

The Resurrection

John 20:1-18

(Mt 28:1–10; Mk 16:1–8; Lk 24:1–12)

20 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. ² 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.” ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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.’ ” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. ¹

Among all the Gospel stories of Jesus’ resurrection, John’s account proves time and again to be the most beloved. It has vivid detail, gripping suspense, and powerful human emotions. Moreover, it tells a down-to-earth story about something with which all sincere Christians struggle: the odd claim to have a real relationship with Jesus, even though, unlike most people we know, he has never physically stood beside us or spoken with us on the phone. More oddly still, we

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Jn 20:1–18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

believe in his risen form, even though we know that in the course of our own daily lives, dead people do not rise from the grave and walk around. **SERENE JONES**

John's account of the first Easter morning provides a charter for the Easter community, the church, that has arisen around the memories to which John bears witness. His story of the visit to the unexpectedly empty tomb furnishes a dramatic image of what kind of community comes to birth and thrives in the wake of Easter. One image is glimpsed in the portrait of Mary's confused encounter with the "gardener." John portrays the recognition as turning on the fact that Jesus calls her name. She recognizes him as "teacher" not when he initially addresses her with a question about the reasons for her distress, but only when he addresses her by name, "Mary."

This echoes up a theme that Raymond Brown observes elsewhere in John's Gospel relating to the Good Shepherd: "The sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). Thereafter the Good Shepherd says, "I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14). So, it is not surprising that Mary recognizes the risen Christ when this Good Shepherd's voice is heard calling her name.

A group of essays by James Baldwin was published in 1961 under the discerning title *Nobody Knows My Name*. The title suggests the profound truth that many minority communities, specifically the African American community, experience in the context of the dominant culture of America is not exactly that of being nameless, but rather that of not having one's name known and called. When nobody knows or calls your name, you feel you stand outside the embrace of the surrounding community. When your name is known and called, you feel enfolded in community. **D. CAMERON MURCHISON**

If we look at the character of Mary's dawning faith, we find clues to our own nature. According to John, she looks the gardener in the eye, listens to him speak, and still does not recognize him. Then, maybe when her back is turned, he says, "Mary," and the sound of his voice saying her name helps her to see him. He does not offer a general address; no, he uses a word that applies to her and her alone, a word that captures the utter particularity of her individual life—her name.

This, too, tells us much about how we know God. Like Mary, we long to be known by God—to be held in God's gaze, to be seen by God as the object of God's love and desire and care. This longing is not "general"—we do not want to be loved by some distant cosmic Lord who relates to us in the same grand way God relates to the cosmos. We want to be seen for who we are in the most intimate, far-reaching corners of our interior psychic lives, our bodies, our histories, our dreams and losses. When Jesus says, "Mary," his words travel toward these most private places in her. Similarly, when he speaks to us through her, his grace travels into the most private places of our own lives. And when his words hit home there, in that name space, John's Gospel tells us that Christ is made known.

What does this reveal about the form of God's appearing in our lives? It shows that when God comes to us in the deeply personal ways invoked by the speaking of our name, the experience is as embodied and physical as it is intellectual. As he did with Mary, Jesus comes to us not as a general idea or an imagined ghostly figure, but as a presence that reaches beyond our mind's powers of knowing and touches our lives in ways we cannot see. They are felt—tasted, touched, smelled, and heard. God is known in the muscle memory of our tissue, in the turn of lip in that garden smile, in the slang-tinged voice of a trusted friend, in the fall of the foot's arch in wet grass at sunrise. God's coming is in the world of our emotions and deepest nature—a

mark of God's presence that can sense that the world suddenly shifts into place and has meaning.

What does this mean for us—Christians living in an era where we do not truly believe that Jesus will come to us in the garden? This sounds like a recipe for fantasy, for a life of faith where we have to disconnect from daily experiences and posit a reality so utterly different, we cannot explain. There is perhaps some truth in this—faith at its best requires of us a willingness to have our most confident experiential gestures humbled. But it does not require that we exist only and exclusively in that humble space.

It means that as people of faith, we are called to attend as much to our material lives as our spiritual and intellectual lives. If Jesus comes to us through the senses, it is important that we come to church and be in a space where we physically, emotionally, communally, experience Jesus in our midst—in the taste of communion bread and wine, in the residual scent of sanitizer on sanctuary chairs, in the familiar sound of a musical selection or favored hymn that stirs us in places too deep to be named, and even in the feel of the elbow bump while we can't embrace because of global pandemic.

We do not come to church simply to remind our conscious minds that God lives and we are called to follow Christ. We need to show up so that our bodies can be reminded of him too, be moved anew, be rejuvenated, our anxieties quelled as the world shifts once again into place and Easter comes, and comes, and comes again.

When Mary's name was called by the risen Jesus, she was enfolded into the company of heaven, and she recognized the One who now lives directly within and from the life of God.

The Easter community is a community whose members have heard the Good Shepherd calling our names. We join Mary in being enfolded in that divine life and

presence. We also become a community of those who know the importance of knowing and calling the names of those whom we encounter. Whether the newest member in the congregation's life, or the latest person in distress seeking assistance from our ministries, the Easter community, the church, is reminded of the importance of speaking the names of all whom we encounter. For by speaking their names, we enfold them in community—human and divine.

Empowered by the Good Shepherd's voice, we call the names of those who cannot speak for themselves in the corridors of power, at once testifying that God knows and calls the names of "the least of these," and claiming the just inclusion of them in the public communities of which they are rightly a part. As the Easter community we call the names of all those wounded and afflicted by greed, insensitivity, and injustice, just because we hear the Good Shepherd calling those names as well. **D. CAMERON MURCHISON**

In this yearly Easter event, we enter into this shared space where Jesus meets us, calling our name, receiving our touch, calming our anxious worries, and reminding us again and again that grace is not an object to be known but a gift to be lived.

SERENE JONES²

Let us join Mary Magdalene in doing what Jesus has instructed. The proclamation of the resurrection begins with Mary's words, "I have seen the Lord."

² Gaventa, B. R. (2008). Perspective on John 20:1–18. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 2, pp. 376–381). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.