

## **Called By Name**

John 20:1-18

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Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

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." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said all these things to her.

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On the first Easter morning, Mary woke up in darkness.  
Mary – who had walked beside Jesus during his ministry  
and seen him hanging on the cross  
and taken to a garden tomb  
and seen that tomb shut tightly with a stone...

Mary woke up on that first Easter morning before the sun – in the dark.

Do you know what it is like to wake up when the world is still dark?

I have four children - three of them three and under; I am somewhat of an expert.

My kids are about the age of those who are about 30 minutes away from an Easter-egg-hunt that we will host on the front lawn this morning [who are about 30 minutes away from a sugar crash after our epic Easter-egg hunt on the front lawn this morning]. If you asked my youngest kids what Easter is about they might mention Jesus – but they would certainly mention bunnies, and chocolate, and jelly beans. Getting up when it is dark is a normal occurrence – and they woke up this morning – in the dark – because they knew that there would be chocolate and jelly beans in the baskets at their place at the kitchen table.

I know what it is to wake up when the world is still dark, yet it is not always because my kids are the alarm clock. There are some days when I lay awake in the dark – wondering what kind of world will await my kids when they are my age with responsibilities of their own.

Do you know what it is like to wake up when the world is still dark?

Do you know what it is to wake up when the world is still dark because you don't know how to make the ends meet?

Do you know what it is to wake up when the world is still dark because today is the day you are going to hear the CT scan results?

Do you know what it is to wake up when the world is still dark because you dread facing the drudgery of your job?

Or what it is to wake up when the world is still dark and wonder if today will be the day that someone will finally take notice of you?

I think about those in Kenya last week who woke up when the world was still dark to discover that their university was under attack.

I think about those who wake up when the world is still dark and wonder if they might finally escape the addiction that torments them.

Do you know what it is like to wake up when the world is still dark?

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I wonder what roused Mary so early that Easter morning?

Did she wake before the sun, worried about her future?

Or devastated because the vision for the world about which Jesus taught had clearly ended on the cross?

Had her grief even allowed her to sleep at all?

Perhaps she set out for the tomb when the world was still dark because she was tired of just lying awake?

John's gospel doesn't tell us why she decided to go. Perhaps it was the way she needed to work out her grief. That's why people make a trip to cemeteries. Sometimes visiting the grave can help. Maybe it was because she didn't know what else to do.

What we do know is that Mary did not go to the tomb expecting it to be empty. And clearly, seeing that it was, she could not allow herself to imagine that God could work beyond the limits of her expectations.

All that a stone rolled back of an empty tomb meant was one thing: that someone had taken Jesus' body away. It was just one more disappointment in an already devastating week.

Mary went to tell the other disciples. Two of them raced to confirm the news. Yes, the tomb was empty. No, Jesus' body was not there.

But it was not yet Easter.

Mary lingered at the tomb after those two disciples went back home. She wasn't ready to face the reality of a world without Jesus. Seeing the empty tomb was one thing, but she still needed an explanation.

And it was not yet Easter.

Then two strangers showed up – strangers being God's preferred brand of messenger. "Why are you weeping?" What a strange question!

Then another stranger; one whom Mary thought to be a gardener. Finally, through her grief and through her tears, she heard the gardener call her by name. Jesus said, "Mary."

And it was Easter.

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We are conditioned, I think, to believe that the Christian faith principally consists of knowledge. That being a Christian is really about believing the right things. And understanding the truth; teaching it; defending it.

But, at least according to John's gospel, at its heart, the gift that is faith isn't about knowing.  
It is about being known.<sup>1</sup>

The way John tells it – it wasn't Easter until the risen Christ spoke Mary's name.

Up until that point, that morning was an intellectual exercise, leaving those disciples who saw the empty tomb left to guess what resurrection meant for their faith.

But Mary, weeping in the garden – believing that the powers of darkness and chaos had won – Mary received a gift. Her Lord and friend stood before her and called her by name. And with one word, Mary's faith was set free to hope, and dream, and endure past the place she thought possible.

Not because of what she knew...but because she finally understood that she was known – personally, intimately – by a God, once dead, now alive, who was not yet finished working his purposes out.

Have you ever experienced the joy of hearing someone lovingly call your name – particularly during a time when you felt hopeless or lost or afraid?

Your spouse or partner – who knows you better than your know yourself?

Your child or grandchild who thinks you've hung the moon?

Your life-long friend who has seen you through it all?

If you have experienced it, you know the grace and the power of being known.

In the earliest of churches, founded by those who were not too far removed from the experience of the resurrection, it was the practice to allow people to join the community of faith on only one day of the year.

On that day, the church would gather in worship where new believers would be baptized. The leader of the church would call each person by name, "Jerry, child of the covenant; Katie, child of the covenant; Elizabeth, child of the covenant" and then, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

And it was Easter.

Here is the essence of the good news – something for you to think about the next time you wake up when the world is still dark: the God of all creation – who was present before even day was separated from night – who flung the stars in the heavens – who is sovereign over heaven and earth – that God knows your name. That God knows your story. And claims you as precious.

I realize this knowledge doesn't sweep away the reality of those things that keep us awake at night.

There is still pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Palmer, Parker, *To Know As We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p. 60.

There is still worry.  
There is still brokenness.  
There are still unspeakable tragedies.

As much as I sometimes wish it were the case, the Christian faith is not an inoculation against the difficulties of life. Any expression of the church that pretends otherwise is not telling the whole story.

But on this day – this Easter day – because the tomb empty and was Jesus raised – we can be certain that there is life and *possibility* beyond our fears and beyond our limits and beyond our suffering. Easter is the affirmation that even in the dark – God’s word is the last word – and that word is always good.

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Listen: I don’t pretend to know all the reasons why you are here today – on this Easter when the church is a little more crowded than usual. Maybe you have come to find out why this story about a resurrected Savior matters. Maybe you are trying to make sense of your own suffering or of the world’s. Maybe you are here to give this Christian thing one more shot. Let’s be honest and admit that some of us are here with more questions than answers. What I want you to know is that those questions are not the opposite of faith. They are a part of it. Part of the mystery of what we proclaim as Christians is that we will never fully understand the resurrection promise that is central to what we believe.

No, I don’t know all the reasons why you are here today, but before you leave, to go back home, to your lives, to your work, to face the world of what you think is possible – remember this: you are known, and loved, and redeemed, by a God who has brightened every tomorrow and defeated even death.

By a God who is still working God’s purposes out for the world that God loves and that Christ suffered to save.

By a God who knows you and calls you by name.

Christ is risen.  
He is risen indeed.  
Alleluia!  
Amen.

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