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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THE WORST DAY, THE BEST DAY”
Matthew 28:1-10 and Parallel Texts**

Friday was the worst day of Peter’s life.

Later, he will confess the necessity of Messiah’s death. He will testify to the blessings which Jesus secured for him on the cross. He will call the day *Holy* or *Great Friday* (*great* in the sense of important). But he will never call it *Good Friday*. How could he?

On Friday, when a servant girl said {Mt 26:69-70} **“You were with Jesus of Galilee,”** he denied knowing him. After that *another* girl said {Mt 26:71-72} **“This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth”** and Peter **“denied it again,”** this time **“with an oath.”** A short while later when some others said {Mt 26:73-74} **“Surely you are one of them”** Peter **“began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’”**

This, despite the fact the Lord had warned him, **“This very night...you will disown me three times.”** But Peter boasted, **“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”** Then he disowned his Master.

To Peter Friday means humiliating weakness, despicable cowardice, wretched failure. It was the worst day of his life.

Sunday is the best day of Peter’s life!

{Lk 24:1-12} It starts early in the morning, when the women come racing in, gasping and wild-eyed. As soon as they catch their breath a little they all start talking over

each other, loudly, the words tumbling out. It’s crazy talk about a stone rolled away and an empty tomb and angels.

But something stirs within Peter, and he runs to the tomb. It is empty as they said! Peter is baffled.

{Lk 24:13-49} Later, he and many of the Master’s friends are together when Cleopas and another disciple come to the door. They have seen and spoken with the Lord! As they are still talking, The Risen Christ suddenly appears in their midst. **“Peace be with you,”** he says. Everyone is frightened. **“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”**

Then Jesus opens their minds to understand that he had to suffer and rise from the dead. He adds: **“and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”**

“Repentance and forgiveness of sins” strikes a chord with Peter. He is repentant; but he has believed that his sins are too bad to be forgiven.

The resurrection changes that! Messiah offers forgiveness, and Peter avails himself of it. He will never be the same.

To Peter Sunday means God’s glorious power. Sunday means indomitable courage. Sunday means ultimate victory. Sunday is the best day of his life.

Some of us have been like Peter on Friday, bound by sin and failure. Hear the Good News: Our

sin crucified Jesus and buried him in the grave – but he did not stay there! He conquered death and came out of the tomb, and now, in his limitless mercy and generosity he freely offers us that which we cannot earn: total forgiveness that erases our guilt and liberates us from bondage to sin.

This is great news, indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Friday was the worst day of Thomas' life.

Later, he will be absolutely certain Jesus is the Messiah. He will have assurance that, far from invalidating the lordship of Jesus, the cross proves it. He will call the day *Holy Friday, Great Friday*.

But he will never call it *Good Friday*. How could he?

Thomas is a skeptic. He *wants* to have faith yet he is hesitant to draw conclusions, averse to jumping on the bandwagon, and slow to invest his trust. But through his teachings, miracles, and demonstrated character of holiness Jesus overcame Thomas' innate caution and earned his precious confidence.

So when Jesus was betrayed, Thomas' faith was betrayed. When Jesus was beaten, Thomas' faith took a beating. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, Thomas' faith was nailed to it. When Jesus died, Thomas' faith died.

He knows Jesus was not a deliberate liar, {Mk 3:21} or crazy, {Mt 12:24} much less demon-possessed. Still, Jesus was obviously mistaken – after all, it is not possible for the Messiah to be crucified!

To Thomas Friday means shattering disappointment, acute disillusionment, incurable cynicism. It was the worst day of his life.

Sunday is the best day of Thomas' life!

Actually, for him it is the next Sunday, because {Jn 20:24-25} he missed Easter. The others told him all about it but, true to form, he demanded evidence.

{Jn 20:26-27} Now it is the Sunday after Easter and the disciples are together again. This time Thomas is with them. Though the doors are locked the Risen Christ abruptly appears, saying, "**Peace be with you!**" (I visualize him materializing directly in front of Thomas.) One second the Messiah is present only in thought, the next in substance. One moment he is mere memory, the next he is material reality.

He looks straight at Thomas and commands: "**Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.**"

His words are in direct response to Thomas' need. Thomas said, "**Unless I see the nail marks... and put my fingers where the nails were**"; Jesus says, "**Put your finger here; see my hands.**" Thomas said, "**Unless I... put my hand into his side**"; Jesus says, "**Reach out your hand and put it into my side.**" Thomas said, "**Unless**" I have proof "**I will not believe it**"; Jesus says, "**Stop doubting and believe.**"

Thomas's reply is immediate: "**My Lord and my God!**" This is a momentous exclamation! Many have called Jesus {Jn 1:28} "**Rabbi.**" Some have called him {Mk 10:47} "**Son of David**" or {Jn 8:4} "**Master.**" Peter even called him {Mt 16:16} "**the Christ, the Son of**

the living God.” But this is the first time anyone has called him **“my God.”** It is a declaration of pure faith.

To Thomas Sunday means restored trust. Sunday means renewed idealism. Sunday means unshakeable hope. Sunday is the best day of his life.

Some of us have been like Thomas on Friday: bound by doubt and disbelief. Hear the Good News: The Risen Christ has not given up on us! Trust him enough to pray {Mk 9:24} **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** and he will. He who conquered the grave freely offers us that which we cannot give ourselves: {Heb 11:1} steadfast **“[assurance] of what we hope for and”** solid **“[certainty] of what we do not see.”**

This is great news, indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Friday was the worst day of Mary’s life.

Later, she will come to terms with Jesus’ death. She will be reconciled to God, and she will even take joy in knowing that he gave Jesus to the whole world. She will call the day *Holy Friday, Great Friday*. But she will never call it *Good Friday*. How could she?

She thought she learned to let go of him when she weaned him from nursing at the age of 3.

She thought she learned to let go of him when he started going to school.

She thought she learned to let go of him when he was 13, read the Law in synagogue and took moral responsibility for his own actions.

She thought she really learned to let go of him when, at the age of 30, he began his public ministry.

But when Mary heard the mob shouting {Mt 27:23} **“Crucify him!”**, saw the soldiers flogging him, saw him

broken and bleeding on the cross, she realized that she knew little about letting go.

To Mary Friday means {Lk 2:35} a sword-pierced soul, the fruition of her worst nightmares, hell on earth. It was the worst day of her life.

Sunday is the best day of Mary’s life.

She does not go to the tomb that morning or gather with the disciples that evening. Her grief is too raw, her wounds too deep, her pain too intolerable.

But it isn’t long before she hears the astonishing reports and sees the remarkable changes in Jesus’ followers. And sometime that week the Risen Son reveals himself to her.

Scripture does not describe their reunion, but it changes Mary forever. She has always loved Jesus. She has sometimes supported his ministry. From today forward she is a full-fledged Christ Follower.

Mothering Jesus was a high and holy calling, for as long as it lasted. She performed her duties well, and she deserves our respect.

But now Mary has a new calling, equally high and holy as the first (though far less exclusive). It is to worship Jesus as Christ; live as a daughter in his newly formed spiritual family; manifest his Father’s Kingdom in all of her attitudes, thoughts, words, actions, and relationships; obey his commandments; and serve the mission of {Mt 28:19-20} **“[making] disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] commanded....”**

To Mary Sunday means profound healing. Sunday means a new set of dreams. Sunday means joyful, abundant life in the present and the promise of heaven later. Sunday is the best day of her life.

Some of us have been like Mary on Friday: bound by loss and grief. Hear the great news: Jesus has conquered death! {Ro 6:3-5} And **“all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus”** by grace through faith **“were ... buried with him... in order that...as [he] was raised from the dead...we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him...in his death, we will ... be united with him in his resurrection.”** Eternal life begins with fresh vitality and new purpose now, a heavenly existence immediately after death, and bodily resurrection at Christ's Second Coming.

This is great news, indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen!