

EASTER SUNDAY

“When Jesus Calls Your Name”

John 20:1-18

All of redemptive history can be summed up in a single sentence.

- **Why would God send His one and only Son into a world of evil, hatred and violence?**
- **Why would Jesus willingly endure the humiliation and shame of the Cross?**
- **Why do we dare call the day in which the Son of God was mercilessly crucified “Good Friday?”**

“The answer is simple,” says the great German theologian **Jurgen Moltmann**. *“God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with Him.”*

That’s the message of Easter, isn’t it? **God always has the last laugh!** And Easter is just a foretaste of the laughter and joy that we will someday eternally celebrate with Him.

Now this morning on this Easter Sunday what I want to talk about is **“When Jesus Calls Your Name.”** There is an old adage that says, *“There is nothing sweeter than the sound of one’s own name.”*

Just the sound of someone calling our name can stop us dead in our tracks. Can cause us to turn or to pay attention or to come or perhaps even to tremble a bit. When I was a boy and my mother or father used my full name—Richard Mark Murphy!—I knew I was in big trouble.

Isn’t it amazing all of the different messages we get when someone calls our name? When our kids were small and at home and called out my name, I could tell instantly by just the sound of their voice the message they were trying to convey—

- That they were afraid and needed my protection
- Or excited and wanted me to celebrate with them
- Or hurt or in trouble and needed my help.

When my wife Linda calls my name, I can tell instantly by the sound

of

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her voice whether she is in an amorous mood or whether I’m in big, big trouble.

When some member of our church calls on the telephone and utters my name, I can usually tell by just the sound of their voice whether this is going to be a good call or a bad, whether they have some good news they want to share with me or bad news of some death or tragedy or crisis.

Just the sound of our name can convey all kinds of emotions—from delight to disgust, from reward to reproof.

Now this morning as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, I want to point your attention to the very first person Jesus spoke to after He had arisen from the grave. I want you to notice what He said to this person (**He called them by name!**), what it meant to that person; and, perhaps even more important, what it means for us today.

You find the record of this story in the book of **John**, the **20th chapter**, **verses 1 through 18**.

Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and I don’t know where they have put him!”

Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb to see. The other disciple outran Peter and got there first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen cloth lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying to the side. Then the other disciple also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they hadn’t realized that the Scriptures said he would rise from the dead. Then they went home.

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Why are you crying?” the angels asked her.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

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She glanced over her shoulder and saw someone standing behind her. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. “Why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

“Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned toward him and exclaimed, “Teacher!”

“Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.”

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. (John 20:1-18 NLT)

Isn’t it amazing that the very first person Jesus spoke to after the resurrection was a common woman whom we don’t know a whole lot about. We do know that she had lived a very evil life, was full of all kinds of demons, and Jesus had touched her and driven out all of these unclean and destructive spirits.

We also know that she was eternally grateful to Jesus for everything He had done for her. Most Bible scholars believe that the sinful woman in **Luke 7** who brought a jar of very expensive perfume and anointed the feet of Jesus with this perfume and her tears—tears of gratefulness—was Mary Magdalene.

And here we find her on that very first Easter Sunday lingering at the tomb of Jesus. She didn’t understand it all! She had seen Him die on the cross. She was there at Calvary grieving with Jesus’ family and friends. She had watched **Joseph of Arimathea** gather the lifeless body of Jesus, wrap Him in a burial cloth, and place Him in a tomb, a grave.

It all looked so hopeless, but something drew her to Jesus. People

said He was a fraud. People laughed at Him and mocked Him and jeered Him. The visible “facts” looked so overwhelming. He was gone, dead, His promises empty. But in the midst of her despair, she

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just couldn’t let Him go.

And so she lingers at the tomb—lost in her thoughts and questions and grief. Peter and John didn’t stay around very long. They go back home. They move on to other things, but she lingers...with her thoughts and doubts and questions and hurts and uncertainties.

She looks in the tomb. She just has to search for the truth. And God sends two angels to minister to her. “*Woman, why are you weeping?*” And then Jesus appears to her—the risen Jesus. He speaks one word to her—but it’s enough. He calls her by name. “*Mary!*”

And although she at first hadn’t recognized Him—she thought He was the gardener—and although she had no concept of or expectation of the resurrection, she immediately recognizes Him for who He is, understands that He is alive, and cries out, “*Teacher!*” Jesus! Lord.

Amazing things happen when you just linger near the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus. He steps out of the shadows and calls your name and you are never again quite the same. I want you to notice from Mary Magdalene’s experience what happens when Jesus calls your name.

First and Foremost – It Confirms The Resurrection. For three days Mary had muddled around in the quagmire of doubt and despair. She wasn’t looking for anything to really happen that first Easter morning, she was just coming to the burial site to anoint the corpse of Jesus with ointment and spices.

She was just paying her final respects to a dream and a hope that had died way before its time. But as she lingered in this place where men had buried Jesus, He called her name and she immediately knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, **He is alive!**

He is not dead and buried and gone and non-existent. He is alive! She heard His voice. She turned to Him and cried out in an audible voice, “*Teacher!*” and threw her arms around Him. This wasn’t just a vision.

This wasn't just a figment of her imagination. This wasn't just the power of positive thinking. This was a Person. This was Jesus.

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She threw her arms around Him and He said, ***“Don't cling to me, Mary, for I haven't yet ascended to the Father.”*** Folks, ideas, concepts, philosophies, ideologies don't talk to us. They don't call us by name.

When Jesus said, ***“Mary,”*** when He called her by name, when He spoke to her...it confirmed in her heart and in her mind and in her soul the reality of the resurrection.

I understand that the latest **Harris Poll** reveals that about 34% of the people who live in the United States of America do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. That means that approximately one-third of your friends, one-third of the people you work with, one-third of your neighbors do not believe that Jesus is real and alive and at work in our world today...do not believe that His promises are true and reliable...do not believe that Christianity is really relevant to their life and work and world.

But when He calls you by name, when you hear His voice, when He steps out of the shadows of life and reveals His presence...everything changes. *Isn't that what happened with Saul of Tarsus?*

In the early part of the book of **Acts**, you will not find anyone more intolerant of Christianity than Saul of Tarsus. He did everything he could to hound and harass Christians. He persecuted them. He misused them. He abused them. He had no place in his life for Jesus. He didn't believe in Him. He thought Christianity was a dangerous and destructive thing.

He would have agreed with **Karl Marx** that ***“religion is the opiate of the masses.”***

But then one day as he is walking along the Damascus Road to pursue and pour out his hatred on believers in that town, Jesus spoke to him and called out his name. He said, ***“Saul, Saul, who do you persecute me?”***

“Who are you?” Saul cries out. I mean sometimes we can become so blinded by our misguided beliefs and presumptions that God speaks to

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us and we don't even recognize His voice. But Jesus answered Saul's question. He said, ***“I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.”***

Now listen to what happens next. ***“He (Saul), trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’”*** (Acts 9:6 NKJV). It was the beginning of an unbelievable kind of transformation in Saul's life. If you are very familiar with the Bible at all, you will remember that Saul became such a different person with such a different spirit and with such a different faith and commitment in life—faith in Jesus and a commitment to establishing God's kingdom here on earth—that people said, ***“Hey, this isn't the same person. We need to change his name or something.”***

And, they did. They changed his name from Saul to **Paul**...and he became such a dynamic follower of Jesus that there are more books in the Bible written by Paul than anyone else. You see, when Jesus calls your name **it confirms the reality of the resurrection.**

Now here's a second thing that happens.

It Creates A New Relationship. *Isn't that what happened with Saul of Tarsus?* He became a new man with a new spirit and a new passion and a new purpose in life and a new name. Before that incident on the Damascus Road when Jesus called Saul by name, he had been the church's worst critic, its worst enemy, its worst nightmare. But after this incident on the Damascus Road, he became its greatest ambassador.

His relationship with Jesus changed. His relationship with the church changed. His relationship with Peter and James and John changed. Something dynamic happens when Jesus calls your name...and you recognize it is Him.

Don't you find it interesting that when Jesus rises from the dead, when He conquers death and sin and Satan, when He proves that truth is stronger than falsehood and that good is stronger than evil and that love is stronger than hatred and that life is stronger than death...the first

person to whom He chooses to appear is a common woman with a questionable past?

Doesn't that strike you as interesting? I mean I would have walked up

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to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, or to Caiaphas, the high priest, and said, *"I'm back. You thought you could destroy me but you can't. I'm here. I'm alive. You can't keep me in the grave."*

Or I would have found the biggest crowd of people I could find, some of those who were three days earlier hollering, *"Crucify him! Crucify him! Away with this man."* I would have just appeared in the midst in an extraordinary kind of way and said, *"See, you were wrong. I am who I said I was. I am the Son of God."*

Or perhaps I would have appeared first to those disciples and leaders and believers who wielded the most power and influence, the movers and the shakers, those up front kind of people who can sway others.

But that's not who He appeared to first. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene...a simple woman of faith who had no credentials other than the fact that Jesus had driven out some terrible demons in her life.

You know, I think Jesus was trying to make a point when He appeared first to Mary. When He called Mary by name, He was saying that every person has worth in His sight, no matter how well known (or unknown) that person is, no matter what his or her background has been, no matter whether he or she is a male or a female.

In the eyes of the world there was nothing significant about Mary. But in the eyes of Jesus she was incredibly significant. She was His child and He knew her by name.

You know, often when I talk to someone about Jesus they will say something like, *"Well, I'm not a very religious person."* I tell them, *"That's great because neither was Jesus!"* He was constantly condemning the religious leaders of His day because they had let their

religious rules and rituals and traditions get in the way of their relationships—with God and with others.

Jesus said one time, *"For I have not come to call the righteous (the religious!), but sinners"* (Matthew 9:13 NIV). *The Message* translates these words of Jesus like this: *"I'm after mercy, not religion. I'm here to*

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invite outsiders, not coddle insiders."

On another occasion Jesus said, *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you"* (John 15:15 NIV).

Jesus calls us by name and when He does that it means that He is calling me to a personal, intimate relationship with Him. Perhaps some of you here this morning have never experienced the joy and the strength and the assurance that comes from a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus. But the resurrection means, if it means anything at all, that Jesus has made this kind of relationship possible for you and for me.

Jesus wanted to make sure that Mary knew He was alive—so personal and precious was this relationship. And He wants that same kind of relationship with you and with me.

Now here's the third thing that happens when Jesus calls your name. **It confirms the resurrection. It creates a new relationship.**

Third – It Calls For A Response. Mary could have done several things. She could have ignored Jesus. She could have thought, *"Well this is just the gardener. This is just some guy talking to me. For goodness sakes leave me alone with my grief. Can't you see I'm hurting here? Just leave me alone with my grief."*

She could have doubted Jesus. *"Well, it sounded like Him but that's crazy. I know He's dead. It must just be my emotions or something."*

She could have rejected Jesus. When He began saying, *"Go there and tell them and do this,"* she could have said, *"Now wait a minute. I didn't sign up for all of this. I've got my stuff and my things and my*

priorities and my life. You're just asking too much."

But she didn't respond in any of those ways. Mary embraced Jesus. I'm sure there were things she didn't understand about this whole experience, but she made a simple to decision believe in Him and to embrace Him and to whatever He told her to do.

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She hurried off to the other disciples...just as Jesus had told her to do...and shared the news, *"I have seen the Lord."*

You know, when you truly hear the voice of Jesus, it calls for some kind of response. You just have to do something. You just have to tell someone.

I'm thinking right now, as I close this message, about another woman. Not a woman from the Bible but a woman who lived right here in America during the early part of the 19th Century. If you were to look at her, you wouldn't be impressed at all. She was very short, about 5 feet tall, couldn't read or write, wore cheap clothes and if she were to smile at you, you would see that her top two teeth in front were missing.

She lived alone. She has been married at one time but left her husband when she was 29 years of age. She gave him no warning that she was leaving. One day he simply woke up and she was gone.

As for her employment, it varied. Most of the time she took small domestic jobs in hotels and lodges and inns. She would scrub the floors, make up the rooms and cook. She would work for several months and then would suddenly disappear for a while. And then come back broke and look for a job again.

When she was working, she seemed to work hard, but then at times she would suddenly fall asleep in the middle of her work...and sometimes even in the middle of a conversation. She claimed it was the result of a blow to the head that she had received when she was a teenager.

Her name? Harriett Tubman! Are you familiar with that name? Harriet was born in Maryland in 1820 and started her life as a slave.

When she was 13 years of age, she tried to stop a white slave owner from beating another slave and she took a blow to the head that nearly killed her. It took her months to recover.

When she was 24 years of age, she married a man by the name of John Tubman. He, too, was a slave. But whenever she talked about

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escaping to freedom in the north, he wouldn't hear of it. In fact, he said that if she ever tried to leave, he would turn her in himself. So when she decided to take her chances and head north, she did it alone, without a word to him.

She made her way to Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, by the Underground Railroad—a secret network of free blacks, white abolitionists and Quakers who hid slaves on the run and helped them find freedom in the north. The year was 1849.

But the next year, Harriett risked it all went back down south. You see, Harriett had vowed to go back and bring her family to freedom. So she started a new life as an Underground Railroad Conductor—someone who would go and find slaves and help them find their way to freedom on the Underground Railroad...connecting them with sympathizers along the way.

So she would work every summer and winter, scrape together what money she could, so she could travel down south in the spring and the fall to look for slaves to help to freedom. She risked it all for others because she had tasted freedom and nothing in this world tastes quite as sweet as true freedom.

Over the course of next 10 years Harriett guided out of slavery more than 300 people...many of them members of her own family. She made 19 trips to the south in all, plus another 11 trips all the way up to Canada, the end of the journey where freedom was guaranteed, thus earning her the nickname *"Black Moses."*

You see, when your life has been set free...you just have to respond in some way. Mary went to the disciples with the news, *"I have seen the Lord!"* Who are you going to tell? What are you going to do with this incredible news? Jesus says, *"My sheep listen to my voice"* (John 10:27 NIV).

In the midst of our noisy world, if you will linger a bit at the foot of the cross and the empty tomb, she will step out of the shadows and call your name? *Have you heard Him...I mean really heard Him?*