

DaySpring Easter Sermon
Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008
John 20:1-18

Call Him "Teacher"
John 20: 1-18

DaySpring Baptist Church, Christ is risen!

We have gathered this morning, not to celebrate an empty tomb. Rather, we have gathered here to experience and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. There's a difference. It is when we hear Jesus call our name that we know resurrection has happened...his and ours. A couple of weeks ago, Lazarus heard Jesus call his name. This morning Mary Magdalene will hear Jesus call her name. Maybe we'll hear our name, as well.

Let's pray:

Jesus, we turn toward you this morning, confessing that this world has taught us that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. We have learned to hear the empty ring of such deals and offers. May we further confess, dear Lord, that occasionally, when we really stop to think about it, the empty tomb has a similar echo to it. We admit that to you in our desire to worship you this morning in spirit and in truth. It is in your name we pray, Amen.

Let's follow Mary Magdalene around on this special morning. You'll remember her. She's the woman who washed Jesus' feet with the jar of expensive perfume and then dried his feet with her hair. Jesus said the reason she loved him so dramatically was because his love and forgiveness had changed her life so dramatically.

She's the one who, early on the first day of the week, after Jesus had been crucified and buried, while it was still dark, went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She didn't know who had moved the stone, but she looked in and saw that the tomb was empty. She didn't know where the body was. She didn't know who was responsible for moving it. There was so much she didn't know. She wanted to understand. She was trying to figure it out, but it was dark and confusing and a little bit scary. She probably had some other women with her to help with the proper rituals for a dead body. I'm sure they were getting a bit nervous, too.

Full of fear, frustration and questions, they ran back home. Mary woke up Simon Peter and "the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved." By the way, it is widely believed that the disciple "whom Jesus loved" was John, the writer of our focal passage. Some scholars believe that the designation points to Lazarus. That's possible and quite interesting. But I think our text for this morning speaks to John being that disciple. I'll explain in a moment.

Running, while a sliver of light begins to push through the darkness, she makes her way to where the disciples are still in their beds, stirring half awake, not quite ready to face a third day of defeat and depression. But, Mary has some news...confusing news...disturbing news. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." (NRSV). Mary Magdalene catches her second wind and, along with Peter and John, rushes back to the tomb, drawn now by death compounded by the possibility of scandal.

The “other disciple whom Jesus loved” arrived first, followed by Peter and then Mary. John stopped at the mouth of the tomb; Peter ran straight in. When Mary arrived, she stopped at the entrance and wept.

Sure enough, the tomb was empty, just like she said. Peter noticed the linen wrappings lying there, with the piece for the head folded carefully and neatly, like swaddling clothes for a newborn. Then verses 8 and 9 tell us that “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.” (NRSV).

There’s all the evidence I need that John is writing about himself as the unnamed disciple who Jesus loved. Looking back on the incident as he writes, it takes him only one sentence to brag that *he* won the race and *he* was the first to believe, and the *others* still didn’t understand. That’s often how I remember things, too.

After a short while, Peter and John had seen enough; they went home. The disciples were *kicking up dust* when they ran *to* the tomb, but now they are simply *kicking rocks* on the way home, discussing possible explanations for the empty tomb, talking about Jesus’ teachings. No doubt they were remembering some of Jesus’ teachings differently. Maybe they were comparing notes as they walked. Perhaps they just plain didn’t like some of his teachings, feeling that what Jesus had said simply wouldn’t work in the real life of fishermen and tax collectors. Maybe they were agreeing on which of Jesus’ teachings they should retain and which they should discard, trying to get on the same page. I can imagine such a discussion. Can we believe in him, love him, yet opt out of following *all* of his teachings?

For three days they were off the hook of Jesus' teachings. They could remember things as they wished. If he was dead, so were the demands of what he taught. They would miss him sorely, but not so much some of his teachings. Peter and John meandered down the road as they walked back toward home.

But Mary didn't go home, not yet, not so soon. She stayed, weeping, kneeling down a bit to peer into the tomb. Through her tears she saw two angels sitting on either end of the death bed. "Why are you crying?" they asked (angels wouldn't know). She told them why.

Then she heard a voice behind her, outside the tomb. The man asked her the same question. She said, "Sir, if you, or some other gardener, have taken the body away, please tell me where it is." **This is still an empty tomb event for her.**

"Mary."

Her heart stopped and then started again as if she had died and come back to life.

"Teacher"

This was now a resurrection event for her.

Jesus' voice and presence answered her questions about the empty tomb and death and life.

Her teacher sent her to the disciples with the great news that she had seen and talked to the Lord. He also gave her some instructions to relay to the disciples.

The disciples would later meet in Galilee with the risen savior. As a group they would see Jesus enter the room through a closed door and join them in eating some fish. Many believed, except for Thomas who wanted to see for himself the wounds of the

crucifixion. Jesus showed him, even as around this table this morning, Jesus will show us the wounds in his hands and side.

Thomas, will you bring people to this table, showing them what Jesus showed you; teaching them as Jesus taught you?

Peter did not insist on seeing the wounds. Even so, he had a personal encounter when on a different occasion a bit later Jesus spoke to him saying, “Peter, if you love me, feed my sheep, even as I fed you.” In other words, teach my people even as I have taught you. Peter, feed his sheep, teach his sheep, here at this table of broken bread and shed blood. Teach them, Peter, even as the teacher fed and taught you.

Whether alone or in a group, the resurrection happens when we hear, sense, or feel Jesus call our name; when we know that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection apply personally. That knowing, that hearing of our name; that is the moment of resurrection. “Lazarus, come forth.” “Thomas, touch my hands and side.” “Peter do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

And then there is Mary...this beautiful soul searched around the empty tomb, until Jesus found her. “Mary, go find my disciples and tell them you have seen me.” Mary got it right. Jesus changed her orientation from empty tomb to resurrection, and her first response was to turn toward Jesus and call him, “teacher,” and then she did as her teacher instructed. She told what she had seen and heard; she acted on her experience.

We have gathered here today not because of an empty tomb, but because of a risen Christ. We gather around this table for yet another *personal* encounter that turns an

empty tomb into a resurrection. Having heard Jesus call our name, we gather to remember the voice, to remember the calling. We gather once again to remember when the empty tomb became resurrection for us. Can you hear him teaching? “This is my body, this is my blood...as often as you do this, remember, as often...look forward...” Christ is risen and class is back in session.

Thomas is here this morning with honest doubts, isn't he? The teacher calls *him* from his doubting to this table with an object lesson saying, “Touch the holes in my hands, touch the wound in my side.” Thomas, you're here, turn an empty tomb into resurrection this morning.

Peter is here this morning, isn't he? The risen teacher calls *him* from his denial to this table saying, “Let me feed you, then, if you love me, feed my sheep this same food.” Peter, you're here. Drawn by an empty tomb, leave here sent by a risen savior.

Mary Magdalene is here this morning, isn't she? She came to an empty tomb, but could not believe, dared not believe, that that was the end of the story. She came seeking at such a depth she could not, would not, cannot, bear the thought of simply walking home unchanged, having seen nothing but an empty tomb. The risen teacher calls *her* from her weeping, saying this is my body, my alabaster jar, broken so that I might anoint you with its priceless ointment, my shed blood; teaching by example from shared experience. Mary, you came to an empty tomb feeling alone with your questions. Leave here knowing that your teacher is risen.

He is risen because of his love for us. Call him “savior.” He is risen and so are his teachings. Call him “teacher,” and in so doing be resurrected to *true* Christ-following.

When Jesus arose, so did all the things he taught us...all of them. They're back on, still in effect, even the tough ones which deal with our doubts, denial, and deepest sin.

Lazarus, Peter, John, Thomas, Mary; my sisters and brothers, fill in the blank. Jesus has called your name. Like Mary, don't go home until this gathering at an empty tomb has turned into a resurrection around this table; this table that is a death and life lesson that cost The Teacher so dearly. Hear his voice, turn to him, experience resurrection, then, for the rest of your life, call him "teacher."

Christ is Risen!

Amen.

Terry W. York