

*You'll Know Him When He Calls Your Name*

**John 20:10-18**

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In a *Time* magazine article, Peggy Noonan wrote about “how quickly we absorb the astounding.” Noonan tells about an elderly woman she knew who was at lunch at a great resort one day before World War I began. Suddenly from the sky, one of those new flying machines, an aeroplane, which no one there had ever seen, zoomed in to land on the smooth, rolling lawn. Everyone ran out to look at this marvel and touch it. Years later, someone asked the woman, “What did you do after that?” She said, “We went inside and finished lunch” (*Time*, April 13, 1998 178).

Doesn't that say something about how we treat Easter and the Resurrection message? We come to church. We sing. We pray. We hear the good news that sin and death have been conquered because Jesus rose from the dead—that a new kind of life has come and we can share in it. We say, “That's interesting.” Then we go and have lunch and don't think much more about it.

“Then they went home” (v. 10). Probably the disciples went back home because they didn't know what else to do. They hadn't yet seen the risen Lord. They didn't understand fully what the Scriptures had said, what Jesus had told them or what his empty tomb meant. So they went back home.

But Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb. Mary was one of the first witnesses of the empty tomb. The only time she is mentioned in the Gospels prior to the account of Jesus' death and resurrection is when Luke reports that seven demons had gone out of her. She was part of a group of women who traveled with Jesus and the other disciples and helped to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:2-3).

When Mary found that Jesus' tomb was empty, all she could think was that someone had taken his body. She ran to tell Peter, then Peter and John ran out to the tomb to look at it. After they left, Mary stayed weeping outside the tomb.

The Teacher was dead. Perhaps Mary was remembering “the day that he found her and drove her darkness away” (Tim Sheppard, “He Is Risen—Mary’ Story”). But now her hopes are dashed, sorrow is sweeping over her, some of her old fears may be returning. With Jesus dead, perhaps her deliverance and freedom will die too. Will she soon be again in the grip of the darkness?

Walter Wangerin portrays Mary this way:

No, Mary Magdalene was not strong again. She was weak and helpless and sad and desolate. And now that the tears had begun, she could not control herself at all. ...She could hardly see. Weeping filled her vision with such a rain of sorrow, that all the world was blurred.

She howled like a small child lost. *Yes, Mary is crazy again, and she doesn't care. She doesn't care. (The Book of God 819-20)*

Besides all this, someone has taken Jesus’ body. Why couldn’t they leave him alone? Wasn’t killing him enough?

As she weeps, she bends over and looks into the tomb. She sees two angels sitting where Jesus’ body had been. Even then it doesn’t dawn on her that he is alive. When the angels ask why she is weeping, she replies, “They have taken my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him.”

At some time, all of us will weep beside the grave of a loved one. But physical death is not the only kind of loss. Have you ever stood weeping by the grave of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you’ve even felt that your Lord is gone and you can’t find him.

Mary now notices a man standing behind her. The stranger is Jesus, but she doesn’t realize that it is Jesus. People often did not immediately recognize Jesus in his resurrection appearances. Perhaps his resurrection body had a different appearance. They certainly were not expecting to see him. Mary may have been blinded by her tears.

Jesus speaks kindly to her: “Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” She doesn’t yet recognize his voice either. Thinking he is the gardener, she asks where Jesus’ body is. Now, finally someone can help her

find the body and she can get it buried properly. She has not yet grasped the fact that Jesus is alive.

Jesus often slips into our lives in times of deepest sorrow and distress. When we wonder where he is, he is there, waiting for us to recognize him.

One of the keys to Jesus' resurrection appearances is that he didn't overwhelm people with a revelation of himself. He left room for recognition and response and faith. He still does. He comes to us in a thousand ways. He is with us always. But he rarely overwhelms us with a sense of his presence. He wants us to trust him, to believe his word that he would not leave us as orphans, but would come to us and would give us the Spirit of truth to be with us always (John 14:18).

As Mary questions the "gardener" about Jesus' body, Jesus says her name: "Mary."

What was in his voice, what was the look in his eye as he spoke her name? Whatever it was about the way he said her name, it got her attention. She looked right at him and recognized him. She knew Jesus when he said her name.

Would you like to believe that you will know Jesus when he speaks your name? God does know you by name. God's promise to Israel is for you as well: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). Jesus speaks your name in such a way that you know that he knows you. It's very familiar, very personal, because that's the kind of relationship God wants to have with each of us.

Bob Benson told about his friend Phil Johnson who was a song writer. Phil once wrote a song called "When I Say Jesus." It's about the joy and promise and hope and love we experience when we speak his name. Phil told Bob he wanted to write another song along the same line and call it "When I Say Phil" (*In Quest of the Shared Life* 63-64).

What's it like for Jesus to speak your name? Can you picture him? Can you imagine his voice? Now hear him call you by name. He is full of joy at seeing you again, at knowing you, at seeing how you recognize him.

There's a phrase used in the Bible to describe God's people: "the apple of his eye" (Psalm 17:8). One interpretation of that is that it means, "the little man in the eye," that is, the reflection of ourselves that we see in

someone else's eye (Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Falling into Greatness* 45). Can you believe that we can be so close to God that we can see ourselves reflected in his eyes?

I can imagine Mary's face lighting up. Instead of the dead body she had hoped to recover, she found herself face to face with her living Lord! (F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*)

She exclaims, "Teacher!" She finally knew him. The truth finally came clear. Jesus had said that he is the Good Shepherd. He knows his own, he calls them by name and they know his voice (Jn 10:3-4). Mary experienced that. She becomes a model of discipleship. All of us who belong to him he knows, he calls by name, we know his voice and we follow him.

Part of the process of discipleship, of getting to know Jesus, is learning to hear his voice amid all the noise around us and learning to recognize his voice. He speaks to us in many ways if we're listening.

There will be beginning days when you think that perhaps it is just the gardener you hear. But the longer you walk together the more certain you are that the whisper you hear is His voice, that the touch on your shoulder is His touch, that the footsteps beside you are the coming of His feet. (Bob Benson, *Something's Going on Here* 140)

When Mary recognized Jesus, she tried to hug him. He said, "Don't hold on to me...instead go and tell..." Jesus has entered a new kind of existence, a new phase of his relationship with the Father. And that changes the way his people relate to him. When Jesus says, "Don't cling to me," he may be saying, "You'll see me again. I'll still be available after you've gone to tell the others." What is also implied here is that Jesus' permanent presence with his people is not in these appearances but in the Holy Spirit. Mary, like Jesus' other followers, would have to get used to a situation in which it would no longer be possible to see him and touch him as they had before. Jesus is trying to get them used to the experience of relating to him through the Holy Spirit.

Mary, the other disciples, and we, are not to long for the way it used to be or wish to return to some past relationship with Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Jesus is growing and dynamic.

We seem too often tempted to stay at some stage of growth, some point or place where we've experienced Jesus, rather than building on that and going on to all the other things he has for us.

Hamilton Wallsley was an attorney. In 1976 he was in an accident. Though he recovered well, his obituary appeared in a little monthly legal paper. That made him pause and think about his life. In church that Easter his pastor preached about the disciples going back to the old way after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus appeared to them and gave them a new purpose. Because of the resurrection, a new way is open.

Hamilton said, "This is intermission in my life." He wondered where to go from there. He and his wife prayed for weeks. Then doors began to open. They moved to Savannah, GA to live in the country's oldest orphanage where they managed seven cabins that housed 21 young men. A life began *after* an obituary (James Buskirk, tape, "I've Just Seen Jesus!" First UMC, Tulsa 3/26/89).

This new relationship with Jesus in the Holy Spirit is dynamic and powerful. God is always bursting out in surprising ways and places in our lives. He will not be contained in the past.

Jesus gives Mary a message for the other disciples regarding this relationship. "I am ascending to my Father *and yours*, to my God *and yours*." Since Jesus is returning to the Father, since his glorification is being accomplished, he can now give the Holy Spirit who makes us children of God. God, the Father of Jesus Christ, can be the Father of all who believe in Jesus (1:12) and are begotten by the Spirit (3:5). Jesus had once said to the disciples, "I no longer call you servants but friends" (14:15). Now he calls them "brothers." Because of the Holy Spirit, we can be Jesus' brothers and sisters. We share with Jesus a covenant relationship with God the Father.

Mary becomes an apostle to the apostles. She goes to the other disciples with the Lord's message and her personal witness. That's our call as well. Tell the gospel story and tell your story. If you've seen Jesus, if you know him because he has called you by name, don't cling to that moment.

Instead, go and tell everyone you can: The Lord is alive. We can know him. And that makes all the difference in our living and our dying.

A friend Nancy and I knew years ago told us about when his great-uncle died. The family was gathered in the hospital room as he died. They sang *Amazing Grace* and prayed. A nurse who was in the room had tears streaming down her cheeks and said, "What is with you people? Your husband and father and uncle just died and you're singing?" The woman whose husband had just died, went to the nurse, put her arms around her, and said, "There, there. It'll be all right." Then one of the sons spoke to the nurse about their faith and led her to Christ. What a way to die. What a way to live! Wouldn't you like to live and die with that kind of confidence and joy?

Mary told the good news: I've just seen Jesus! The two disciples in Emmaus ran and told it: We've just seen Jesus! Later, all the disciples would run out into the world and proclaim, "We've just seen Jesus! Everything is new!"

I've just seen Jesus! I tell you he's alive!  
I've just seen Jesus! Our precious Lord alive!  
And I knew he really saw me too  
As if 'til now I'd never lived  
All that I've done before won't matter anymore  
I've just seen Jesus! And I'll never be the same again!  
(Gloria Gaither, 1984)