

CAN YOU HEAR IT?

John 20:1-18

Intro

Mary Magdalene was stuck emotionally. She had become so wrapped in the death, in what she had to see as the murder of her friend Jesus, that she was stuck...and it didn't matter what she was able to see, hear, or feel: Jesus was dead. What now? What's the point?

According to John, she is the first to discover the empty tomb but even after running to have Peter and the Beloved disciple behold what she has already seen, she is not able to get beyond the sadness that of Good Friday that is draped upon her like a sack of bricks.

It is, at least in part, because of her sadness that she could not recognize her risen Lord, even when he stood before her.

How often have we, because we have been unable to live in the moment, allowed the moment to rocket by? How often have we, because we have been burdened by memories from the past, distracted by the happenings of our current day, or focused on 'the needs' of the future, missed God, right there, in the midst of our lives? The scripture reads this way.

John 20:1-18

20Early 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 from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary was grieving horribly. All that she was carrying...it was awful. It just was.

A quick rundown of the events of the last four days: she has watched, both from a distance and more likely than not from close up as well, her Lord betrayed by one of his chosen twelve. She was most likely present as the crowd when, given the opportunity to release Jesus, shouted instead to free the criminal Barabbas. She was also there, on the hill of the skull, to watch as her friend, the person whom she felt was sent by God to set things right, as he faced a humiliating and brutal death on the cross. She watched as, because of his weakened state, he could not find the energy to fill his lungs and suffocated to death, even though he was guilty of no crime.

It had to be awful. And yes, I very much say that from a place of not being able to comprehend even most of what she faced: it is just that painful.

With this sort of a primer, is it any wonder that what we have come to know as Easter morning was so...incomprehensible?

The way that the Gospel of John describes it she went to the tomb early on Sunday morning and found it empty. After going to get the disciples to tell them what she had discovered, she followed them back and began to weep. She wasn't thinking, "my Lord has been risen". She was thinking, "how could it get any worse". Not only had her friend and guide been killed, but now his body had been taken. Talk about adding insult to injury.

So there she stands, outside of the tomb, crying. And the disciples, the disciples have just left. I know that scripturally that the other disciple comes into the tomb after Peter, 'and believes', but recognize that what he believes is that Jesus' body is gone because what we hear next is, 'for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.' Jesus' body is gone. The disciples have verified it and now they've gone back home.

And now Mary is there...alone.

Only she is not.

For some unknown reason she looks back into to the tomb. But this time when she looks in, she sees something unexpected, or at the very least should seem unexpected: two individuals, two angels. The thing that I find shocking about the exchange that follows is not so much that the angels are there (after all, we are reading the Bible!), but instead how Mary reacts, or better said, doesn't react, to them.

Think about the different times that angels show up in the pages of scripture. As we have talked about before, what is one of the first statements that we hear out of the mouths of angels? If you thought, "do not be afraid" then you're right where I'm at. When angels show up, people get scared. People fall to their knees and put their heads to the ground because they know that something quasi-divine is before them. Old Testament, New Testament: it doesn't matter.

But how does Mary react to the sudden, unexplainable appearance of these beings who are now seated within the tomb?

She acts, albeit through tears, as if their appearance is, well, almost expected. The angels ask her, "woman, why are you weeping?" She answers, and you can see the tears flowing down her face as she says it, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." She is so

overwhelmed by the emotional storm of the last few days which is now being capped off with Jesus body being taken that she cannot recognize what is right in front of her. Are we surprised?

This reality of overwhelm is all the more obvious as Mary turns around and sees another person. Does she recognize this individual? No, and I think it's at least in part because she is so overcome. Jesus talks with her, and she still doesn't know that it's him. Instead she makes Jesus out to be the gardener. She can't see who is right in front of her!

It's only when Jesus does what that Mary finally figures out who it is?

It's when he declares her name that she is brought into the moment. "Mary! I'm right here! It's me: I'm right here!"

It's when he calls out to her by name that Mary is able to be pulled from the overwhelming realities that had swallowed her up, and recognize the miraculous truths that she was beholding; truths that stood in diametric opposition to the overwhelming realities that were very much there. She needed to be pulled free and then, and only then, was she able to see...really see.

As I think about Mary's experience, and then look out at the world of which I am most certainly a part, what I am reminded of is how desperately we need to have that moment where God, in some way, calls out our name and pulls us free of the aspects of our lives that leaving us feeling swamped, and certainly unable to behold a truth that stands in contrast to those painful difficulties.

For example, my guess is that within the last ten minutes at least a quarter of you started thinking about what you're going to have to do after this service. You've got to get this or that food prepared. You have to drive here or there to meet up with relatives. You've got to make sure that you remember where you hid all the eggs because the last thing that anyone wants is to find a lost egg by smelling the lost egg, you know, a few days later. I'm not saying whether or not I think this is good or bad, I'm just saying that we do it. And we do it a lot.

Instead of being able to be present, with our families, with our God, we're mentally off to the next thing, or as we were able to hear in our passage this morning, we are so overwhelmed by life as it has been thrown at us and as we have created for ourselves, that we can't process, in any real way, what is happening before us.

How often has this happened? How often have we missed experiencing Jesus in our life; Jesus right there in our lives, trying to let us know that we are not alone.

And it can happen in so many ways.

You can be so scheduled that you are worried about getting everything done that 'needs' to be done, and as you worry about making sure that the next thing gets done you are not able to appreciate when those other things are finished ...let alone how God may have been in the midst of that moment.

When you receive a diagnosis, or your loved one is going through a treatment to battle an illness that they did nothing to bring upon themselves, and all of a sudden your life becomes consumed with what can or can't be done, just how ill the treatment may make your loved one, to whether or not life, as you once knew it, can be achieved again. How many of us, when we get caught up in that wave of life, which

absolutely comes upon all of us at some point, how many of us become so focused on the illness that the opportunity to be embraced by God is neglected, or deemed impossible (after all, look at all that you are dealing with)?

Maybe it is financial issues: issues that become so overwhelming that you have just given up because there is no hope...there is no way out. At this point you might not be thinking about how you are going to be able to pay the next bill that's due. No, you're just trying to keep your creditors at bay until you are able to get that next pay check, or finally find that job.

How many of us feel like we are able to see let alone appreciate God's love when we're in those sorts of places?

There are so many reasons why we are unable to hear let alone see God in our midst; Jesus right there with us.

But what our Easter message calls out is that a new creation is being made, that God is with us, that Jesus does stand beside us, and always will stand with us. It is true...not just for someone else...it's true for us as well. We need to resist those tendencies that all of us have to go inward and find a way, any way to remain open to the many ways that Jesus calls out to us, calling us by our name.

Mary had to have her name called out before she was able to be brought back into the moment and recognize that the risen Lord was there, for her, with her. I'm not sure what that moment will look like for you...but I absolutely trust that Jesus is calling; that Jesus is calling you.

I hope and pray that this service might act as a reminder that even in the pain, God abides, and that through even the smallest finger-hold of faith, Jesus heals, and heals forevermore. God is calling your name! Can you hear it?

This Easter let us celebrate the God who is able to pull us free by calling our name, reminding us that He was there through it all!

Can you hear it? God *is* calling your name.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, on this day when we celebrate the resurrection of Your son, help us to realize that You are still at work in the world and absolutely at work in our lives. God, deliver us from the depths that we become consumed by. Call out our name and awaken us to the truth that you are with us and will never leave us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.