

Mary Magdalen went to the tomb, early that first Resurrection Sunday. She had seen Jesus die. There was no doubt in her mind that Jesus was dead. Death, even violent death, came early in those times. For her, this death was much too early, much too violent. She went out alone in the early morning darkness, a dark and threatening time. The darkness reflected the darkness of her mood, of her soul, for she felt so threateningly alone. Jesus was dead.

He had shown her such human kindness. But more, he had shown her the power of God in her own life, power that came from God and touched people, made them whole. No, this was not some abstract God touching nameless people. This was the God who had touched her, had driven seven demons out of her body. Freed from the demons, she had suddenly felt alive again. From that time on, she had traveled with Jesus and the disciples, had helped support them with her own money. And then she had stood there with another Mary, the mother of Jesus, as they watched him die. It seemed as if part of her died along with him.

But, in the darkness, she found that the stone had been rolled away, the tomb was empty. She ran to tell Peter and John that someone had taken the body of Jesus. And then she again returned to the tomb, the empty tomb. It was now daylight, but even the light of day could not replace the empty feeling within her. Somehow, this callous act of taking his body just drove home to her how empty she felt. For years, she had followed Jesus, she saw what he could do, heard what he said about the Kingdom of God;

believed, totally believed with all her heart that God was here, walking as a human. She knew that God knew her name, had often called her by name. But the empty tomb created the emptiness of doubt. How could God have died, died like this? How could this have happened?

Daylight lit the empty tomb; but the light now revealed two angels sitting in the tomb. They asked her why she was crying. She replied: "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't now where they have put him." Even in her shock, her emptiness, her doubts, Jesus was still her Lord. Even dead, Jesus was still Lord, Master, God. Tearfully, she turned away in sadness, bumping into a man, most likely the gardener, who asked her the same question.

And then, then that man, Jesus, said to her, "Mary. Mary." Jesus called her by name. The voice that had cast the demons out of her called her by name. The voice that she had listened to so often had just called her by name. The voice that she knew that she would never hear again gently, kindly was calling her name. And her eyes were opened and she saw Jesus. Jesus alive! And she heard, again, that voice that she knew so well telling her that he was returning to his Father and her Father, to his God and her God, a special message just for her to relay to the others.

Strangely enough, Mary brings to my mind James Bond. No, really! I often have thought that the best part of the James Bond series was a simple, short but perhaps profound, poem:

You only live twice:  
Once when you're born  
And once when you look death in the face.<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly, Mary is alive again. She had seen death. She thought that she had looked death in the face, the death of Jesus, and she grieved. Now she looked death in the face but saw life, Jesus is alive! And Mary came alive again. Jesus has overcome death. Death no longer means darkness, emptiness, doubt. Instead, death has been defeated along with Mary's darkness, doubt and emptiness. God has raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive. And now, so much more than ever before, Mary is alive.

Jesus is still casting out demons, healing the sick, providing comfort. Because he lives, he still knows us, still calls us by name. Jesus still invites us to travel with him, to see God's love in action.

After the celebration of Palm Sunday, the somber dinner of Maundy Thursday, the darkness and despair of Good Friday, today we find that the tomb is empty. We can stagger away in shock as did Mary, outraged that someone would take the body of our Lord. We can be blinded in our grief, failing to recognize that Jesus lives. We can continue to live in doubt and despair; the one who offered so much has been taken away. We can live, half alive, without hope.

But then, Jesus calls us by name and our eyes, ears and hearts are opened. We see

---

<sup>1</sup> Ian Fleming

that he is alive. Jesus calls out, telling us that we are God's people. As a shepherd, he knows each of us by name. As a shepherd, he has lived with us, he knows all of our strengths and all of our blemishes. When we are lost, he comes looking for us. He still calls us by name. Do you hear the voice? The voice that declares that our Lord lives. Do you hear the voice of our Risen Lord?

Jesus calls us by name. The sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God, calls out to God's people. He has taken all of our sins upon himself: all of our imperfections, our doubts, our aloneness when we feel that God is too distant to care. For this he suffered, so that we might hear his voice calling us by name. Because he lives, we can live. Not just live, but be fully alive, restored to a new life with God.

My wife Dorothy and her friend, Tammy were at a concert. Tammy had been the church organist for a number of years before she became involved in a different congregation. Since her departure, Tammy had lost over 100 pounds of weight. The pastor and his wife, who hadn't seen Tammy since she left, seeing Dorothy came over to greet her. The pastor's wife, who had watched Tammy play the organ week after week, looked at Tammy and quizzically said, "Should I recognize you?"

We may not recognize Jesus calling our name simply because of our own expectations. Jesus calls to some by answered prayer. Jesus calls to others through a Scripture passage that suddenly takes on new meaning, brings new understanding of the love of God. For others, it is an almost audible voice or a sudden certitude of how to act

in His name.

Some people want to hear Jesus calling, want so disparately to hear Jesus call their name, that they can't hear it. The Pastor's wife wanted to recognize Tammy but couldn't because she expected a far different woman to go with that vaguely familiar face.

The beauty of the mountains and the lilies call to us in the name of God. God has given us that unique ability to see, appreciate, beauty. Whether its massive majesty or delicate beauty, God's creation calls to us, letting us know that we are alive.

Perhaps you heard God calling your name as we read about Jesus washing the disciples feet, telling us to do likewise. For those of us who have never had our feet washed by another, God may be speaking, calling to us, in the simple, even menial tasks of service that people do for us: meals when we are sick, comfort as we grieve, even setting up the coffee hour after service each week. God transforms these simple things, done in his name, into divine acts of love. Whether serving sandwiches at the Salvation Army or teaching, or cleaning up after, a raucous Sunday School class, we become alive, offer others life, as God uses us to call each other by name, in His name.

For some people, coming to church is such a habit that they no longer hear that gentle voice, the one calling them to come and worship the Risen Lord. For others, being called to worship is a new, even unique experience when they hear God call. When faced with all the possibilities of a new day, it is that voice calling our names, that lifts time with God over all the other potential distractions. Being here this morning in

itself is a sign that Jesus is calling our names, inviting us to become alive in our acts of worship.

Let us open our ears anew, hearing Jesus in Scripture and song, in acts of love and service, in meditation and prayer. Then let us call to others in the name of Jesus, so that they might have the joy, the confidence, of realizing that Jesus is alive. Jesus is calling to them and to us. So that we all might be fully alive in Christ.

Yes, Jesus calls us by name. Jesus calls all the people of God, the doubters, the tempted, the blind and outsiders, the crowds and those who feel alone. All of God's people are called by name, called to new life with the Risen Christ.

God's people have faced death, the death but also the resurrection of Jesus, and because of this, they are alive, fully alive.

Praise God! Amen.