

The Great Reversal

The Resurrection of Our Lord—Easter Day; Series C

Luke 24:1-12

A trick play or a gimmick play, is a play in American football that uses deception and unorthodox strategies to fool the opposing team. A trick play is often risky. There is the chance for a large gain or a touchdown if successful, but with the chance of a significant loss of yards or a turnover if not. Trick plays are rarely used not only because of the riskiness, but to also maintain the element of surprise for when they are used.

Trick plays take advantage of the fact that nearly all American football plays are either a pass from the quarterback or a run by the halfback. As a result, defenses will think *pass* when the quarterback has the ball and *run* when the running back has it. They respond by quickly changing position in an attempt to block further motion of the offense's players. Trick plays depart from these expectations, attempting to have the defense move into position to block the wrong play. They tend only to work if they are unanticipated (Wikipedia, "Trick Play").

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And just so we are clear, this is no trick! It is actual and it is factual. God, the Father raised Jesus from the dead. He is risen, never to die again. Yet, like a successful trick play in American football maintains the element of surprise and is completely unanticipated and unexpected, so too there is every indication that no one was expecting Jesus to actually rise from the dead. This leads us to the first of the three points of application in our sermon on St. Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus.

No one was expecting an empty tomb. It even appears that no one was hoping for an empty tomb. It was such a new thing that no one expected it or knew to hope for it. We read that the women who traveled to the tomb on that first day of the week at early dawn were carrying spices with them in order to prepare Jesus' body for burial (Lk 24:1). They were expecting to find a body. Instead, the women found two unexpected things that perplexed and puzzled them. First, they found a stone rolled away from the tomb (Lk 24:2). Second, they found the tomb empty with no body inside (Lk 24:3). This was something that the people did not expect.

We often remember events that we are looking forward to and are expecting. For instance, we look forward to the birth of a new child or a vacation with great anticipation. Early on in Jesus' Public Ministry he told his disciples that he would be crucified and then rise from the dead on the third day. He said this to them plainly and directly. Yet, St. Luke tells us in the account of Jesus' resurrection that the women didn't remember this, more than likely because Jesus' words were unexpected and difficult for them to comprehend. And so the two angels at the tomb have to keep reminding them. They say, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee . . ." (Lk 24:6). After the angels jogged their memory, *then* the women remembered and returned from the tomb to tell the Apostles what they had witnessed.

Jesus had risen from the dead. It was an unorthodox strategy that left everyone on the "field" surprised. It simply was not expected. When the women returned to tell the Apostles, even they did not believe it. Luke tells us that they thought it was an "idle tale" (Lk 24:11). The Apostle Peter even ran to the tomb to look. When he saw the clothes lying

by themselves he went home marveling and amazed. Peter is no different than us in the sense that we too marvel and are amazed at surprising and unexpected things when they actually happen. Jesus told his disciples that it would happen. St. Luke tells us clearly that they didn't believe it, weren't expecting it, and were not hoping for it.

This leads us to our second point of application. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was way more than anyone could have expected. Dead is dead. People that die don't rise from the dead. It was true in New Testament times and it is true today. Jesus is the sole exception. He is the first human being to experience resurrection life. In his Public Ministry Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and told a little girl who had died to rise again. Yet, all of these people died again. Their restored life was only momentary and temporary. Once they were restored to life again, they, like us all, were back on a crash course toward death, unable to reverse it. Only Jesus can "be raised from the dead and never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For, the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (Ro 6:9-10). Jesus is the first fruit of resurrection *life*. Through him we also have the hope of resurrection *life*. Though we die, yet we live. And through his eternal victory over Sin and death, the new heavens and the new earth will *grow*.

One of the most common trick plays in American football is the reverse. A reverse catches the defense off guard by changing the lateral direction of a running play. And this leads us to the third point of application from the account of the Resurrection of Jesus. God let happen to Jesus the very worst that Sin and Satan could do and then he reversed it all. It is necessary for Jesus to die and rise from the dead. Through Jesus God is carrying out the divine plan. God had made it his plan and purpose to save the whole world. So Jesus took our place as the humblest and the lowliest. He became the victim for you. And then he rose from the dead to become the victor for you.

Our God is the God of the great reversal. Even in his three year Public Ministry Jesus was reversing things. Through the great power and authority of God, the Father he was taking the sick and making them well. He was taking what was broken and fixing it. He restored sight to the blind. He made the deaf to hear. He made the lame to walk. He even raised the dead. All of this foreshadowed Jesus' reversal of the power of Sin and death through his resurrection. And so that is what we celebrate this Resurrection Sunday. We celebrate the great reversal.

Let God's reversing act and the news of Jesus' resurrection be of great comfort to you. We all struggle with doubts and regrets. We may live each day with tentativeness and apprehension. We may live in fear of the unknown and unexpected. We may guard too strongly against surprises. We may live in fear rather than in the joy of resurrection life. So let us remember and trust more firmly in our God who reversed Sin and death for us. The worst the world can do to us and the worst that we can do to ourselves—God will reverse it. He already has through Jesus' resurrection and our participation in his resurrection life through Baptism. His reversal work will be fully known when he renews the heavens and the earth at his coming on the Last Day. Amen.