

April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

John 20:1-18

"Called by Name"

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"It is not easy being six years old. Not easy at all." That is what Johnny thought as he grumbled at having his hand held as he was dragged through store after store at the mall. Then, finally a moment of reprieve. His mother needed two hands to hold up a piece of clothing. "Freedom" he called out to himself in his head. He did a quick 360 to survey what surrounded him to see if there was anything interesting at all in this place. "Blah! Nothing!" He wandered a few steps in search of adventure. Still nothing. "Shoot. This whole place is so boring!!!!" Johnny reluctantly turned around to return to his mother's side so he could whine about when they would go home.

But whatever direction he turned, she was not there. She was not there. He stood on his tip toes. No sign of her. She was not there. Johnny's heart started to race. He ran a couple of steps in one direction. He could not see her. He tried another direction, nearly running into someone. He still could not see her. He felt scared and angry and confused. Johnny's tiny hands clenched into fists and tears started to well up in his eyes. Over and over again in his head the words, "Where is she? Where is she? Where is she?" clanged inside of him. He closed his eyes tight and was about to curl up in a ball on the floor.

And then a different sound snuck through the anxiety and fear inside of him. No, it wasn't the general noise of the store, it was something else. "Johhny...Johnny...Johnny, where are you???" He opened his eyes and ran to the sound of his mother's voice, flinging himself headlong into her arms. The relief and joy rang through his entire being.

There is so much action in our gospel lesson this morning. Mary coming to the tomb. Mary running from the tomb. Peter and another disciple, who is John, racing to the tomb, seeing and believing and leaving. Mary weeping and begging to be told where Jesus is. Mary and the risen Jesus reunited. Mary's return to the disciples proclaiming "I have seen the Lord." So many twists and turns and intriguing details to the story. But all I can ever focus upon, in John's telling of the resurrection, is Jesus calling Mary by name.

Those of us who are adults do not get lost like six-year-olds in the mall. But we can and do get lost in other ways. We get lost like Mary does when she is engulfed in grief. We can get lost when someone we love dies. We can get lost when a relationship fails or is struggling. We can get lost when the plans we had for our life take an unexpected turn. We can get lost when we wake up one day having everything we thought we wanted but realize there is still a deep ache of unmet need within us. Our getting lost is not so much about not knowing where we are but losing track of who we are.

And when we lose track of who we are there is nothing quite like the beacon of someone who knows us deeply and completely calling our name, inviting us back to ourselves. Facing an empty tomb and the death of Jesus, who had transformed her entire life, Mary did not know who she was anymore. Her eyes

were clouded with devastation, so much so, that she could not recognize herself for Jesus right before her.

But when Jesus knowingly calls her name she is brought back to herself. She not only recognizes Jesus she recognizes herself once more. When Jesus calls her name he speaks it with an understanding of who Mary truly is. He knows her joys and her sorrows; her victories and defeats; her gifts and her weaknesses. He knows who she is; who she really is. Through his death on the cross, all the way onto resurrection, Jesus carried all he knew of her with him.

We have an innate need to be called knowingly by name by both the people who are most important to us in our lives and by our God. If we are blessed we have people in our lives who know us well, and heck, are still willing to put up with us. God bless them and their patience. But no person knows all of who we are, every minute of our lives; every hidden hope and private loss; every thought and dream and worry ever born and carried within us.

When Jesus, who died on the cross for us, lovingly calls us by name, there is not a single thing about us that is not known. The very best of us is known, every time we have been generous and kind and thoughtful. And the very worst of us is known, every time we have been selfish, and unforgiving and thoughtless. God knows every last quirk and nook and cranny of who we are and still calls us lovingly by name. Remarkable. Simply remarkable. Scratch that. Remarkable is too small a word. The appropriate word is miraculous. Simply miraculous.

Many of us, or perhaps all of us, have wondered if someone knew all of who we are would it be possible for them to love us. We do our best to tuck away and conceal all of our limitations,

rough edges and failings, for fear of being un-loveable. And this can cause us to feel lost and disconnected. Perhaps not with the same anxiety of six year old Johnny, but with an underlying sense of unease.

When the one who knows all of us and has conquered death for us lovingly calls our name, we are freed from all of those fears. And not only freed from our fears but invited to a place beyond our every limitation, rough edge, and failing.

There are so many ways we can get lost from ourselves. In the trials and turmoil of life we somehow lose track of who we truly are. Perhaps it is because we are so busy playing out the roles thrust upon us by the responsibilities and people around us. Perhaps the messiness of life just wears us down. We wander away from whom we truly are and we cannot recognize ourselves anymore. Being called lovingly and knowingly by name calls us home to ourselves.

On Easter Sunday we celebrate God's defeat of death in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We give thanks that God's love is more powerful than sin and death, promising us eternal life. But we are not just being promised more of the same old life. It is so much deeper and wider and more transforming a promise than that.

What we are offered is new life. We are being offered an invitation to be the person we truly are; the person God created us to be. We are not solely being invited beyond death and into eternal life. We are being invited to a life beyond the doubts and fears which inhibit and haunt us. We are being invited beyond all of the emotional bumps and bruises which have left us wounded. We are being invited beyond all of the ways we have compromised the best of who we are in an effort just to get by.

In the resurrection when we are called knowingly and lovingly by name we are being invited to be who we were always created to be. Our imaginations can barely begin to conjure what an exultant joy that will be. When the risen Christ calls us by name we are welcomed into a deep forgiveness where our every shortcoming is washed away. When the risen Christ calls us by name, we are welcomed into a place of steadfast hope where despair has no home. When the risen Christ calls us by name we are welcomed into eternity where death has no sway. When the risen Christ calls us by name we are welcomed into the reality of whom we were fashioned to be before time began.

If we have the ears to hear it, that call comes today. The resurrection is real today and so is the calling of each of our names by the one who knows us and loves us completely. And when we hear that call it will make the relief and joy of that found six year old boy, Johnny feel like a tiny amuse bouche, a mere appetizer, compared to the feast to which we are invited.

Mary-White come to the table. Lynn come to the table. Jim come to the table...

Thanks be to God. Amen.