

## He Calls Your Name

Series: Hanging On in an Upside-Down World

John 20:1-2, 11-18

April 4, 2021

Again, I want to welcome you to Germantown United Methodist Church on this Easter Sunday. This is the biggest, most important day for Christians. It's not Christmas, even though that celebrates the birth of the Son of God. You see, there have been thousands, maybe tens of thousands of "messiahs" born, but only One was crucified, then raised from the dead, and is alive today. Only One! Jesus came back to life. He defeated death and the grave. So, this is a great day, and I am so glad you are here to share it.

There is something else that occurred on Easter, and that is that He restored the opportunity for you and I to be what God intended us to be way back in the Garden of Eden: paradise. A victorious life in intimate relationship with God.

But that's not how it felt that first Easter. Friday through early Sunday morning, it didn't feel like a victory at all. In fact, it felt like the worse defeat ever. The itinerate preacher and healer from Galilee, of whom story after story was told of His power and teaching, was brutally crucified on a Roman cross, yet another so-called Messiah who seemingly turned out to be a fraud.

For some of the general population, it was just another subjugation by the government; for others, another disappointment for a life with a long line of disappointments.

Then there were His followers.

Somewhere, the leader of the group Peter, was holed up, out of sight, devastated by the sequence of events over the past couple of days. He had been the only one of Jesus' followers who had the courage to stand up in the boat, get out, and actually walk on water. He had boldly proclaimed on Thursday night that Jesus could count on him. But then a short time later, when everything was on the line, when he had his chance to stand up for his Master, he choked. I mean, come on. It wasn't the high priests or the Sanhedrin who asked him in the courtyard if he had any dealings with Jesus, if he knew the accused. It was just a bunch of folks hanging out around the fire on a cold night. But Peter could see their inquisitive stares and quiet conversations between themselves. Then finally a nobody, a servant girl, asked him, "Hey, the guy in there. Don't you know him?" Peter categorically denied any relationship, and before he knew it, two more denials were added to the roster before the predicted rooster's crow. Peter, the Rock, became a lump of Jell-O, and quickly escaped, in part before more than questions could be directed towards him, but mostly because he had failed. He was devastated. His world was turned upside down.

Another was Mary Magdalene, who witnessed the horrific scene of the torture and execution of her "Rabboni." Her life before she met Jesus had been one of societal alienation and destructive behavior. He was on a preaching tour when their paths crossed, and that encounter changed her life. Mary, along with some other women, financially supported the needs of the traveling Holy Man and His disciples.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Jesus made a life-altering impact on Mary. But, as she watched the final moments of

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 8:1-2

Jesus' life, then the disrespectful spear in His lifeless side, her heart and mind were broken in grief. She followed the men as they took His body to a garden tomb and roll the stone into place. Her world was turned upside down.

John, the son of Zebedee, was the only one of the crucified man's disciples with courage enough to venture out on that Friday, and what did he get for his bravery? Nightmarish images. He watched as Jesus hung from a cross as a common criminal and suffered unspeakable pain. He saw the grotesqueness of this agonizing form of execution. He tried to vicariously breathe for his Master when it was clear no more breathes would be taken. He watched as a soldier desecrated the body with a spear into the side and was startled to see blood and what appeared to be water gush forth. He stood by and tried to comfort his "new mother" Mary as she held her first born son's head in her arms. He helped carry the lifeless body into a borrowed tomb and rolled the stone over the entrance. His world was turned upside down.

All those who followed Jesus of Nazareth had their worlds turned upside by His crucifixion: the rest of the disciples, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, plus others whose names are long since forgotten. Followers of Jesus who thought that certainly here was a leader, the Messiah, dare they say, the Son of God. But now He was dead, and with Him much of their hopes and dreams. Their worlds had been turned upside down.

What happens when your world turns upside down? When your marriage or family is disintegrating? When the doctor's report provides only bad news? When you are just barely getting by? Life seems to be blocked repeatedly by obstacles and detours and troubles. At times, it seems as if the earth itself seems to be groaning and shifting from the strain.

Today, we know how the Easter story goes. Though the Sabbath Day suggested that evil had won, Easter Sunday came, and along with it, the Resurrection. Jesus is alive.

In the many, many encounters after the resurrection, Jesus helped people out of their upside down worlds. How did He do that? What did He say? Can we learn how to handle the issues, disruptions and complications of life? Can we discover how to face our topsy-turvy society? Can we find out how we can hang on in an upside down world?

For the next 8 weeks, we are going to be answering those questions in our series "Hanging On In An Upside Down World." I want to invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin, or if you are online, grab your spiritual journal and take notes.

What is the most important word to you? A teenage girl was teaching the 4-year-olds at Vacation Bible School one summer. The first day she gave everyone yarn necklace nametags to wear around their necks. After the recreation time, one little girl, whose name tag had slipped behind her, came running up to the teenager and excitedly proclaimed, "Teacher, Teacher, I lost my price tag!"<sup>2</sup>

Your most important word is probably your name. Hopefully, it was the first word you learned as a baby. Hopefully I said, because you don't want to be like the little boy who was in his front yard playing with his dog. A neighbor on a walk passed by and asked the little boy his dog's name. The little boy smiled and said, "His name is 'Bad Dog.'"

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra Hanson, Rosemont, MN. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."

Your name is the most important word for you. Gary is my most important word; it's not yours, unless you are Gary Smith or any other Gary. It is the word that we can overhear from distance conversation in a crowded room. It is the word that we love to hear announced as part of an accomplishment.

Your name is very important. It is the name that your family gave you. Your parents spent a great deal of time, and possibly even money for books on names to decide your name. Sometimes your name was given to you because of the legacy of another person. Maybe they named you for a character trait they hoped you might have or demonstrate.

But imagine that the only name you heard were bad names, demeaning names, like stupid, ugly, fat, loser. I heard about a guy who was named by his parents "Winless Kid." What do you think that did to him? I will tell you: he lived up to his name; he died from a drug overdose.

Folks, that first Easter Sunday, things happened, lives were changed when a name was called. I want us to look at John 20:

*Early [Easter] 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!..*

Let's skip to verse 11:

*[Mary later returned to the tomb. As she 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."*

*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."<sup>3</sup>*

The Gospel writer John's account of the resurrection of Christ is a quiet event that takes place in the stillness before dawn. The other Gospels tell of three women who went to stand outside a small garden tomb.

But John likes to place the focus on persons whose lives have been changed by Jesus, so in his account of early Easter morning, Mary is central in the story. Jesus had healed her of seven demons.<sup>4</sup> She accompanied the disciples and supported the group

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<sup>3</sup> John 20:1-2,11-18 (New Living Translation)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 8:2

financially. We can picture Mary with her arm around Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. While all the disciples except the beloved disciple fled, she stood steadfast. On Sunday, she hurried to the tomb "while it was still dark" and found that the stone has been removed. She went and told Peter and John, then returned once again. When she did, she looked in and saw two angels in white who greeted her and lit up the tomb, sitting at either end of the place where Jesus' body had been laid. They called out to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Enveloped by a cloak of depression and hopelessness, she said: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

The angels did not shake her sorrow; they could not break through her despair.

But then there was another presence as Mary backed out of the tomb, stood up, and turned around. "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" We know that it was Jesus who was asking the question, but she didn't. She supposed this stranger to be the gardener or possibly the thief who had stolen Jesus.

Her face was wet and dirty. Her hands, clothes, and knees covered with sandy grime. Trying desperately to make sense, she babbled to the stranger her situation. Gesturing to the tomb, she pleaded with him to tell her where the body of Jesus had been placed so that she could take it away.

He responded with one word: "Mary!"

When Mary's world was upside down, the first thing Jesus did to help her was call her name.

When your world is upside down, here's the first thing Jesus will do: **He calls your name.** Why does He do that?

**First, to comfort.**

As I got home on Thursday night, there was an ambulance and fire truck down the street from us. I parked my car in the garage and went to the scene, not in some curiosity, but because the call of Christ led me to compassion. I found the emergency vehicles in front of the home of Gary and Nancy Dickerson, friends of ours who are also fellow believers. I asked a fire fighter if everyone was okay. He said they were; it was a chimney fire. I was then able to talk with Gary and confirm they were okay, and told them we were praying, and if they needed anything, to let us know, then sat and talked with them the next day.

When a friend is near us following an accident or tragedy, we experience comfort. We'll receive a hug or comforting words. Yet, the greatest comfort is when Jesus comes beside you.

He spoke one word to Mary. It was the word of comfort, the word of life, the ultimate word of love. He said, "Mary!" He called her by name.

The Bible says that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. "I know my own and my own know me."<sup>5</sup> The Lord knows us personally and individually, by name. Why? Because we are now part of His family. We're family, and we are loved.

When your world is upside down, Jesus comes to you and calls your name to comfort you.

**Second, Jesus called Mary's name to get her eyes off the tragedy.**

Look back at John 20. Verse 1 tells us that while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away. But

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<sup>5</sup> John 10:14 (NRSV)

noticed what it doesn't say. She didn't look in. After informing Peter and John, she went back. Verses 11-13:

*Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, 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."<sup>6</sup>*

Mary was stuck at the tomb. It is the only thing she could look at.

We're the same way. We have the images of the planes hitting the Twin Towers still burned into our memory. And when there's tragedy in your own life, it is ever worse. You look endlessly at it. Maybe it's your loved one's body. Maybe it is the divorce papers. Maybe it is the termination notice, or the "Dear John" letter.

When our world's turn upside down, it is hard for us to stop looking at it. Our eyes seem glued to it as if there is nothing else left in the world.

So, what did Jesus do? He called her name, "Mary." It turned her attention away from what she thought was the worst thing ever.

And that's what Jesus wants to do in your tragedy, even if He has to take you by the shoulders and say your name. Jesus wants to get your eyes off your tragedy, else you will never do the third thing.

**Jesus called Mary's name to focus on Jesus and change course.**

Verses 16-18:

*"Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "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, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus changed Mary's course. No longer was she to cry about what was or was not in a tomb. He was alive. Look at Him! Now it's time to tell others about it, and that's exactly what she did. She went and told the disciples He was risen.

I saw a picture of a woman protesting the exclusion of women from church pulpits. She was carrying a sign that read, "Woman have been called to share the good news since the empty tomb." Mary became the first evangelist of the resurrected Lord.

"I have seen the Lord" is the cry of every person who has found Christ and accepted Him as their Savior.

"I have seen the Lord" is the testimony of every person who has discovered the abundant life found only in Christ.

"I have seen the Lord" is the declaration of every person who shares with another what Christ has done in their life.

Folks, when your world turns upside down, you need Jesus. In the midst of your confusion, despair, and chaos, He is calling your name – your beautiful name – to comfort you, to get your eyes off the tragedy, and focus your attention on Him and what He is about to do.

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<sup>6</sup> John 20:11-13 (NLT2)

<sup>7</sup> John 20:16-18 (NLT2)

Jesus is still calling your name. Your wonderful name. It's the name that you love hearing called out when you return from a trip and you get home and they call you by name. He knows what it takes to begin to unlock you from your upside down world.