

**Ahead of the Curve**  
**Matthew 28: 1-10**

Don't you wish, just once, just for a while, that you could be ahead of the curve?

Don't you wish that you could feel that life was full of exciting promises laid out in front of you instead of incessant demands breathing down your neck?

Don't you wish that your daily routine was one meaningful task after another instead of one more weight piled on your back?

Don't you wish that your financial debt was manageable? Or that time would slow down? Or that something or someone would break into your boredom or lift your constant worry?

Don't you wish?

I'm sure that not all of you are in such predicaments, but I'm equally sure that many of you are or have been...

What would it feel like to be ahead of the curve?

Well, if you were ahead of the curve, you would not be struggling to keep up from behind or chasing some impossible goal imposed upon you by society. You would be less anxious and less tired. You would be – happier.

Or, if you were ahead of the curve, you wouldn't be lost in the great swallowing swell surrounding you. You would feel that you as an individual are important and what you do in life matters.

If you were ahead of the curve, you would have a sense of what's coming in life and that you can handle it. You might even be able to set

your own agenda, as much as any of us can. And you would feel free, out from under the heaviness of it all.

**Jesus, you know, was ahead of the curve.**

The women, both named Mary, came to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. But an angel, of whom they were afraid, greeted them: “...*I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said...go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’*”

*...he is going ahead of you to Galilee.* There is a key phrase. Jesus, raised from the dead, is ahead of his disciples, out of Jerusalem, back in Galilee, their home countryside, the place where they had first come to know him.

Jesus was ahead of the curve in his earthly lifetime and in his ministry, preaching repentance, God’s forgiveness of sin and God’s love. Jesus was ahead of the curve in his resurrection from the dead, which promise is held out now to each one of us. Jesus was ahead of his disciples and ahead of the curve in returning to Galilee, the place of their ordinary daily life, bearing with him the promise that he would be with them, and therefore with us, in all of our ordinary life, forever.

**If we were attentive to Jesus’ leading, we could be, we would be ahead of the curve too.**

I’m in the middle of reading an excellent book called *Get Real: a Spiritual Journey for Men* by Derek Maul. Maul is a journalist who writes

an op-ed column for the *Tampa Tribune*. He is active in his church, and his wife is a Presbyterian minister.

*Get Real* is direct and practical, honest and sensible. Maul feeds the reader with stories of spiritual journeys, stories of how you get ahead of the curve in life by following Jesus. I want to share one with you now. I may comment along the way – I hope you don't mind.

My friend Don Zegel plays trombone for the Florida Orchestra. Sometimes when he sits on the stage, just one man in the middle of a mass of musicians, Don simply lets the music wash over him. "I feel this admiration and thankfulness," he said, genuinely awestruck. "It's one of the biggest thrills, just to be there."

In a well-known anecdote about his decision to become a Christ-follower, author S.S. Lewis described his conversion to Christianity as a gradual realization, one that he was able to narrow down to a particular journey on a bus. He said that when he boarded the bus he was not a Christian, but when he finally arrived at his destination he realized that he was.

If you ask Don the trombonist to pinpoint the day and the hour when he turned to Christ, he'll likely come up with something more like this: "In 1965 when I walked into my first college class, I was not a Christian. When I was recovering from my heart attack in 1999, I realized I was."

The unexpected cardiac event certainly captured my friend's attention, but he was quick to realize that God had in effect been speaking to him for three decades. The circumstances of the precipitating event left Don not only shaken but incredulous. He wanted to argue with the doctors. [like the women at the tomb?]

"I was saying, 'No, you're wrong!'" Don explained. "I didn't want to hear that a guy my age – who didn't eat dessert and ran twenty-five miles a week – could have a heart attack."

Surprises aren't supposed to happen to technically proficient musicians who dot all the i's and cross all the t's in their lives. Don was further insulted a couple of weeks later when a new pain led to another hospital stay, and his doctors prescribed a stress test. He was scared that he would fail, and he said he wasn't ready for that much reality all at once. He knew he was losing control.

The man in the adjacent bed – [also named] Don – was in bad shape. Yet as visitors came and went, the musician became aware that his counterpart was alive, compassionate, and more concerned for other people’s lives than his own. The man was obviously devout and at peace; faith was his sure companion. [Christ was alive in him; Christ was ahead of him and had taken him by the hand]

“I was in a panic that I might fail the stress test,” Don said, still bemused at his own need for control. “The more I thought about it, the more nervous I became. I started to freak.”

Eventually, Don buzzed a nurse and asked for medicine to help him relax. Her response was priceless. “I’ll bring you your Xanax,” she promised, “but drugs or not drugs, we need to talk. If you take that Xanax without talking to me, you’re going to fall asleep – but everything you need to talk about is still going to be in there.”

So Don the trombone player poured it all out. The worries, the fears, the injustice of it all; his need to be in control. “She was an angel,” he said. “I really mean that. Right then and there I started to cry; I mean I started to sob. She listened and said, “You don’t live alone on this planet.” [Jesus has been there already, in the place Don was in]

“I was really ashamed,” he continued, “because the other Don turned out to be concerned about me. A week later I read that he had passed away. It was obvious that his whole family had great faith. This guy was so strong and so at peace.” [could you say that the hospital Don was Jesus for the musician Don, going ahead, showing the way to be a patient and to be patient?]

The experience placed everything in perspective.

“I had assumed that by this point in my life I would be principal trombonist in one of the big orchestras,” Don said. “But what I have learned to realize is my purpose in relation to creation, my purpose in terms of why God gave me these particular gifts, and what he wants me to do with them.”

Don had already visited church a few times as a guest musician. I don’t routinely go to the hospitals, but I felt strongly led to visit him during his stay.

“I told the pastor I wasn’t sure enough,” he told me, “and that I didn’t think I had enough faith to be a Christian. But she said if I was ready to make a commitment, then Christ was willing to meet me right where I was. Jesus didn’t let me down.” [you see, Jesus was already there in Don’s Galilee, waiting for him]

Don now understands his lifelong journey more and more in the context of the language of faith. “It makes so much more sense,” he said, “when it is all about God and not all about Don Zegel.

“I now realize,” he continued, “that I have enough ability to do whatever I am called to do. It just hit me one day: it’s not about what I want; it’s about what God wants for me. That makes everything all right.

“I’ve learned that my job doesn’t make me any more valuable than any other person, and that brings a lot of freedom. Even if I had one of these absolutely major jobs, I wouldn’t be free unless I realized that the guy who helped me find the #1 screws at Home Depot was every bit as important to the workings of the world.”

Like someone who always wakes up with fresh eyes, Don emanates a sense of wonder and a quiet peace. He talks about the orchestra with awe, reflects on his faith with deep gratitude, and regards his family with consummate love.

He is that grateful now, that much at peace. (Maul 53-55)

I could tell you other stories not unlike this one, stories about people in this very congregation who have come to understand **that there is nothing in life that Jesus has not already experienced ahead of us. That because of Jesus we are not alone, that because of Jesus, we can live with hope and courage, ahead of the curve.**

The great curve in the road of life is sin and death. And the great story of Easter is that Jesus overcame sin and death. He has been there; he has done that, and so shall we all.

Maul, Derek. *Get Real: A Spiritual Journey for Men*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2007.

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