

“How Mary Grew in the Garden”

John 20:1-18

[55] Good morning. Would you pray with me? Gracious Lord, thank you that you know us and call every one of us by name. Please take these next moments and use them as you will. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

[56] Would you do me a favor? Turn to your neighbor and tell them, by name, how glad you are that they are here today to worship God. If you don't know their name, learn it right now. *[Pause for people to do this.]*

We are all in this church making disciples together, but sometimes we forget the importance of knowing someone's name. Maybe you are like me; I struggle to remember names. It's one reason I am fond of name tags. It takes the embarrassment and awkwardness away.

[57] Have you ever had that awkward moment when a teacher called you by name, but you weren't expecting it? I can vividly recall a time that happened to me. I was sitting in 9th grade biology, and my friend Jason was talking to me. We had disengaged from the class, and the teacher knew it. He called out, “Eric Falker!” and I knew at once it was not a good thing. Usually, I wanted to hear my name when I raised my hand to answer a question, but that time, it was because I had stopped listening to the teacher. It was pretty embarrassing, but I admit, he got his point across.

Names are important. Dale Carnegie says that your name is the sweetest sound you will ever hear. You know that feeling, don't you? Not when the teacher calls on you, but when you're having a conversation with someone, and they use your name as they speak. Or the second time they meet you, they smile and say, “John! It's so nice to see you again!” (Unless, of course, your name is Steve.)

Sometimes I have that awkward moment when I hear my name, but it's because they are talking to someone else named Eric. It makes me wish that my name were more unique. Like, Hermione, or Fernando, or John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt.

[58] Are there times you wish to hear your name called? At the doctor's office when you've been waiting? When mom says, “Dinner's ready!” How about

when you're just feeling down, and the phone rings and it's a friend? Or you've arrived at the airport after a long trip, and your loved one is there to pick you up? They call your name and wave and rush over to give you a hug.

Those moments of recognition are powerful. And our scripture today is one of those. As we look at John 20, a story of Easter morning, I want us to consider just how powerful it is when Jesus calls us by name.

[59] In our scripture today, Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by name. Who was this Mary? There are a lot of Mary's in the New Testament: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, who anointed Jesus' feet. There are a few others, as well. Mary Magdalene was none of those women. She is mentioned 13 times in the Bible, all in the gospels, and we only know four things about her:

- 1) She was part of a group of women who supported Jesus' ministry.
- 2) Jesus had cast out seven demons from her.
- 3) She was there at the cross when he died.

And finally, 4) according to the gospels of Mark and John, she was the very first witness to see the resurrected Jesus.

[60] Other legends may paint her with a sordid past and incorrectly connect her to other anonymous women in the Bible, but those first four facts are really all that we can say about her with any certainty. Clearly, she was in the garden at the time of the resurrection because she cared deeply for Jesus. She wanted to give his body the appropriate embalming, which Joseph of Arimathea started on Good Friday, but due to the Sabbath, couldn't be completed. It appears from the other gospel accounts that Mary was not alone at first, but returned or remained at the tomb while everyone else left.

[61] Do you find it odd that she was there alone? Why was she hanging around at the tomb? I mean, after she had seen the stone was removed and the tomb was empty, she was still there. Why? Why didn't she return to the disciples and try to figure out this mystery? Why was she compelled remain there, alone?

I think Mary was clinging to the past. The last place she ever saw Jesus was at the tomb, and she could not bear to leave. I believe this is a common problem for all of us. We also dwell in the past. We resist change. We “return to the tomb”, instead of experiencing new life.

[62] I have the privilege of officiating at a lot of funerals. I know I am there to help people grieve, and I proclaim the hope of eternal life that we have in Christ Jesus. But I am very clear with the families as I counsel them: we have funerals so that we can say goodbye. A funeral is a celebration of life, for certain, but it is also a milestone, a dose of reality, a transition. Like Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says, “To everything, there is a season...a time to be born and a time to die.” While it is healthy for us to face the reality of death, it is not healthy to remain locked in its grip.

I have a friend who lost his mother a few years ago. Every time the family gets together, they go to the grave and recreate the funeral. There is nothing wrong with marking the passing of a loved one, or even visiting a grave and placing fresh flowers, but the point is, we are supposed to grieve and heal. We still have a life to live. When we dwell in the past, it robs us of our present and our future. The past is not the place where God wants us to live. Sometimes, it takes God calling our name to move us back into the present with him.

Why is grief so hard? Because it is change. Change is never easy, and it always comes with some form of anxiety.

[63] This is where Mary was. She was lost, and the only reality she knew was the grave. Even when she saw the angels, she couldn't stop weeping. Her vision was clouded. She couldn't see Jesus, even when he stood right in front of her. She had lost her purpose, and she couldn't even find his body.

[64] It was at this point that Jesus spoke her name. I love this. Honestly, I wish I could have been there to witness the precious moment when Jesus said, “Mary!” One word. That was it. No rebuke, no ridicule, no sarcasm. Jesus did not say, “Seriously, Mary? Two angels, the stone rolled away, and still, you had no idea it was me?” No, he simply said her name, “Mary!” With one word, Jesus called Mary out of the past and back into the present.

[65] In her joy, she responded, “Rabbouni!” “Rabbouni” is a Hebrew or Aramaic word, a form of the common word “rabbi”. We know that “Rabbi” means teacher, and is frequently used in the gospels to address Jesus. Literally, Rabbi means “my great one.” Rabbouni possibly indicates a special relationship, something to the effect of “my beloved teacher.” It's something like the

difference between “Mom” and “Mommy”. Similar words, but “Mommy” conveys a slightly deeper affection.

Do you find it interesting that Mary used that word, “Teacher”? Why not, “Lord”? Why not, “Savior”? It’s not that Jesus wasn’t those things and more to her, it’s just that her first response to Jesus was “Teacher!” Maybe it had something to do with the miracle Jesus performed in her life, casting out the seven demons. Maybe she followed him all those years because she wanted to cling to every word he spoke.

[66] Mary’s response is remarkable, because it tells us something that we in the church need to remember. Jesus is our Teacher, as well as Lord and Savior. In other words, we need to realize discipleship and salvation go hand in hand. We all want to see Jesus; we all want to hear him call our names. So when he speaks, and he will, we had better listen up and be good students. No teacher is content with students just sitting in the classroom; teachers want their pupils to apply their lessons in real life.

Jesus gave Mary a new lesson. He told her not to cling to him. In my own words, Jesus meant, “Mary, don’t just stand there and hug me. Go back and tell the others what you’ve seen.” It’s not that Jesus didn’t want Mary to touch him at all. Rather, Jesus didn’t want Mary to keep him to herself. John Wesley notes it is as if Jesus said, “Do not detain me now. You will have other opportunities of conversing with me. For I am not ascended to my Father - I have not yet left the world.” (Wesley Study Bible)

[67] Jesus knows every one of us by name, and Jesus calls us daily. Maybe it’s not with an audible voice; but then again, maybe it is. The point is, we need to live like we are expecting Jesus to show up and speak to us.

Mary almost missed the resurrection. As a church, we don’t want to miss Jesus showing up, either. There are times when it will be so obvious: when we celebrate communion, baptism, Christmas or Easter. God’s Word will be revealed to us all. Those are the more obvious times when Christ’s Spirit can be felt. But what about in our ordinary, daily lives? Or when we serve others? Or attend worship? Do we feel the exciting presence of Jesus in this place?

[68] It is fascinating how Jesus revealed himself. At the first Christmas, it was to a bunch of lowly, cast-out shepherds. At the first Easter, it was to the

women, long overlooked and very unlikely to be the heralds of the greatest news ever told. If Jesus revealed himself to the plain, simple, marginal people in the Bible, how much more does Jesus want to reveal himself to us?

[69] Let us leave the empty tomb behind us. It's OK to remember it as a vision to propel us forward, however, we need to live into the present Jesus calls us into. We need to listen for his voice. We need to expect Jesus is going to show up and say our names. And when he does, we need to follow him. It will be risky. It will involve going places that might make us uncomfortable. But we can trust him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. John 10:3 says, "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

I challenge you to listen for Christ calling you and then to respond. Don't hang around the tomb. Don't keep this joy to yourself. Take the news with you. Jesus knows and calls every single one of us by name. So let us live like we expect Jesus to show up in our lives and the lives of those around us. Amen.

Memory Verse:

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God."

Reflection questions:

1. When was the last time a teacher called your name to get your attention?
How did it feel?
2. In what ways do you "return to the tomb" (dwell in the past) instead of living in the present with Christ?
3. In what ways do we miss Jesus or overlook him in our lives? In our church?
4. What is the name you are most likely use to describe Jesus? (Teacher, Lord, Savior, etc.) Why?
5. Has Jesus called your name? Have you responded?