

## Resurrection of Our Lord (RCL/A): “The Risen Lord Knows Your Name, Too”

John 20:1-18

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Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

“I’ve arrived, Sweetie!”: a text I **thought** I was sending to Pastor Mark a number of years ago when I safely reached Harvey Cedars for a synod youth retreat for which I was chaplain. A split second after hitting “Send” I realized, “Oh, shoot, I just sent that text to Jason, the retreat coordinator!” (whom I certainly would **not** be addressing as “Sweetie”). You can only imagine how **quickly** I shot Jason another text: “Oops! Wrong recipient! Meant for Mark!”

Mistaken identity. **That** instance was really embarrassing, but a more recent one tickled my funny bone. One of my prize possessions is a Birdfy bird feeder fitted out with a camera and the ability to send me text and video when a feathered friend visits. One day a month or so ago I got a text saying that a tufted titmouse had dined with us. I couldn’t wait to see the little blue and grey fellow with a charming tuft of feathers on its head, so I logged right on and “behold,” I saw the top of Pastor Mark’s head as he refilled the feeder. (I told him it’s not **every** human being who’s been mistaken for a tufted titmouse!)

So what’s up with Mary Magdalene mistaking the risen Lord Jesus for a gardener? True, St. John tells us the tomb where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had placed Jesus’ body was **in** a garden. (He’s the only evangelist who shares that detail.) In a silly way I’ve wondered if the Lord was wearing a straw hat or carrying a watering can or lugging around a hose to make Mary think He was out there so early to garden. I’m not the only one, though. Fra Angelico, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian painter, decorated the monks’ cells in San Marco Monastery in Florence with magnificent frescoes of Scriptural scenes. One of those murals is of Mary Magdalene kneeling in front of the tomb, reaching out to touch the risen Lord, who has a hoe in His left hand, the handle balancing on His left shoulder. Jesus also bears the marks of the nails in His hands and feet – which should have been a tip-off to His true identity. We don’t know if it was still too dark for Mary to make out those nail marks, or if she was simply so upset she couldn’t see straight. We know **that** feeling.

First we wonder why Mary didn't recognize Jesus from the get-go, and then we wonder why she'd identify this person she doesn't recognize as the gardener. We may also ask: why would a gardener even **want** to steal the body? We're not talking grave-robbing a pyramid to ransack Pharaoh's wealth. Very early on there was a story circulated by unbelievers, countering the resurrection of our Lord. Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers, recorded it for posterity's sake. The story claimed that a gardener **had** stolen Jesus' body, because he was afraid Lookie Lou's and paparazzi would come to see it and would trample his cabbages in the process! (More evidence that fake news is nothing new ☺.)

It's not what she **sees** but what she **hears** that finally enables Mary to recognize her precious Lord. It's not the beauty of an angel chorus or the flutter of angel wings or the grating rumble of a stone disc sliding away from the grave opening that sheds light into Mary's darkness. It's the sound of her own name. Different manuscripts of the Gospels give 2 different versions of her name, maybe reflecting Greek and Hebrew: Maria, Miriam.

Who else has the Lord Jesus called by name? *"Zacchaeus, come down immediately! I must stay at your house today."* (Luke 19:5) *"You are **Peter**, and on this rock I will build my church."* (Matthew 16:18) *"**Martha, Martha**, you are worried and distracted by many things. Mary has chosen the better part."* (Luke 10:41-42) *"**Lazarus**, come out!"* (John 11:43) *"Have I been with you all this time, **Philip**, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* (John 14:9) *"**Simon, Simon**, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."* (Luke 22:31-32) Later, on the road to Damascus, *"**Saul, Saul**, why do you persecute me?"* (Acts 9:4)

The Lord calls each one of **us** by name, too. In John's Gospel Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and says: *"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."* (John 10:3) Jesus was echoing His Father in Heaven, who 500 years earlier through Isaiah had said to the children of Israel (43:1): *"I have called you by name; you are mine."*

*Can a woman forget her nursing child  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these might forget,  
yet I will not forget you.  
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands....* (Isaiah 49:15-16)

**Our** names inscribed on the palms of God’s hands; **our** pictures on God’s refrigerator; **my** name, **your** name, on God’s lips: “What wondrous love is this?”

In some circumstances we don’t necessarily **want** to have attracted God’s attention, like Adam hiding in the Garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit. But even if the Lord is calling our name in order to call attention to our failure in love, there is the merciful offer of grace to change course, humbly and trustingly accept forgiveness and launch a new life, forgiven and freed. ‘Remember the story of the risen Lord preparing breakfast on the beach for the disciples, and asking 3 times, “*Simon son of John, do you love me?*” (John 21:15, 16, 17) Peter felt hurt because he couldn’t help but think the Lord was referring to his threefold denial the night before the crucifixion. But Jesus doesn’t vote Peter off the island. He entrusts him with a new job: “*Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.*” (John 21: 15, 16, 17)

In Mary’s case, the risen Lord appears and calls her by name to remove the shroud of grief that was covering her eyes and strangling her heart. Sometimes the Lord speaks to **our** hearts for the same reason: to instill resurrection joy in the midst of our sorrows or struggles. I was reminded of that yesterday morning as I waited in line at one of our local prepared food stores to pick up Easter dinner. The lady behind me in line looked sad and stressed, and said to me, “My husband is in a skilled care nursing home. I’ll be taking this food there, so the family can eat with him.” I commented that she was doing something very special that would make his day. She added, “I don’t know why I do it. Last time I overcooked everything. There’s only a microwave to heat it up. I’m probably wasting all this money.” From the outside looking in, we know the quality of food is not the issue here. It’s her profound sadness over her husband’s condition and her exhaustion doing her best to make things ok, to care for him still, to

bring the family together, to put one foot in front of the other. I could only reflect to her, “Sometimes Holy Week lasts longer than 7 days, and sometimes Easter doesn’t arrive as scheduled.” I wished her well and said a prayer for her as I moved toward the cashier. Her parting words were, “I don’t know why I just shared all this with you.” I think the answer is the Holy Spirit. I hope her unburdening her heart was a resurrection moment in a difficult time, a gift any of us can give, and which we sometimes need to receive.

Fra Angelico’s painting of the risen Lord and Mary Magdalene in the garden is called “Noli Me Tangere,” which means, “Don’t Touch Me” or “Don’t Cling to Me.” Mary wants to hug her Lord, but He’s helping her realize their relationship **after** the resurrection will be different than their relationship **before**. He gives her a new job: to be the apostle to the apostles, telling the men the good news of His resurrection. Imagine the joy and awe with which she set off on her holy errand! I thought of Mary Magdalene’s joy when I recently saw a picture of the newly installed Archbishop of Canterbury, Sarah Elisabeth Mullally. There have been 105 archbishops of Canterbury before her – and they were all men. The newspaper photo shows her after the ceremony, apparently running, crozier in hand, miter on her head, chasuble flying behind her, as she greets another clergy friend. Her smile is so big we can almost hear her laughter, her cry of joy. Usually such formally robed clergy look very proper and solemn. Not this one! I saw her, I smiled, and I thought of Mary Magdalene hearing the Lord speak her name, finally recognizing Him, correcting the whole mistaken identity episode, and taking off at mach speed to do as He commanded: proclaim that He is risen, risen indeed! Let us do the same, with our lives as well as our words. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

