

“The Sound of our Name”
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First Congregational Church Camden, Maine

John 20:1-18

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’s 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 touch 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 these things to her.

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Did you hear about the man who was visiting New York City. He hailed a cab, gave the driver the address of his destination and settled in for the ride.

As the cab was about a block away from his destination, he decided that he wanted to walk the rest of the way. So, he reached over and tapped his driver on the shoulder.

The driver screamed, lost control of the car, jumped the curb, almost hit a lamp post and finally came to a screeching halt just inches from a huge plate glass window.

They sat in dazed silence for several seconds.

Finally the driver spoke up,

"I'm so sorry, but you scared the living daylights out of me!"

"No, I'm sorry," the passenger replied,

"I just had no idea that a tap on the shoulder would be so unnerving."

"No, no," the driver insisted, "It's all my fault.

Today is my first day driving a cab.

For the past 25 years, I've been driving a hearse."

It is a good thing to laugh on this day of days when the fact of life overcame the fact of death. The invocation of laughter on Easter Sunday is a tradition from the earliest Christians communities.

A blessed Easter everyone!

I find it interesting, even instructive, that while our larger culture seems to know what to do with Christmas...babies, mangers, animals, shepherds, starry skies, and wise men bearing gifts...are all easily assimilated.

Easter is another story: We get A bunny that comes delivering eggs...and looks more like a Kangaroo with a pouch....Resurrection much more difficult to appropriate.

Tombs don't translate well...even empty ones.

The story of the Resurrection we read today from the Gospel of John shows that Resurrection was no less difficult to assimilate for the first witnesses.

Our story begins in darkness, with Mary visiting the tomb of Jesus before sunrise on the First day of the week. That's the day we call Sunday. It has been barely two days since the horrific events of Good Friday.

The fact of death looms large.

Anyone who rises and ventures out in the minutes before sunrise encounters the unique stillness and tranquility of the world.

Original setting for Easter Worship is more akin to the setting down on the harbor at 6am in the wind and rain..only sounds...still dark...barely able to see.

In the receding darkness what Mary sees sends her into a panic. She alerts her fellow disciples. They run to the tomb to see for themselves that the stone has been rolled away...that the body of Jesus is gone. They also see that the grave clothes are still there – which only adds to the mystery. If, as Mary assumed, the body had been stolen, the bodysnatchers would not have taken the time to unwrap the body and leave the linens neatly in place.

The disciples retreat from the scene....which, by now, we know they are in the habit of doing.

But Mary stays. Overwhelmed as she is by the fact of death.  
I have said that there should be laughter on Easter Sunday  
But there is room for tears.  
The fact of death looms large in this world. Good Friday is no less real in our day.

Tears belong in Easter....

Jesus meets her in her grief.  
He asks her, Why are you weeping?

Then comes the turning point...THE moment of recognition.

Seeing Jesus is not enough...Mary mistakes him for the gardener.  
she needs to hear his voice...  
but hearing his voice is not enough.  
She needs to hear her name. "Mary."

It is an incredibly HUMAN moment.  
No angelic choir, no lightning bolt.  
Just the sound of her name.

Studies show that when we hear our names, it reaches into the depths of our brains and almost involuntarily pulls us toward whomever or wherever our name has been spoken.

Our Brains have the ability to suppress all kinds of audible stimuli so that we can focus on a single stream of information...which is why we can be in a crowded room and carry on a meaningful conversation even though there is noise going on all around us.

There is one sound that breaks through all those suppression efforts of our brains. "Unlike almost any other stimulus, our own name has a special resonance....hearing your name is like a small fire cracker going off: it grabs our attention no matter what else is going on."

It's a signal that someone is paying attention to us...

Mary is awakened to the Resurrection, to the fact of life, by the sound of her name...

Revelation does not come through impersonal exchange of information...but through a mystical encounter of loving recognition.

Resurrection is not a proposition to be believed...but a reality to be encountered...as intimate and as personal as the sound of our name.

In a few minutes, you will be invited to receive Communion...and when you come, I am going to ask you to speak your name to the one who is serving you bread. So that, as they share the bread with you, they can say your name.

Everyone should hear their name spoken on Easter Sunday.

When Mary recognizes Jesus, he says...

"Don't hold on"...Don't cling to what was..everything has changed.. Not just, "don't cling" but GO and tell...go and LIVE.

Resurrection is less a place of ARRIVAL than it is point of DEPARTURE.

Resurrection is not the pronouncement of a happy ending. It is an invitation to new beginning.

And Mary became the first witness of the Resurrection. She would be the first of countless witnesses to follow...all the way to this place and time.

When Christians got it right, they became known as those who lived lives for which the Resurrection was the only viable explanation...

They lived lives free from fear, they refused to kill, loved their enemies, practiced forgiveness, showed mercy, cared for the vulnerable...cared for the poor and the sick.

Without the Resurrection we are left with no alternative than the fact of death...we equate the fact of life with the fact of death.

The fact of death explains a lot in this world...but it's not enough.  
There is too much that defies the fact of death...and when it does, it always takes us by surprise...like a tap on the shoulder...it awakens us.

The building of the Berlin Wall...not justifiable...but can be explained...we know all too well the facts that explain its construction.

When it fell: took us by surprise...in a way you could say it was inexplicable.... (As one General in the regime of East Berlin put it, "We have prepared for everything except candles and prayers.)

Apartheid in South Africa, but could be explained given the logic of racism and white supremacy...plain as day. Facts of death are enough to explain Apartheid.

When it fell, without bloodshed...it took everyone by surprise...in a way, it can be said it was inexplicable...

Bishop Tutu who, along with Nelson Mandela, was instrumental in the anti-apartheid movement, became known for this prayer which he prayed often in public:

*Goodness is stronger than evil;  
Love is stronger than hate;  
Light is stronger than darkness;  
Life is stronger than death;  
Victory is ours through Him who loves us.*

The fact of life is stronger than the fact of death.

Launching a war...threatening Retaliation, retribution....these things need no proof, no explanation...all of these ways of being make sense according to the fact of death.

What this world, this time, awaits is a people awakened to Resurrection, who choose to live boldly the fact of life.

At the heart of Easter is the proclamation that there is another way...beyond the fact of death.

The Resurrection defies the facts of death,  
it goes deeper,  
it cuts against the grain of reality to reveal a deeper truth...

it unleashes a power, call it a hope, it speaks to a longing, yearning, that is in all of us that all that is broken can and will be mended, healed, forgiven, and made whole... in our own lives...in the life of the world.

In the words of one my favorite Theologians, David Bentley Hart: "Easter is an act of rebellion against all false necessity, all cruelty and heatless chance. It emancipates us from fate, it overcomes the world. Easter should make rebels of us all."

To which I can only say, AMEN!