

## Someone Has Stolen Jesus

*Bishop Yvette Flunder, City of Refuge United Church of Christ, 2006*

John 20: 10-15

*Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.*

*They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"*

*"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

*"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"*

*Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."*

“You see He died day before yesterday...

We placed him in a snug comfortable tomb, secure from the elements and external influences. We put him where we could find him. All of his miracles are behind him. He's dead... and death is the end. All he could do he has done already. I loved him. I served Him. I am here to maintain him. I did not come here for an event. I came to be alone one last time with my Jesus.”

This woman was in deep grief and loss. Her future hopes were dashed. Her senses callused. She was worn out from the events of the last two days. And now Jesus was not where He was supposed to be. Jesus was not only dead but also missing. She knew they hated Him. What might they be doing to the body of the one she loved so much? She came looking for her Jesus and she was willing to go get him, pick him up and carry him back to his tomb. You see, a form of Jesus, a shell of Jesus is better than no Jesus at all. At least she could look at the shape of His lips that spoke softly to her, the curve of His hands that touched and healed her and remember...

She went to find the remains of her Lord to care for Him as He had cared for her. She knew it was over when He had been pulled from the garden and taken from judge to judge, handled by hateful hands and discarded as just another expendable religious fanatic.

And she loved him, but she did not really know who he was... or where he was.

And on this morning of all mornings she needed Him to be where He was supposed to be.

It is great grief to those who know Jesus when the Jesus they know is taken away, or is transformed from the Jesus they were accustomed to. This is seldom thought of as a time to rejoice.

Where was He? Who took Him, and how could she get him back?

Could it be that her need to find Jesus where she left Him hindered her from seeing where He was?

Can our need to keep Jesus where we need him blind us to where Jesus is moving today?

Can our need to confine Jesus keep us from participating in the real power of his resurrection...Do we waste our time by looking in a graveyard for a living, dancing, glorified Jesus?

Now let's not think little of Mary. She represents many that are loyal, vigilant, and faithful to attending a graveyard where Jesus used to be and asking, "Where have they taken him?"

"Where did you take Him", she asked?

Someone said, "We've got Him. He's over here!"

"He now dwells behind stained glass and in the vaulted ceilings of mighty gothic cathedrals. He flies in buttresses. He resides in shrines and holy places... in relics and shrouds. He whispers a lot."

"No, we've got him!"

"Jesus is walking among things political and national. Jesus is the **man**. Proposition J. He is a plank on our platform. We put him back on the Supreme Court! He is on the banner that goes before us in war...He supports preemptive strikes! He is here with us on the right. We sealed Him up in our positions, our rallies and our mass mailings. We've got him...we've dressed Him up in prejudice. Made Him hate the poor, the immigrant, and Mickey Mouse. He speaks very little...we talk for Him."

And I hear a voice from the left..."We **really do** have Jesus, but we've stripped Him of most of His power, His glory and His mystery. We made Jesus another great teacher, you know like Ghandi, or Martin, or Nelson. We made Jesus more manageable... We've got Him under control."

It did not dawn on Mary that nobody took Jesus. She did not realize Jesus got up and got out of there Himself. The living Christ does not dwell long where death is the lifestyle. She didn't know that Jesus had come forth to usher in a new and living way.

Mary couldn't conceive that Jesus could be doing such a radical new thing. She loved him but she couldn't imagine full scope of his power and influence.

She did not know that He could steal victory from his own death

She did not know that she need not pity the Lord of Lords.

Mary couldn't imagine that death had been turned into life...and once death had tasted life again **no** grave could hold it.

There are those of us who would prefer a dead Christ in His place to a living one outside of our control.

There are those who can only recognize Christ in certain forms and under certain circumstances.

Imagine the struggle for some quiet Protestant church folks watching some African American folks dancing in the spirit well into the night. I'm sure someone felt to ask the question, "How dare these people try to claim my Jesus?"

Imagine a group of patriarchal religious folks watching a group of men, women and children who are not gender or orientation limited rejoicing in the Lord in perfect freedom? I'm sure someone would say, "What have they done with our Jesus?"

Can we hold him in our religions?

Can we keep Jesus in the church?

Can we even confine him to Christianity?

Into what sect, denomination or order has Jesus crowded all the riches of heaven? Into which race, ethnicity, country, culture, gender or orientation has Jesus poured out all of himself exclusively? To whom has he given all the truth so that we may cease to seek him daily?

He's up now, out of the confines of the tomb...

He's out now and He will not be held exclusively, by anyone.

Just about the time we feel we have Jesus down to a science we see the wonder of His ability to show up in people and in places we never would have guessed possible.

He is not back at the church where you left Him. He is here with you.

Go get your Jesus back!

Go get your purpose back! Marginalized people often feel alienated from God because they/we are alienated from religion..."We can't do this or that because too many people are against us"; but the battle is already won...that is why the folk who oppose inclusion are so mad. and desperate. They know it too.

Go get your parents back!

Go get your ministry back!

Go get your children back! No laws are going to stop us from caring for children. No laws are going to stop Jesus from loving us or keep us from loving each other.

IF WE SEEK TO CONFINE HIM BEHIND ANY WALLS... ANY STONE HE WILL  
BREAK OUT EVERY TIME

HE IS THE LIVING WAY

HE IS THE LIVING TRUTH

HE IS A FRESH FLOWING RIVER

HE IS RESURRECTION POWER

HE IS LIGHT AND HE IS LIFE