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Convention 2012

There is something odd about this story.  
Matthew agrees with Mark and Luke in most places-  
The women come to the tomb-  
there is an angel--everything is dazzling white  
And they are told to spread the good news.

Same old same old, right?  
Well, no.  
Look at the text for a minute.  
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb-  
Suddenly there is an earthquake-  
there is a line in the earth itself dividing the old from the new  
death from new life.  
And the angel rolls back the stone.

Then the angel tells the women- *I know you are looking for Jesus, but he isn't here-  
Go look in the tomb for yourselves  
And then go--He is going ahead of you. You will see Him in Galilee.*

Here's what's peculiar: The angel rolls away the stone but Jesus is already gone.  
The angel doesn't roll away the stone to let Him out-  
He is out.  
Jesus is already on the road-ahead of the women.<sup>i</sup>  
The angel rolls away the stone to reorient the women and all the others who will follow.  
It's a new world on the other side of the earthquake.

The angel says:  
*He isn't confined to the Tomb.  
And He isn't confined to space and time  
And He isn't confined to anything but disbelief.*

We talk about a Paradigm Shift—  
and we talk about Post Christendom---  
and we talk about the Emergent Church.  
And it's all good talk;  
it's talk to get reoriented to a new age with wondrous possibilities.

But let us be careful of talking about this as if we understand it or can plan for it.  
It's a new world. It's a new creation---it's an earthquake.

The Risen Christ is set free.  
Therefore we cannot continue to think we ONLY face a structural problem—  
Or that our task is merely to change an organizational chart.

It's not a shift---it's a revolution.  
Jesus has been set free—  
He doesn't need the angel to let him out  
And he doesn't need the angel to give directions to tell anyone where to meet him  
Because he's everywhere.

Yes we need to think about the shifts and changes.  
But our talk about the many changes must not delay our experience of the new reality.  
Let us not trade analyzing it for participating in it.  
Look at the text.  
The angel tells Mary Magdalene and the other Mary that they will see him in Galilee  
But they meet him 10 steps down the road—miles from Galilee.  
It's not that the angel is lying—  
but trying to limit or predict what the Risen Christ can do is a fool's errand.  
You cannot Mapquest the Risen Christ  
Now he's everywhere in all times in all places.  
It's not about planning for the future---it's about living in a new world right now.  
Let's not let our preconceptions blind us to resurrection.

When I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1968  
The ratio of men to women was 10 to 1.  
I spent my freshman year thinking about dating more than actually dating.  
However, I joined a fraternity hoping my social life would improve.  
The fall semester of my sophomore year,  
The Betas—that would be me—Had a mixer with AD Pi.  
Now, remember this was 1969—it was a different world.  
So the way we “mixed” was this:  
There was a list of the women in the sorority and the men just signed up for their dates  
I had an inside track.  
I knew the cool woman who sat two rows across from me was an AD PI.  
She had long brown hair, wore cowboy boots, and was from Corpus Cristi Texas.  
Her name was Jo Abbott.  
So I signed on the list for Jo Abbott and waited for the mixer with high anticipation  
that I was being released from my solitary existence.  
The night came—I put on my best T shirt, cleanest corduroy jeans,  
and strapped an extra motor cycle helmet on the back of my motorcycle.  
I went into the McIver Dorm and called for Jo Abbott from the phone in the lobby  
(yes, it was 1969—women still had to sign out).  
I was sitting in the lobby thinking about the night before me  
When I noticed a gorgeous, slim woman with straight blond hair standing before me.  
She looked like the Mary of Peter Paul and Mary.  
“Are you ready?” she asked.  
“Ready for what?” I said because I had no idea what she was talking about.  
“The Party. Don't you want to party?”  
“I'm flattered,” I said. “But I am waiting for Jo Abbott.”

She looked at me with surprise---frustration---and a little bewilderment.  
“I’m Jo Abbott.” she said a little too loudly.  
“No you’re not,” I said. “You don’t even have a Texas accent.”

My plans blinded me.  
Waiting for Brown hair, Texas accent, cool cowboy boots.  
I could not see Mary Travis hair,  
that sweet North Carolina intonation,  
and a knock out purple dress right before me.

We as the church must not miss the encounter with Jesus right where we are.  
Let’s not so fixate on planning for the future that we forget resurrection is here right now  
Instead of being afraid that Christianity is in decline  
Let us rejoice that we cannot predict what Jesus will do anymore.

He is free.

Our calling is recognize him wherever he is  
Our calling is to learn to see him in unexpected places  
And most of all our calling is to believe in his power to make all things new

Back to 1969.

So Jo Abbott with the blond hair took a step back, crossed her arms, and paused.

I know now that my life hung in the balance.

I could have said to her---please go upstairs and find the Jo Abbott with brown hair,  
cowboy boots and the Texas accent.

Thank God, I said what Mary Magdalene said that Easter morning  
and we the Church need to say on this and every day.

“Of course it’s you. Forgive me for not recognizing you at first. Let’s go out.”

We open our eyes—we open our hearts—we open our Church

This then is our prayer:

Dear Jesus—forgive us for not recognizing you. Let’s go anywhere together.

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<sup>i</sup> Barbara Lundblat, “Transforming the Stone, Protestant Hour, 1999.