

The Rolling Stone, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. X1060416
Acts 10:34-43 and John 20:1-18
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She was the faithful one. She was the one who, early in the morning, while it was yet dark, went to the tomb to anoint the body of her friend. She had *already* been the faithful one. She was the one, according to John and Luke, who poured the oil of anointing on Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. She was there with Mary, Jesus' mother, and some other women at Golgotha after all the other disciples had fled. She sat there opposite Joseph of Aramathea's tomb when that big heavy stone was rolled across the opening. She remained there keeping a weeping vigil.

Mary Magdalene is the one person that all four gospels agree went to the tomb on that Easter morning. This was the second time she had run to the tomb that morning. The first time she was amazed that the stone had been rolled away, and so she ran back to tell Peter and John that the tomb was empty. The three ran back to the tomb, and saw the linen wrappings. But the men, in their wonderment, went home. Faithful Mary from Magdala did not. She stayed there weeping once again beside that rolling stone.

This was a terrible time for Mary. Her friend, the one who taught her so much, the one who loved her so much, the one who was falsely tried and convicted, was dead. This was the man who knew Mary and accepted her for who she was. Somehow, Jesus had helped her heal from her tormented past. Whether it was demons that possessed her, whether she had some sort of psychological disorder, or whether she had sold her body for others' pleasure, Jesus had accepted her questionable past, and now he was dead.

This was a terrible time for Mary, and now she was even denied the chance to do the one thing she could do, anoint that bruised, beaten, tortured body. The body had disappeared. So Mary sat, weeping, beside that rolling stone. It was then, in the depth of her grief and confusion, that Jesus said, "Mary." And immediately, she recognized who he was.

It is in our brokenness that Jesus calls out to us. Sit for a moment next to Mary, next to that rolling stone, next to that empty tomb. Sit for a moment in your grief, your loneliness. Feel the pain of losing a friend. Feel the emptiness of a broken relationship. Feel the grief caused by the death of a loved one. Suddenly, Jesus calls *you* by name. It's too good to be true. But it is true. Jesus meets you, recognizes you, and calls your name in the depth of your grief. This is resurrection!

It matters not what others have called you or labeled you. It matters not that a culture has discarded you. Jesus calls you by name, and you are made new. When all hope seems to be gone, Jesus calls you by name.

That's how Jesus lived out his ministry, isn't it? Calling people by name: "Lazarus, come out!"¹ "Zacchaeus, hurry down!"² "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things."³

There is no substitute for being looked at directly and called by name. Imagine a God who is that close to you, looking directly at you and calling your name. This is not some distant uncaring being, but a loving God who counts the very hairs on our heads. To this God, we are never an

¹John 11:43

²Luke 19:5

³Luke 10:41

“it” or a number. We are people, God’s own children. And this God gives us the power to experience all other people and all living things as personal, rather than as objects or “its.”

Seventy-eight years ago, a Jewish mystic, a Hasidim named Martin Buber, wrote a book in German, entitled *Ich und du*. We have no adequate translation of that phrase in English. The book title became *I and Thou* when published in English.⁴ The German *du* reflects a closer personal relationship with another than the formal *sie*. Likewise, *thou* reflects viewing another person in their fullness and individuality, rather than as simply “Hey you!” or “yo!” or “dude!”

Buber’s thesis was that when we have a *relationship* with another, that person is no longer an it or simply a he or she. That person is a *thou*. We can speak of another as an object: “He weighs 162 pounds and has brown hair.” “She is a real babe.” “He’s a hunk.” Or, we can speak of another as a *thou*, a person with feelings, with memories of the past and a hope for the future. That changes the whole character of the relationship.

Buber wrote that we can have similar I-Thou relationships with trees and birds and animals. We can view a tree as an object: as something that has so many board/feet for lumber, or as being in the way of a house we want to construct. Or, it can be viewed as a *thou*, a living breathing creation of God’s that hosts birds and produces the very oxygen I breathe. I can have *I-thou* relationships with people and with animals, birds, and trees.

That *I-Thou* relationship begins with God. As Christians, we believe God is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus knew Mary as a person, a *thou*, not as an object. To others, Mary was one of *those*: one of *those* women of the streets; one of *those* ditzes who doesn’t know the value of precious anointing oil; one of *those* women who was uneducated and without value.

Flora Slosson Wuellner⁵ says that Christianity is not a religion *of* Jesus nor religion *about* Jesus. It is religion *through* Jesus. That means we understand the meaning of God when we can look at God through Jesus. We are not called to worship Jesus: we are called to worship God *through* Jesus. We are not called to study facts, or figure out details of Jesus life: we are called to understand God’s love more fully *through* Jesus.

The important thing in the Easter story is not the detail of a bodily or spiritual resurrection, but that resurrection happens with us: with th church. Jesus, the embodiment of God’s creative and loving word, is resurrected– is brought to life in us. We are the ones to look others in the eye and call them by name: to show them that they matter to us and to God. We are the ones to care for this earth and all living things as if they really mattered to God, because they *do*!

Resurrection happens with the church, and you and I are the church– not independent individuals hoping to make it to heaven, but a living breathing body–the body of Christ–at work in the world today. We are connected together in I - Thou relationships, and we minister to others as children of a God who cares, a God who calls each by name.

In your amazement and wonderment, in your despair and in your joy, listen! Listen to the voice of God calling you by name. The heavy stone is rolled away from the door to our hearts, and we are called into personhood. Happy Easter!

⁴Buber, Martin (1958) *I and Thou* , Second Edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark

⁵Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Feed My Shepherds*, Nashville: Upper Room Books, © 1998, p. 32