Known and Loved

Easter Sunday

It has been a year since our lives changed dramatically due to the virus. A lot has happened since then. Perhaps there is a sense of nostalgia or grief, of sadness and even anger as we may think about our losses since then. For many of us, it is hard to know what to do, how to feel, how to think when everything happening around you does not make any sense. Many of us have experienced this, and sometimes we are tempted to give up and stop believing that life would get any better.

Why wouldn’t we? How couldn’t we? Under our circumstances when we look to the past is difficult to imagine a better future. But there is always a future.

This morning, that is why we are here, to remember that there is always a future. To tell each other that we are not done because God is never done with us. If there is one thing that we can trust, it is God’s grace and provision for our lives.

The events that took place 2000 years ago are our hope for today and forever. Jesus was killed, but the Spirit of God resurrected him from the dead.

Today is that day of the resurrection of Jesus. Today we are reminded that there is always a future, and with it, hope.

A lot of things happened that day of the resurrection, and this morning, I will focus on one story about a disciple of Jesus, a woman named Mary Magdalene, and what happened to hear that morning.

In our Scripture reading of John 20:11-18, the apostle John sets the scene**: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed.”** Then, John tells us she ran to share the news with the others.

After Mary went to report to the disciples, they came rushing to the tomb, and when they arrived, John says that “They saw and believed,” “yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” The disciples returned home confused, saddened, and unsure of what would happen next.

But Mary wasn’t ready to let go just yet. Mary stays behind, weeping while she examines the emptiness of the tomb, making sure that no detail or clue goes unseen or unexamined—desperately searching for some shred of evidence, grasping for even the faintest possibility of a miracle. And, while she searches, we can see her desperation to find hope—we can hear her thoughts yelling aguishly loud inside her mind, “Where is he!?”

I think many of us know what is happening here. We have all had similar moments to the one Mary is experiencing at this time—particularly lately. Moments of significant loss and confusion, sadness and anger when we have found ourselves desperately searching for God, only to be met with nothing—so it seemed.

I believe we can see ourselves in Mary. We see her distress, and it is like a mirror. Mary Magdalene is experiencing bewildering grief in the face of great uncertainty. What’s next?

Can you imagine Mary stumbling as she searches for Jesus, for answers, with her tears making it difficult for her to see? But as she was looking into the tomb with her tears pouring out, she sees two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been resting, and they ask her why she is weeping, and she says, **“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”**

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. She thought it was the gardener. And desperately hoping that he would know something she didn’t, she asked him, **“If you know where he is—if you’ve taken him somewhere else—just tell me where and I will take him myself.”** It’s as if she was saying, “If you just tell me what to do or where to go, I’ll do it!”

And that’s when it happens: Jesus calls her by name! “Mary!” And when she hears it, she is overcome! She cries out, “Teacher!”

Mary heard Jesus’ voice! The voice she did not recognize before until it spoke her name, and as she listened, she was free of the grief and began to feel the great joy that we are to feel this day and always: the joy of knowing we are not done because God knows us and loves us. We are known and loved. God loves us and calls us by name.

This reminds me of the Scripture in Psalms 147:4, where it says, “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.” **If God calls the stars by their name, what do you think God would for each of us?** Everything. **God knows your name.**

I believe that the same thing that happened to Mary Magdalene can happen to us too. Jesus is still calling people by their names, and he is calling you today to remind you that you are not alone, that he is right there beside you. You may not recognize him sometimes because you are not looking for him or because you are overwhelmed by your grief and disappointment, but if you pay attention, you will hear Jesus calling you by name, and you will know he is there. Do you know what that means? **That everything will be fine, that you will be ok.**

This story of Mary Magdalene is an encouraging story about finding hope. It is a story that brings us face to face with the depths of our own life experiences. Her story is a medley of the human experience—grief and joy, uncertainty and affirmation.

Here is our challenge: this world seems so filled with much confusion, temptation, distractions, and fears that we stop paying attention to God’s presence in our lives, and it is hard to remember the light when everything seems so dark.

But, here is also the good news: **when we hear his voice calling our names, it is then that we realize the truth of his word; it is then that we can lay hold to the promised joy of knowing we are known, we are loved, and we are not alone, that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5)**

Today is such a day, a day to remember that God is with us. Today we are reminded that Jesus is calling us by our names. Today we are reminded that Jesus’ love for us has conquered our enemies. Today, we remember or are learning for the first time that in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, love, hope, and peace will ultimately prevail!

Let this day be filled with the sound of Jesus’ voice. Let our Savior’s voice speak through the words of scripture and prayer. Let our Savior’s voice sing through the notes of the music. Let our Savior’s voice call us gently by name and increase our joy with the knowledge that **his sacrifice and resurrection save us, and we are promised a future.**

Friends, if any of you feel weary from your battles, needs, and burdens, please be encouraged on this day. Let your weariness, confusion, and doubt fall away by knowing you are known and Jesus, the Resurrected Christ, loves you.