

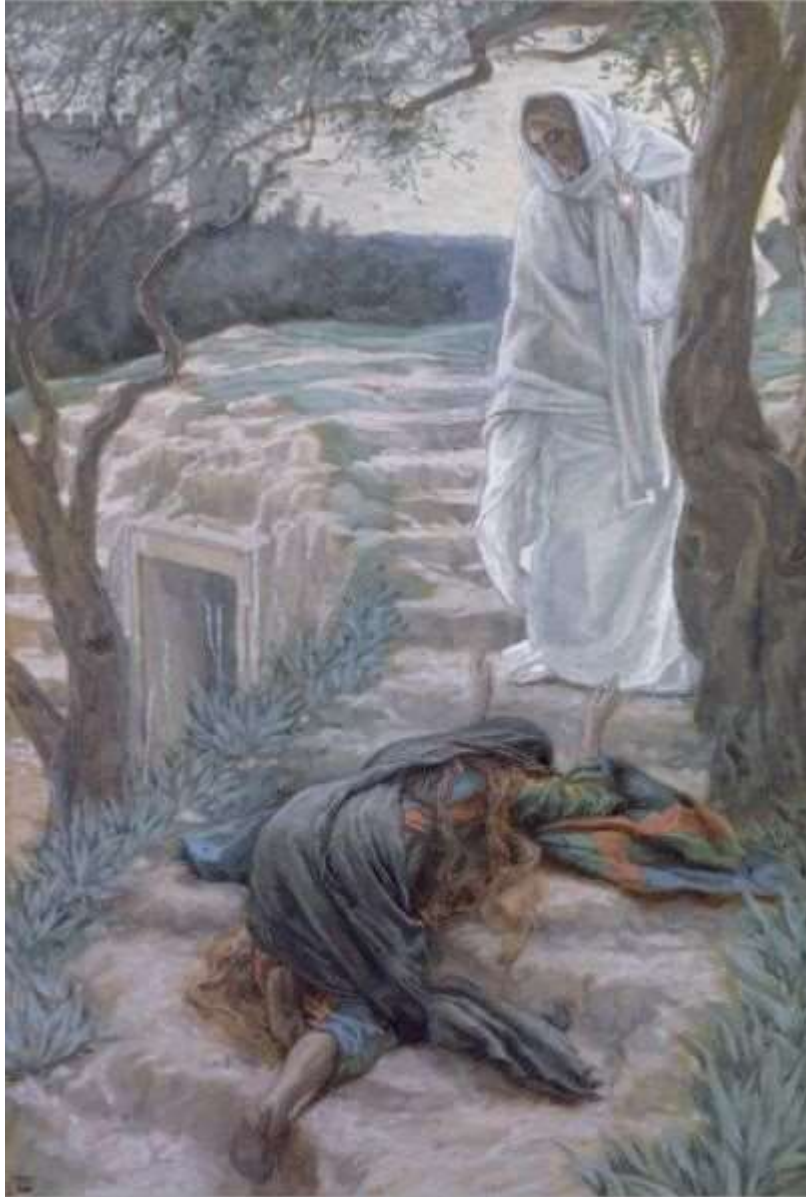
Imaging the Word

Four Meditations on John's Resurrection Account



J. Kirk Richards (American), *The Garden Tomb*, 2000

In John's account, Easter begins in the dark. Not in gladsome light but in the gloom of darkness. Mary's Jesus is dead. He doesn't just appear to have died. The few disciples present at his horrible crucifixion are absolutely sure of what they have seen. Jesus is dead. The darkness of the night indicates not only the time of day but the mood within each of their souls. It is dark, dark indeed.



James Tissot, *Noli me tangere*, illustration for the Life of Christ (c-1884-96)

You can love someone but once that person changes you may not recognize them anymore. They may be so different because death and life are different. A dead Jesus is distinct from a living Jesus. Jesus had changed clothes because he was alive and shook off the sting of death's designer attire. Death's clothing won't fit on a living God. Jesus left his tomb linen suit in the deathbed of the grave and was now wearing living clothes of light.



Alexander Ivanov (Russian, 1806-58), *Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene*, 1835

The risen, living Jesus refuses to be imprisoned in death's solitary confinement. This living Jesus cannot be controlled by our theological paradigms or ecclesial traditions embalmed in a tomb. We won't find the living Lord of light there, dressed in death's dingy clothes. Jesus is alive and on the move in the world, which is why he tells Mary "Do not hold on to me." You can't control me. You can't hold me down or hold me back or keep me dead and useless. There's too much work to do in the world. Too much interceding and healing and comforting and reconciling. Bringing peace in the midst of conflict. Love where there is hatred. Justice where there is oppression. "Do not hold on to me" with your sanctified straightjacket. Release me for the work of redemption.



Fra Angelico (Italian, 1395–1455), *Noli me tangere*

In his frescoed depiction of *Noli me tangere*, Fra Angelico takes up the idea of Jesus as gardener in a symbolic fashion. In the field of green surrounding Mary and Jesus, Angelico sprinkled little spots, little splotches of more of white and a bright red, a *terra rossa*. At first glance, one takes them to be flowers, or icons of flowers, in the field. Yet, these red blotches are painted like—that is, exactly in the same manner as—Christ's wounds, his 'stigmata':



The visual connection suggests that Christ's stigmata are, according to Fra Angelico, the "flowers" of his body. At the same time, conversely, these flowers are Christ's wounds. In Angelico's fresco, then, Christ is here represented in the emblematic act of "sowing" his stigmata in the garden of the earthly world, just before going to rejoin the right hand of his Father in heaven. For more on Angelico and the sowing the "flowers" of Jesus' wounds, see [here](#).

In what sense are the "wounds of Christ" sown in the "garden of this world"? And, how do we make sense of theologian Stanley Hauerwas' argument that it is unfair for Christians to assert that the figure of Christ on the cross is a representation of all human suffering, but rather that what Christians learn from the cross is that all human suffering should be cruciform, or cross-shaped?