakes Jesus for a gardener. Like that first time in the garden, she reaches out her hand. But Jesus stops her. Jesus says he needs to go to God first, to complete His transformation. God, man, woman, all in the garden again. But this time, there is no fall, no expulsion from the garden. Instead, like a film played in reverse, death is undone by a man with no sin. He walks out of death, out of the ultimate exile, back into the life, back into a garden, where a woman is waiting. A woman whom the world despises, but whom He loves enough to appear to Her first. This encounter in the garden is meant as a signal that in Christ, the fall has been reversed, humanity has been given a second chance to live again in grace and love.

The choice of Mary of Magdalene is pregnant with meaning. Jesus chooses to appear to someone whom society considered worthless. If we are to be Christians, we must stumble over this story, realize what it implies in all of its radical love. Jesus could have appeared to the leaders of his movement, John and Peter. He could have appeared to anyone he wanted – judges, soldiers, governors, respectable people, people who would be believed. But, instead he chose someone whom society had rejected. His message is clear: if want to hear me, to be with me, you must be with the rejected, too. You must listen to what Mary of the demons has to say. You must listen to the people who are cast off, who are ignored, who are silenced.

You must listen, but not because Jesus is being nice. Not because Jesus is compassionate to the downtrodden. Jesus wraps his resurrection in this story so we will be reminded that the salvation of humanity is truly for every single person. This is not a faith only for the successful, for those in charge, for the ones with all the toys. This is a faith for every single human being who draws breath. For those who have lost everything, for those who are held down by the powerful, for the raped, the scorned, the beaten, the ignored. This is a faith where Christ says to those who have been cast out that I see you and I want you to be listened to. That's why He appeared first to a woman who could not be heard in court, who was once delirious with mental health problems, to one no one had to believe, but thanks to Jesus, her name is now known all over the world.

On Easter Sunday we rejoice that Christ has conquered our greatest foe, death. Christ has offered us eternal life, something we cannot achieve on our own. But there is a second part to that invitation: to undo the power of sin, that separation in human consciousness, where some people are cast out while others consider themselves the chosen ones. Jesus appeared to one who had been cast out, who was not allowed to be a witness. We are encouraged to reach out and speak with those who have been silenced and sidelined. Not as a form of spiritual tourism, where they stay silenced after our visit is over. No, Jesus invites us, urges us to speak with those who have been pushed aside so that their marginalization can end, and our collective recovery

can begin. It is a two-way salvation, led by God. Jesus forced all those men in his movement to tell the story of a powerless woman seeing the resurrected Saviour first. Who are the powerless and rejected among us, in our time? Who has been silenced, cast aside? If we want to join Jesus in the garden, to be an Easter people, we are called to be in relationship with each other, and especially, the people society rejects.

Christ's work of saving the world begins not with Peter or John, but by placing Mary on his resume. She is His first reference for anyone who wants to hear about Christ's resurrection. For some that may be proof that this Christian message should be rejected, that Christ should not get the job. But for us, and many others, Mary's reference is the one that proves that Christ has shown us the way to heal the world. Let's give Christ the job, and let Him lead us into a world built on hope and love. To take a painful death on the cross, and make it into a joyful reunion in a garden, where humanity and God were reconciled for all time. Amen.

(Invite people to come up to flower the cross during the anthem)