

## Don't Hold On

FCCH Easter Sunday, March 31 2024

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I was just a kid~~just old enough to do something stupid and remember it. So, like five? It was winter. My grandma and grandpa had these iron railings down the stairs of their front stoop, and there were icicles hanging from them.

They looked so delicious and even though I had been warned not to, I licked one too close to the metal, and of course, my tongue stuck.

Bad stuck. I was the pre-cursor to that boy in the 1983 movie, A



Christmas Story. Flick was triple-dog dared to touch his tongue to a flagpole when it was below freezing. Like Flick, It took a bit of effort to rip my fused tongue off the metal-ice, and part of my tongue got left on the railing.

This was the image that popped in my head when I first read John's account of the resurrection. The Gardener/Jesus warns Mary not to hold on to him, and I immediately imagine Mary taking this as a triple-dog dare—sticking herself to Jesus. Now, I know Jesus is not a frozen flagpole and that this is an unusual image for Easter morning. Bear with me. The whole story is weird, that somehow has stood the test of 2000 years of Christianity. NOT, I would argue, because it is literally true.

It is a fantastical story for us modern folk, but in the first century Roman Empire, it was perfectly normal to have a god that defied death by coming back to life. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, gods with super-hero powers were common place. Think Jupiter, the King of Heaven and Earth. The Jesus story stood its ground among the pantheon of gods in greco roman religion.

We live in a different time.

So, a Super Hero God doesn't resonate with most of us. In fact, it is easy to get stuck on what we don't believe anymore~~these stories of the dead coming back to life, walking through walls and doors and more. There is no evidence strong enough to believe this can happen. And so, we don't believe in the religion of our childhoods, or even the religion at some of the churches down the street. We chew on our dis-belief like a dog with a bone. We think it is sheer enlightenment to hold fast to what we don't believe. But is it?

For me, its time let go of my belief in my unbelief. I need to loosen my hold on it so that I might be able to at least wrestle with the conspiracy of Love overcoming death.

We find ourselves with this conspiracy of Love with Mary who is weeping in the gardens of the graveyard. Her tears are made of the grief-stricken mourning that comes with the brutal reality of death that comes before its time. As in her friend, Jesus, who are been tried as criminal and tortured by crucifixion.

Shattered by the discovery of an empty tomb, Mary talks to angels hiding within inside that death house. She demands the gardener tell her where her friend's broken body has been taken.

Mary is my people. I love her. It doesn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary for her to a. to see angels b. have sensible conversations with them and c. to issue ultimatums to the Man in Charge them, even though it means transgressing gender social rules of the first century.

Here we are, with the conspiracy of Love with Mary, as she recognizes the voice and face of Jesus...and everything in her wants to hang on to him, to never lose him again, and Love calls her to do the very opposite: "Do not hold on to me, Mary. Do not cling to me. Do not get stuck here...."

Why?

The text, over time has been redacted and shaped theologically, because Jesus gives some weird reason that he can't be touched because he hasn't "ascended to the Father." I am sorry, but what does that even mean?

This is what I think:

I know some of you have been visited by loved ones who have died. They appear to you in a dream or meditation, or right in front of you. They have let you know that "they are okay..."

It is such a blessed assurance.

Maybe Jesus is promising her that he is fine in spite of his horrific death. BUT~~he doesn't want her to get stuck on him, though, because there is nothing to hold on to in the graveyard. He isn't going to stay among the dead, and neither ought she.

And, neither ought we.

Let's talk about holding on too tight, friends. While we might not be silly enough to lick frozen flag poles and get stuck to them, there are plenty of ways in which we get stuck in our lives, clinging to death-dealing ideas and experiences and people that only lead us further into nothingness and despair.

Spiritually, Jesus is inviting Mary to the practice of non-attachment, which is an essential tenet in eastern thought. Non-attachment can be summed up as the effort to live life with flexibility, and not get fixated on outcomes. To not cling to outcomes.

Parker Palmer tells a story when he was wrestling with a transition in his life at age 75. Gathering some trusted friends into a Quaker clearness committee, he ask them to help him discern the answer to his question, "What do I want to let go of and what do I want to hang on to?" After a lot of discussion, he emerged from that little gathering with something more important than an answer. He writes, *"I emerged with a better question. I'm no long asking, 'What do I want to let go of and what do I want to hang onto?' Instead I'm asking, 'What do I want to let go of and what do I want to give myself to?' I now see that "hanging on" is a fearful, needy, and clinging way*

*to be in the world. But looking for what I want to give myself to transforms everything. It's taking me to a place where I find energy, abundance, trust, and new life."*

Do not hold on to me, Jesus says. Let go. Don't cling to what was, and give yourself over to what is next. This is the miracle of resurrection~~the present NOW, and the curiosity it brings to whatever is next.

Letting go is a deep and sacred practice. There are so many facets and levels of letting go. For some of us who have experienced trauma or difficulty in any form, holding on to control has been the way in which we have navigated danger, and fear. Letting go needs to be a gentle and caring process of discovery and trust. Loosening our grip can lead to transformation, and the tender greening of our hearts that hold the promise of new life.

Where do you get stuck?

Is it the idea that some people will never change for the better?

Do you often expect the worse?

Can you ever imagine having no expectations?

What do you cling to?

Do you find yourself being disappointed over and over and over again? Can you find the flexibility and courage to "let go?"

This Easter morning, I find myself with Mary, weeping in the garden. I know some of you are right there, too.

You have friends in dire health conditions.

You might be in the midst of the pain of betrayal by someone you trusted.

You might be in fear of losing your agency, or anxious about the state of our world, our country....You might be overwhelmed with loneliness.

I get it.

Death, or the threat of it, is all around. The tomb is empty, and there are no answers.

It's important to name the brutality of it all. It's even okay to linger in the tears and hopelessness.

And when Love calls your name,  
I hope you can hear it.

I hope you can hear the deep welcome in the calling of your name, welcoming you home to the heart of Life. Whether you are stuck or free, weeping and grieving or able to have hope...Love conspires to welcome you with wide open arms.

I woke up really early this morning. Okay, I didn't sleep well. I was having trouble letting go of what is weighing heavy on my heart. I just wasn't feeling Easter, or the promise of the sunrise or bunnies carrying licorice flavored jelly beans, let alone life conquering death.

But then, Charlotte, the pregnant Round Stingray popped into my mind. Do you know about Charlotte, at Aquarium and Shark Lab down on main street here in Hendersonville? She is an international phenomenon because her conception is either by inter-species mating with the bamboo sharks, or more likely, by parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction; all by herself.) Charlotte is the first documented case of parthenogenesis by a round stingray, which means she is a miracle. No matter what the outcome is of her pregnancy. In fact, I think she is a miracle because her unusual circumstances have garnered a lot of attention, bringing awareness and education about the preciousness of sea life, the worries of extinction, and more. Charlotte's story is a surprise, a gift of wonder and curiosity. This, to me, is at least the promise of resurrection. At least it is a hope. Was this love calling my name at 2:45 in the morning?

Don't hold on, Karla.

— —  
*Don't hold on to what is dead, dying, and keeping you stuck.  
Let go, and Know that hope is alive,  
in Charlotte the StingRay,  
In the azaleas that are starting to pop,*

*In the surprise of that sunset that happens every night but it still takes  
your breath away,  
In the gentling strength of Big Glassy Rock at Carl Sandburg, or the  
silliness of the goats, even.  
You don't know how Love will show up.  
You don't know how Love will come back to life.  
Don't hold on,  
Let go and Know.  
Love will welcome you in the most surprising places, because that is  
what some say, is the conspiracy of resurrection.  
In the midst of tears, hope shoots through.  
So, don't hold on.  
Let go, give way....  
And in the meantime,  
feel free to talk to angels and gardeners. and take joy in pregnant  
stingrays. Amen.*

## **SOURCES**

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