

## The Lenten Meditations 2024

### Episode 6: Reordering

By Tara Ludwig



*Mary Magdalene on Christ's Tomb* (circa 1900) by Giuseppe Cali  
Exhibited by the Malta Art Association

In this year's Lenten Meditations, we have contemplated together many aspects of suffering: what it is and isn't, what we can do with it, what it calls out in us. We are beginning to get a sense that, when we have suffered something profound, it inevitably *changes* us. Suffering causes us to become different, and we may even feel that we are not the same person we once were.

This was certainly true for Jesus, who, following his crucifixion and death, was resurrected into new life. Jesus was back; but he wasn't exactly the *same*. Something about him had changed, so much so that one of his closest and most beloved friends, Mary Magdalene, couldn't even recognize him. Let us listen in on their first post-resurrection meeting, here in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John:

But Mary was standing outside the tomb, weeping; so as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the

feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they put Him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and yet she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Thinking that He was the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for 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, and My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18.)

I have read many theories about why the resurrected Jesus *looked* different, and why Mary might have mistaken him for the gardener. It's interesting to wonder about. But I also think it's essential that we recognize the change in Jesus' *outward* appearance as emblematic of the profound changes that took place in his *inward* self. Jesus endured torture, crucifixion, death, a descent to hell and the realm of the dead; he could not have gone through suffering like that without becoming a changed man.

From a human point of view, it would be understandable if Jesus, after having undergone such torment and pain despite his complete innocence, had emerged bitter, resentful, angry, or even revengeful. But instead, we see that the changes that took place in Jesus' inner life made him *more beautiful*; the resurrected Jesus was a glorified Jesus, not an embittered one. His suffering brought him closer to God and revealed his authentic, glorious self.

It is one of the mysteries of our faith that suffering *is* the bridge leading to new life. There can be no resurrection without a crucifixion. But the choice whether to cross the bridge is ours; we are free to stay in the same place, to remain unchanged by suffering and let our hearts grow darker and harder, or to find our way *through* the suffering towards resurrection, towards the unknown transformation on the other side, as Jesus so courageously modeled for us.

Life, crucifixion, resurrection; life, suffering, new life. This process of change perfectly illustrates what author Richard Rohr refers to as "The Wisdom Pattern": order, disorder, reorder. Rohr describes the Wisdom Pattern here, in this abridged excerpt from his blog at the Center for Action and Contemplation:

A sense of order is the easiest and most natural way to begin... But... "Order" must be deconstructed by the trials and vagaries of life. We must go through a period of "disorder" to grow up. Only in the final "reorder" stage can darkness and light coexist, can paradox be okay... Here death is a part of life, failure is a part of victory, and imperfection is included in perfection. Opposites collide and unite; everything belongs. We dare not get rid of our pain before we have learned what it has to teach us... we must resist the instant fix... to be open to true transformation...

The Resurrected Christ is the icon of reorder. Once we can learn to live in this third spacious place, neither fighting nor fleeing reality but holding the creative tension, we are in the spacious place of grace out of which all newness comes. God is now in charge, not us... There is no direct flight from order to reorder. You must go through disorder, which is surely why Jesus dramatically and shockingly endured it on the cross. He knew we would all want to deny necessary suffering unless he made it overwhelmingly clear.<sup>i</sup>

Rohr is pointing us towards the understanding that suffering is not “in the way” of our transformation to new life, it *is* the way; the only way, to resurrection, to a complete reordering of our way of being.

So, my invitation to you, as I send you off into the wilds of this sixth and final week of Lent, is to consider your life, and where you may be resisting “disorder”, where you might be fighting against a crucifixion that is necessary for your transformation. What new life might be waiting for you on the other side if you are willing to walk with Jesus through this suffering?

I’ll close now with a quote from writer and theologian Frederick Buechner:

Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing. The worst thing is the next to the last thing. The last thing is the best. It's the power from on high that comes down into the world, that wells up from the rock bottom worst of the world like a hidden spring. Can you believe it? The last, best thing is the laughing deep in the hearts of the Saints, sometimes our hearts even. Yes. You are terribly loved and forgiven. Yes. You are healed. All is well.

I’m Tara Ludwig, thank you so much for joining us this year for the Lenten Meditations. With gratitude, all of us at the Faber Institute wish you a blessed and joyful Easter. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Read the full text here: <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/order-disorder-reorder-2017-07-14/>