

John 20: 1-18

Raised to New Life

Years ago, when our children were teenagers, we made a trip to Disneyland in Los Angeles during the school spring break. There was a wonderful and unexpected moment as we got on a large tourist bus taking us to Universal Studios and I heard my name. Not just my name, but my name said by a voice I recognized. There sitting just seats across from us was my eldest son's former grade six teacher and her family. By this point the teacher had moved on to another community, so I had not seen or spoken to her in some time. On top of that, I had also been her son's piano teacher. We talked all the way to our destination. We never saw them again on our trip or since, but that moment of recognition brought joy and connection. So much so that I still remember it today some twenty some years later.

Going to a class reunion can have the same moments of joy as you recognize or are recognized by someone you haven't seen in years. Even weddings, funerals, or gatherings to remember someone who has passed, will have moments where long-time separation of friends or family due to distance or just plain busy lives has one greeting another by name.

Hearing our names, being able to call another by name, means connection. It means there is a relationship. It may or may not be a deep connection but there is still something that binds people when their name is spoken. It means that you have been important enough to be remembered and recognized. To be recognized means that you are known to another in some capacity.

There is a verse in chapter 10 of the Gospel of John where Jesus says to his disciples, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."¹ (John 10:27).

Now, hold onto those words of Jesus as you think of hearing the voice of someone you know and recognizing it, even without actually seeing the person. Not so hard to do as we are able to achieve that on the phone all the time. And keep that verse in mind as we delve into this resurrection story. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

The resurrection story in each of the gospels are told in slightly different ways, with an emphasis on different parts of the story or with details that may be in one account but

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not another. This should not surprise us. Each of the writers shared their stories with different audiences, each had their own memory of the experience and the stories that were told. Just like you and I could each go to the same play, concert, or worship service, and take away different highlights and lowlights, things that we would love and things that we just didn't even notice.

And today, though I could weave a sermon around any one of the characters of Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, the unnamed disciple that Jesus loved, the angels, or Jesus himself, from John's gospel story, the one character that has my attention is Mary.

We are given many details about Mary in this retelling of the resurrection story. Mary came to the tomb on the first day of the week, while it was still dark and she saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. Consider how you would feel or what you would be thinking if it had been you that came upon this unexpected scene. You have come to grieve, to mourn, to be alone in your sadness and your tears and you are jerked into another reality. The tomb is open. What has happened?

In Mary's case, she runs to Simon Peter, and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and says to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." (v2) She went to grieve and finds that Jesus' body is gone. Is this a conspiracy? Her first thought was that someone had taken the body and the thought of not knowing what had happened or where the body was...well it is too much.

The two disciples go running to check it out and they have their experience, and their story, but for the moment that it as far as they go. They head back to their homes. One would be led to believe they didn't share it with anyone else, or at the very least their stories have been shared very privately. And the scene returns to Mary. She has not gone back home. She remained. Her grief was deep. She was deeply distressed. Tears streamed down her face.

Think of the trauma of this whole event. She has witnessed it all. She was there when Jesus hung from the cross. She was there when he cried out to God from the cross, and she heard Jesus take his last breath. Unlike other disciples who had scattered, she and other women stayed, witnessed, and felt their hearts torn from them in their grief.

On this morning, Mary just wanted to be near to Jesus and the closest she was going to get was outside the tomb carved from the rock. This action is not unlike anyone who goes to a graveside to remember in order to just feel a little closer to the person they loved. And she is confronted with an unexpected and to her, horrifying realization...the stone has been rolled away. Confusion and grief, fear and anger, all coming together. All of it was so over the top that she doesn't even seem to question the fact that she sees two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying. She doesn't run off or tremble in fear as they speak to her, which in scriptures most often what happens with the appearance of an angel or angels, which is unlike the comfort we perfect to think of when it comes to angels.

And the angels question her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Her answer, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” (v13).

Sit with that a moment.

Can you feel the layers of grief? Not only is she dealing with his death, but now this indignity, this not knowing. She just wants to know where he is.

Then she turned around and saw this person that we are told is Jesus, but Mary did not recognize him. She didn't know it was him. He too asks her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking? Then supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’” (vv15-16). Her concern is so great. She just wants to know where Jesus' body is. That is her only focus.

...and then, then Jesus said to her, “Mary!” He said her name! It was in her name that the voice, the recognition, the love, the hope, the connection, the miracle of it all hits her. She now knows that voice. To hear her name spoken by the one that she was seeking in death, to hear her name spoken by the living Jesus, that is everything. “She turned and said to him Rabbouni, (which means Teacher.) This is the one who has taught her so much. This is the one who she watched feed multitudes of people, teach, and heal. This is the one with whom she was connected, and he has said her name.

Remember the earlier verse, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” The shepherd is the one who tends the sheep, keeps them safe, shows them the way they should go, and searches for them when they are lost. This is the voice of the shepherd, the teacher, her Rabbi. He is alive and she recognizes him and, in that, Jesus shows that he knows her. Even in this resurrected body, he has not forgotten who she is. The relationship is restored.

She so must have wanted to hold onto him, and maybe even Jesus wanted to hold onto her, but the story is not done. Jesus gives Mary instructions. These words shared by Mary with the disciples mean that it was a woman that was the first to share Jesus' resurrection story with others. Jesus says to her, “...go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’”

And Mary does go to them, but her first words, are the announcement, “I have seen the Lord” and things will never be the same! Then she tells them what Jesus asked her to say.

Remember that verse, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” There is a little more to that as it also says, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Maybe you are someone who has heard the voice of Jesus. It may not have been audible. It may have been an experience that just had you knowing that the hand of God was in it...that God was with you. You don't forget when that has happened to you. It

helps you get through everything else that you face in life, the grief, the loss, the struggles. Some people are fortunate enough to have more than one very real encounter with the risen Christ. It may be in crisis or it might be in nature. It may be profound or it may be in the small blessings of love and light in a day. Somehow, in these experiences you know that Jesus, that God, knows your name and you recognize God in those moments.

It may also be that you have never had that experience. That is okay. Jesus never stops looking for the ones that are lost or yet to know him, or want to hear him say their name in some recognizable way. Trust that you are not alone. God is with you whether or not you realize or recognize it. Look for God in the sunset or sunrise, the wind of the storm, or the glistening of snowflakes in the sun, the trickling of water, or the warm smile or embrace of someone who cares for you or you for them.

This Jesus who spoke Mary's name and said, share with others, is the same Jesus who speaks our name and says share love, compassion, and grace with others. Share with them who I am.

You don't have to stand and shout it from a street corner. You just share through acts of justice, kindness, and compassion, but please don't forget to say Jesus' name. It means something, there is power in the name of Jesus.

Today we celebrate the resurrection, but it is only a beginning. Jesus will ascend to the Father, to be united in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Resurrection is the promise of release from death and what feels like death and loss, but it is ascension, Jesus going to be with the Father that leads to an ongoing and abiding connection and relationship with God. This story did not end with the scriptures we read in the Bible, the story is to be continued in you, in me, and always. Go and tell your story, go and tell the story of Jesus now and always.

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.