

Run, Run, Faster than Peter

“Run for it!”

John 20:1-10

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Run

I must have been 5 years old and I was walking with my family to my Grandmother's house. It was a short walk by adult standards, only two short city blocks. But to me, a small child, it seemed like we were going from one edge of the known world to the other. I don't know why, but after we crossed the first street, I began to lag behind, distracted by a bumblebee, perhaps, or a row of blossomed flowers growing in a garden strip along a neighbor's fence. Whatever it was, it had distracted me long enough to set me back – with my little legs – a considerable distance from the rest of the family. They were about to turn the corner and when they did they would quickly disappear and I would be lost.

So, I did the reasonable thing: I ran. I had just begun a spirited sprint when, it seemed out of nowhere, another little stranger appeared on the sidewalk. I had never met him before and I hadn't seen him coming; but there he was, almost blocking my path telling me in a raised voice, “You're not supposed to run on Easter!” That's why he had appeared: he was a little Pharisee, come to accuse me!

I wasn't about to stop: I just responded with something like, “Oh, pipe down!” I dodged him and kept on running. There was something far more urgent at hand than paying attention to some Sunday observance I never quite understood. *This was urgent.*

What is *urgent* for you? What is it that can get you running? ‘Something you would run away from’ Or ‘something you need to run toward?’

Peter, John, and Mary

Whatever I said to the little Pharisee, I wish I'd known my Bible well enough to have said, “John 20, verses 2 and 4!” as I flew by because, if anything, there's a lot of running going on.

And it was on Easter!

Of course, at first there' no running at all: only the solemn, mournful walk of Mary Magdalene, who has come to the tomb alone. For all she knows and all she feels, Friday events have had the last word. Sin is inescapable. Evil is overpowering. Death is final.

What if there was no Easter? Nothing would be worth our running. Illness could well mean the end of health. A betrayal would have to mean the end of a relationship. Sin would mean the irreversible loss of righteousness. Loss of a job might mean no more options. Death would be the end. In the face of it, running *away* would be futile; running *toward* would prove fruitless. That's what it would be like if there were no Easter.

As it is, though, Mary reaches the tomb while it is still dark and does not find it as she expects. Its seal has been broken. It is empty.

So, Mary runs. She runs because she thinks the worst. Adding insult to injury, whoever it is that wanted to put an end to the thing Jesus started has arranged that there can be no observance to honor him in his death. There can be no memorial to which his followers can go.

Who says there's no running on Easter? Mary runs, as one in a panic, to tell the others. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him." Who says there's no running on Easter?

This is urgent. Peter runs, he is the impulsive one and you would expect it. But John runs; runs faster than Peter. He stops at the door, peering into the dark empty until Peter catches up and runs all the way in and sees. Then, both of them inside the vacated tomb, they look. Imagine: eyes take a moment to adjust; pupils widening, taking in the shadows; and they see. The Bible says that they see the linen wrappings still there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head rolled up and off to the side. These are not as you would expect if a corpse had been stolen. Rather, these are evidence that Jesus has left death behind.¹

John sees and believes. Never mind that all this is a mystery. He just believes. This, indeed, has been worth the run. Then Mary, left alone, stands outside in the garden. Just as Jesus had said, she is weeping. She cries the way you and I sometimes cry when whatever it is we have run from has caught up. And she doesn't stop crying until Jesus calls her by name and Easter dawns on her: he is alive.

I wonder if Peter and John *run* back to their homes. I wonder even more: when Mary goes to tell the rest, *does she run?*

Who says, there's no running on Easter? *If Easter is true it's worth our running.* If Christ has risen, illness is not the end of health. Relationships can be reconciled in the face of betrayal. Forgiveness of sin will always restore righteousness. Loss of a job would mean new options. Death would no longer be the end, but life eternal; and God can always be counted on. That's what it would be like if Easter is true. It would be worth running toward that.

How Fast Will You Run?

Throughout the year, our 8th graders in Confirmation Class work to memorize the Apostles' Creed. Then, near the end of their studies, they are scheduled to meet with me for a short one-on-one conversation and are asked to recite the Creed. This may be the reason they find the meeting so scary. (They don't realize I am really pretty easy). The traditional version of the Creed has some outdated English words; and I am inclined to help them wherever they get stuck. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. On the third day he rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead..."

That's where I stop and ask, "What does it mean, 'Jesus will come to judge *the quick and the dead?*'" At first, I pull their leg and say that you have to be able to run the 800 meter in less than two minutes. Then I explain that *quick*, here, means *alive*. Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead.

But don't let go of the idea that "quick" can mean "fast". Those who are alive are those who know there's reason for joy and run in the light of the Resurrection.

Who says there's no running on Easter? The Lord is Risen! That's our very reason to run.

¹ Gail R. O'Day, The Gospel of John. The Interpreter's Bible, vol. IX. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, ©1995. p 841.)