

**“He’s Risen and Calling Your Name”**

**The Bible says, that when the disciples of Jesus discovered his tomb empty, “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” So they went on home. Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene thought that maybe body snatchers had visited the grave. . . That’s how that first Easter began.**

**Most of us are here this morning because we acknowledge that Jesus is special. Perhaps though, like Mary Magdalene, we are still uncertain about what really happened, and who he really is. Mary Magdalene, after discovering the tomb to be empty, searched for Him . . . like others today who search for him. When she finally met Him she did not recognize Him, thinking He was the gardener. What or whom do seekers find today? Do they recognize the Risen Christ? Do they recognize him when they come to church? Do you?**

**Then, amidst Mary’s confusion, He called her by name. Jesus spoke one word, her name, and the power of resurrection became a reality to her. Hearing her name, she recognizes him, and the loneliness and defeat of death is replaced by the joy of resurrection. The mere sight of Him did not lead to her faith... just looking in His direction will not guarantee recognition... no amount of reading about him, or being “a good person,” or church activity can substitute. Only on hearing His voice can we recognize Jesus.**

**This should not be so surprising – sure Mary was surprised that he was risen from the dead (even though he had told them he would). But she was not surprised that he called her. He called followers, disciples, to be with him, and she had been among those who followed Jesus for several years. Stories of persons being called to a life of discipleship were common in the ancient world. In the rabbinic schools, the initiative to follow a teacher generally rested with the disciple – they chose their teacher. What distinguishes Jesus’ call is *his* initiative. The four gospels are clear: one becomes a disciple of Jesus only on the basis of *his* call.<sup>1</sup> The call of Jesus was clearly not limited to especially holy or religious people. Various accounts in the gospels tell of ordinary people, seemingly unfit for the religious life, being called by Jesus. The call of Jesus is not restricted to pastors, priests, or teachers. His call is for you, just as much as it is for me.**

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<sup>1</sup>Richard H. Thompson, *Hearing God’s Call in a Postmodern World*, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, doctoral dissertation, 2006), 68.

**The astounding thing is that he rose from death, and still calls disciples to himself. Jesus, not held by death, still calls disciples to be with him. His resurrection was a supernatural event: not hallucination, not group think, not just wishes or philosophy. The Bible clearly uses the language of space and time to describe this event, in quite specific terms. Jesus was raised on the *third* day. He left behind an empty tomb, with “the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.” The note of particularity is unmistakable. This is the un-perjured testimony of eyewitnesses: the Lord is risen - bodily, audibly, perceptibly, in the same concrete sense in which he lived and died.**

**Resurrection is not a synonym for resuscitation or immortality. The resurrection of Jesus was a supernatural event of cosmic significance. Why? Because it touched upon the very meaning of existence. The message of Easter is that God left his heaven to enter fully into the life of this real world; he came into the very thick of it. “The message of the Resurrection is that this present world matters; that the problems and pains of this present world matter; that the living God has made a decisive bridgehead into this present world with his healing and all-conquering love... That’s why we pray: ‘Thy kingdom come, *on earth as it is in heaven.*’ Easter Day was the first great answer to that prayer.”<sup>2</sup>**

**If Jesus were simply a man then his death is no more notable than yours or mine. If Jesus were God and God only, then his death and resurrection is of no relevance to you and me. But if Jesus were fully man and fully God, then his death and resurrection is an event that binds me to the divine and gives hope for life now and eternally.**

**“If Easter faith is simply about believing that God has a nice comfortable afterlife for some or all of us, then Christianity becomes a mere pie-in-the-sky religion instead of a ‘kingdom on earth as it is in heaven’ religion. If Easter faith is simply about believing that Jesus is risen in some “spiritual” sense, leaving his body in the tomb, then Christianity turns into a ‘let the world stew in its own juice’ religion, instead of a kingdom on earth as it is in heaven religion. If Easter faith is only about me, and perhaps you, finding a new dimension to our own personal spiritual lives in the here and now, then Christianity becomes simply a warmth-in-the-heart religion instead of a kingdom on earth as it is in heaven religion. It becomes focused on me and my survival, my sense of God, my spirituality, rather than outwards on God and on God’s world that still needs the kingdom message so badly.”**

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<sup>2</sup>N. T. Wright, “Why Easter Matters,” *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997); as quoted in *Good News Magazine*, March/April 2003, (Wilmore, KY: Forum for Scriptural Christianity).

**“But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes what the New Testament insists that it is: good news for the whole world, news that warms our hearts *precisely because it isn’t just about warming hearts*. The living God has in principle dealt with evil once and for all, and is now at work, by his own Spirit, to do for us and the whole world what he did for Jesus on that first Easter Day.”<sup>3</sup> “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20).**

**When the evil in human hearts nailed him to a cross, he pronounced forgiveness. In Jesus, God made a personal sacrifice for our benefit. Think of it! For God to play the tyrant over men would be a miserable tale of unrelieved oppression. For men to play the tyrant over other men is the sad and discouraging recounting of human history. But for men to play the tyrant over God, and God be a better man than they, is news, astounding news and a tale of hope. If you really seek the audacity of hope, this it!**

**The heart of the Christian experience is that God did not shun this tough world, but lived among us, and suffered and died for our sins, and rose from the dead to call you and me – by name - to join him in transforming this world. It begins in that one to one encounter with the living God, in the person of the risen Jesus. St. Paul met him on the road to Damascus when the risen Lord called him by name. Throughout history, countless others have been called and made an impact on the world. John Wesley, when his “heart was strangely warmed” knew in that deepest personal place, that Jesus had called him. All England heard about it, as Wesley preached and transformed a nation. Jesus is calling your name today. Can you recognize his voice? Will you respond? He knows your name; God is that personal.**

**[Notice one more thing: after responding to the voice of Jesus, Mary proceeds to her mission: she went and announced to the disciples what had just happened. Subsequent to the initial call are the calls to specific tasks, or vocations. One of the most popular preachers in England, in the late 1500’s, explained this as the distinction between God’s general call and a special calling. The first was when a person was “called out of the world to be a child of God, a member of Christ and heir of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>4</sup> The second calling was to “the execution of some particular office” for “the common good,” and not simply a matter of fulfilling one’s desires or ambitions.<sup>5</sup> A century and a half later, John Wesley (the founder of the Methodist movement of which we are a piece) emphasized Christian vocation that was rooted in a personal, transforming experience of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, which was**

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid

<sup>4</sup>William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward, (Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtney Press, 1970), 451.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 451-453.

**then brought into daily life. Jesus' call was not simply to believe in him, but to be a disciple as well, which ushers one into a life wherein one's mission for Christ is discovered and nurtured.<sup>6</sup> The call of Jesus is personal and demands a response, and then he gives the mission.**

**The sequence is important. Many will hear of Jesus, find his teachings and character admirable and want to work for him. But they err if they set off on some mission in his name without his call upon their lives. Scripture attests, "the sheep hear his voice as he calls by name those who *belong* to him" (John 10:3).]**

**This is vitally crucial to know in today's world. Deep inside, everyone yearns for eternal significance, for Someone to know your name. What is really at stake in Jesus' resurrection is whether your life and mine has ultimate significance. Are we so significant in God's eyes that even death cannot separate us from God's love?**

**He knows your name and wants you to know Him. Christian faith is Easter faith: knowing the Risen Christ.**

**Mary Magdalene was so significant he called her by name. I know you are too. He is calling your name.**

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<sup>6</sup>Thompson, 94.