

Sermon by Lex Breckinridge 4/21/19

Easter Day

John 20:1-18

Hundreds and hundreds of folks will have walked through these doors before the sun sets today and they will be hundreds and hundreds of reasons why they came. As far as I'm concerned, they're all good. And I really do believe we each have at least one thing in common, whether consciously or in the deepest reaches of our subconscious. We have all come here today because we want to hear Jesus call us by name.

You know, our deepest desire as human beings is to know and to be known; to love and to be loved. And that deep desire as human beings is to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. And that deep desire is given voice when we are called by name. One of the most powerful images that runs throughout John's gospel is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. John tells us that the sheep hear the shepherd's voice; the shepherd calls the sheep by name and leads them out. And the sheep follow him because they know the Good Shepherd's voice; the shepherd calls the sheep by name and leads them out. And the sheep follow him because they know the Good Shepherd's voice.

So we have each come here this morning, whether we're conscious so of it or not, looking for Jesus.

But how will we know when we find him? How will we know? Reflect on the story we just heard and sang so beautifully a moment ago. Of all of Jesus' disciples, the one who was constant from Good Friday through Easter Morning is Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is with Jesus throughout his long, slow death. She waits at the foot of the cross. It is Mary Magdalene who comes alone early in the morning to Jesus' tomb, to faithfully keep watch with her teacher, with her friend, even in death. But she finds the stone has been rolled away from the face of the tomb and runs to tell Peter and the others. She comes back with Peter and the other disciples, but they don't really understand what they're seeing and just go on back home. But faithful Mary remains behind. And then in this beautiful scene, she sees a man whom she first thinks must be the gardener, and the man says to her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" And then comes the moment of recognition. "Mary," the Risen Jesus says. "Rabbouni! Teacher!" she replies. In the instant that the Good Shepherd speaks her name, she knows it is him. Hearing her name called, she experiences the power of the Risen Christ in her life.

I think it's not a coincidence that each of the four gospels reports that Mary Magdalene was the first disciple to whom Jesus appeared following his Resurrection. It was Mary Magdalene, after all, who presented herself to Jesus with such holy humility for healing. We don't have any reports of any of the other disciples being so forthcoming with Jesus. (As an aside, the idea that Mary Magdalene might have had an unsavory past has no basis at all in the biblical text. That gets dreamed up 400 or so years later by Pope Gregory the Great)

She then keeps watch at the foot of the cross with Jesus after Peter and so many of the others have taken off. She is drawn to Jesus' tomb, searching for something she probably couldn't identify. Her faithfulness, her persistence, her longing for relationship with Jesus, seem to put her in the right place at the right time. The time and the place where she can recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd as he calls her by name.

So why are we here today? There's an image that we here in the Northwest know well that maybe gets at the question. I think maybe we share something with the salmon, that beautiful fish that after an eventful and treacherous journey out to sea, experiences an ineffable pull to return home. And so the salmon makes her way back upstream to the place of her birth – she is called back

So let me invite us to do something now that I hope won't feel too awkward. Let me invite you to turn to the person next to you and call him or her by name. Just look her in the eye and say her name. And then invite him to look you in the eye and say yours. Now you may very well need to ask your neighbor to tell you his name. But that's a good thing. I know this may be more difficult for those of us who are introverts, but remember we all have at least one thing in common. We all have a name.

We call each other by name in the name of the Good Shepherd, the Risen Christ, who first called Mary Magdalene by name. That's how she recognized him. On this day, may we as the community of St. Thomas reach out to each other, calling each other by name. May we reach beyond these doors and call by name all those who feel that their names are not known. And from this day forward, may we be a community where we each feel called by name – each of us loved and known in the beauty of the heart of the Good Shepherd.

Amen.