

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote “...*new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.*”

“It was still dark”. Mary Magdalene walks the path to the tomb. The sunrise has yet to happen, both physically and, for Mary, in her very soul, “it is still dark”. She carries a lamp, though she knows the way. The Lord has been laid there three days. In my imagination she has come before....journeyed to this place several times...to sit...to gaze at the stone....to mourn...to pray.....to curse....to cry.

Had the last three years been for nothing? What about all the Jesus had told them? The Kingdom, the startling teachings of upside-down rules, where the first would be last and the last would be first. What about the fullness of life and the unexpected blessing, when having just enough to share is extravagant bounty, and where the meek inherit the earth? Now all of these seem like empty dreams, sealed behind the stone with his lifeless body.

This pre-dawn morning, there is something different in the graveyard. As she rounds the corner....perhaps it is a trick of new light just beginning to come, playing with the shadows. She can barely trust what she sees. But no, the seal is broken, the stone is fallen away from the entrance. And her breath catches, the ground, her very foundation seems to shift below her feet.

Grave robbers! Or perhaps yet another betrayal by the authorities. Another way to humiliate Jesus, even in death. “They have taken away my Lord!” And she turns and runs to tell the others.

Peter and the “one that Jesus loved” come running to the tomb. The scripture tells us that the “other disciple” gets there first and looks into the tomb and sees the linen wrappings but does not enter. Peter, rushes in, as Peter does, and, yes, there are the wrappings and the cloth that covered Jesus’ head lying on the floor of the tomb. The other disciple finally enters the cave himself and “saw and believed”.

The term John uses here describes a different seeing that what happened initially to Mary. Mary sees what is before her and assumes a stolen body.

The difference here is one of vision. I think it’s safe to say we, in our present time and culture, tend to give preference to what our eyes physically observe. Seeing is believing, right? But what John is taking about here is vision that incorporates intuition, imagination, the mind, and the heart. Isn’t that what “believing” is all about? Incorporating all of our senses, our intellect, and our full selves in our curiosity about what’s happening in the Resurrection.

It is not until Mary not only sees, but also hears the voice calling her name, that her singleness of vision takes on the discernment of belief. Then, in her *seeing*, she is then *knowing* her Lord is standing before her. His light breaks into her darkness of grief and sorrow. And her joy is overwhelming!

There’s nothing quite like being called by our name. So often in our daily life we remain somewhat anonymous. But when we are recognized and we hear our name, we feel as though we belong where we are. I remember being at a convention in San Antonio with around 15,000 people. We all wore name tags and were easily recognized as part of a greater whole. We smiled at each other in the hotels and convention center, and on the banks of the Riverwalk. I didn’t realize just how much feeling like I belonged to that group meant to me until the meeting was over. People took off their lanyards and

then, all of a sudden, we were back to being anonymous. As I searched for familiar faces and found few, I was surprised at how much it felt like a loss to me.

So, I get it. When Jesus calls Mary by her name, it is that moment of *being known* that changes everything. A name is something intimate, at the very core of our being. Which is why it's so sweet when a loved one whispers your name. Or when an old friend calls you on the phone and speaks your name. When the right person speaks your name for the right reasons, it communicates that they know you, they recognize you, and they value you. You matter to them.

Bursting with joy, Mary goes, as her beloved master asks her to, and proclaims to the others a much different message than the one she told them before. **"I have seen the Lord!"**. Her witness is the gift Jesus sends to them as they hide away filled with fear and the shame of abandoning their teacher and friend.

In our lives we witness so much. I know it is hard for us at times to hold on to promises and faith when we cannot clearly see where God is at work. At one time or another we all have experienced what it is to stand outside the entrance to the tomb or hidden in a locked room. We have all at one time or another known how felt to be in the darkness of the cave.

And we often realize when we come out the other side, that even as the stone rolled in front of the tomb seemed impenetrable, there was always some light that seeped in through the edges and the cracks. We could see those small illuminations of the spirit and believe that we were not alone. And in those times, we find God was at work in us.

On this Easter morning we bear witness to the Light of Light come forth in glory and in hope. And we are reminded that no matter what brokenness exists in the world, God's light still shines. Today we are reminded that not even the finality of death could end God's action of Love in Christ Jesus.

Today the circle of love grows ever wider in this place. This morning Isla will be baptized into that new life that flows from an empty tomb. She will be called by name by the one who loves her beyond all measure. We will light a candle for her from the flame of the Pascal candle we lit last evening from the new fire kindled at the Great Vigil of Easter. We will welcome her with these words proclaimed through the ages to those that are born through baptism into Christ's life: *"We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood."* And we rejoice with her. This joy is a visible sign of God with us. Yes, indeed....seeing is believing.

Life springs forth from an empty tomb. What we are given is light and hope. What we receive is resurrection. You see, Easter is more than a Sunday morning in Spring. Easter is not only what God has done, but also what God is still doing, and leading us forward into new life in Christ.

As we go out from here, may we hear and recognize Jesus' voice when he calls us by name—like Mary did that first Easter morning. And may his voice, calling our name, sound as sweet in our ears as it did in hers.

**Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!**