

Scripture:

John 20:1-18

“Wonder, Mystery, Power, and Awe.”

Wonder ----- mystery --- power ----- and awe.

These are just some of the words to describe the saving reality of Easter.

And when we think of Easter many of the things that come to mind are big --
---- and bright ----- and beautiful ---- dramatic --- and striking.

Joy and proclamation ----- a trumpets blast.

The thunder of pipe organs.

The shining brightness of white and gold banners ----- paraments --- and vestments.

Beautiful flowers ----- lilies and hydrangea ---- and so on.

Bright --- beautiful ---- powerful ----- wonderful --- exuberant --- awe inspiring.

That's Easter ----- and then some.

And so it ought to be ---- Easter is the highest of high days in the life of the church --- the day along with Christmas ---- that the whole of the church year evolves around and grounds itself in.

But as we have seen in our reading this morning ----- John's gospel paints a far more subdued and understated kind of day than this --- at least initially.

The empty tomb ---- Easter day in John's gospel --- is filled with excitement yes ----- Mary is running --- and Peter is running --- and the other disciple with Peter is running ---- and then Mary is weeping ----- fearful that Jesus' corpse has been taken away.

There's a fair amount of excitement here in John's gospel --- but excitement of a different nature than what we might expect.

It's more confused and anxious excitement ----- than joyful exuberant excitement ----- at least at first.

That is until the critical moment that Jesus calls out to Mary ---- saying simply --- "Mary" --- calling her --- and addressing her by name.

Picking it up mid way through verse 15 from John's gospel today -----
 "Thinking he was the gardener ---- she said --- "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her ---- "Mary"

She turned toward him and cried out "Teacher".

Everything changes for Mary after Jesus calls her by name --- speaking directly to her and her alone.

Everything changes for us too when Jesus calls us by name ----- speaking directly to us.

Where there was once anxiety and confusion ----- "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." --- there is now peace and calm --- meaning ---- intimate relationship ---- everything suddenly makes sense ---- where mere moments ago it didn't.

Everything changes when Jesus speaks to us directly.

Easter ----- wonder --- mystery ---- power --- and awe --- for sure.

But not because of trumpets ----- pipe organs ----- flashes of white and gold ----- flowers ---- lilies and so on --- many of the things we associate with Easter ----- not even first and foremost the empty tomb even.

As beautiful and powerful and meaningful as these things can be ---- the real wonder --- mystery ---- power and awe of Easter --- comes in the resurrected one calling us by name.

Presbyterian preacher and theologian Dr. Tom Long ----- one of the most faithful preachers of the gospel tells this story.

The story of Mary Ann Bird.

Mary Ann Bird --- had a rough life growing up ----- the kind of life you would wish for no one.

Born with a cleft palate --- and disfigured face ---- Mary Ann also had lopsided feet --- and a very awkward way of walking and moving about.

And unfortunately --- children being children ----- she was often the target of school yard cruelty.

“What’s the matter with you Mary Ann ----- did you cut your lip?” --- classmates would call out ---- sneering and laughing ---- huddled together while she often stood all alone.

“How come you walk like duck?” --- they’d say --- followed by laughter.

Mary Ann lived --- survived --- a very tough childhood --- it was often a dark world for her growing up.

One year things changed ----- the year her teacher was Miss Leonard.

And Miss Leonard shined with kindness --- a gracious and loving person ---- a good teacher.

And back in those days teachers were required to administer a kind of homespun hearing test.

The teacher would call the student up to her desk --- have the student cover first one ear and then the other ---- and the teacher would whisper something to see if the child could hear.

Rudimentary as it was ----- this is what they actually did.

And usually the teacher would simply say something like --- “The sky is blue.” ----- or ----- “I have new shoes on today.”

Well --- poor Mary Ann dreaded this test --- because in addition to a cleft palate --- disfigured face --- and lopsided feet ---- she was deaf in one ear.

This test --- like so many other things in life --- seemed like just another opportunity for Mary Ann to be singled out for her “deficiencies” in life --- her abnormalities.

And so the day of the test finally came --- and Mary Ann’s turn came to make her way up to the teacher’s desk ----- and so she waddles and shuffle’s forward ----- and as usual the other students snicker and laugh --- mumbling things under their breath.

So Mary Ann covers up her bad ear and leans in to Miss Leonard’s desk.

And what she heard next were words than changed her life.

Instead of the usual ---- “The sky is blue.” --- or “I have new shoes on today.”

Miss Leonard said ----- “I wish you were my little girl, Mary Ann.”

“I wish you were my little girl, Mary Ann.”

And in those words ---- in the midst of her personal darkness ----- somehow Mary Ann heard the voice of Jesus ---- the voice of love --- and the voice of grace ---- the saving voice of Christ.

And it changed her life forever.

Mary Ann grew up to become a teacher herself --- and like Miss Leonard she too shone with kindness and grace.

And it all started that day when she heard Jesus call her name through the voice of a middle aged school teacher.

Mary in John’s gospel reading today is changed when she hears Jesus call her name too.

From anxious --- despairing ---- confused ----- Mary instantly moves to being calm and at peace ---- at ease ----- responding to Jesus saying --- the very intimate and personal Aramaic word for teacher ---- “Rabboni”.

John 20 gives us an Easter that fits us --- an Easter that we can take home with us in a very personal way ----- Jesus calling us by name.

Yes Easter joy and proclamation is also about blaring pipe organs ----- blazing rays of sunlight ----- shining brightness through stained glass windows and so on ---- but if it's only ever this --- it can be difficult to take home with us ---- and experience beyond the morning worship.

In this intimate interaction with Mary --- Jesus calling her by name ----- we have an Easter that we can take home.

Intimate --- personal ---- life changing interaction with the risen Christ.

John 20 gives us Good News we can live by ---- and live with ----- hang on to ---- and carry with us.

Somewhere in the shadows of our lives --- amidst the sometimes confusion and anxiety of our lives --- the same confusion and anxiety that Mary experienced on that very first Easter day ----- amidst all of this ----- is the risen Saviour King lurking ---- bursting with new life --- Easter life --- calling us by name --- and changing our lives forever.

He's here ----- and He's now.

And He knows our name.

Just as surely as He knew Mary's name --- Jesus knows our names ---- each and every one of us.

And just as sure as He burst into Mary's heart the moment He spoke to her with a gentle whisper ---- so He enters into ours too.

That's the true ----- wonder ---- mystery ----- power --- and awe --- of Easter.

Personal relationship with the risen one.

The still small voice of Christ --- calling us by name amidst the sometimes confusion and anxiety of our lives.

Verses 2 and 3 from John's gospel this morning ----- "So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running....."

Verse 11 ----- "Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying."

Verse 13 ----- "They have taken my Lord away," she said "And I don't know where they have put him."

What starts out with running --- and confusion ---- "Where is He?" ----- "Where have they taken Him? ---- and ---- "Where have they put Him?"

Quickly turns to crying ---- and a kind of sad resolve that ----- well ---- we really don't know where He is.

Finally ends with ----- "Mary."

Finally ends with Jesus calling her by name in the quietness of the dew filled morning.

That's the wonder ----- mystery ---- power ----- and awe of Easter morning -
----- God calling us by name in the risen Christ.

No matter what the circumstances of life ----- confused --- anxious -----
running here and there ----- wondering where Jesus is in the world today ---
-- John's Easter gospel reminds us that in the midst of life ---- Jesus is there -
-- here ---- calling us by name.

No matter what the circumstances in life ----- cleft palate --- deformed face
---- lopsided feet ----- deaf in one ear ----- people laughing and making fun
of us ----- Jesus is there whispering in our ear ---- words of love --- and
peace ----- and gracious comfort ---- words of acceptance and belonging ----
"You are my beloved child."

And no matter what the circumstances in life ----- we are to listen to that voice --- His voice ----- the voice of the Risen Lord --- calling ----- perhaps whispering our name.

Because He is forever calling us to new --- resurrected life.

Mary Magdalene----- Simon Peter ----- Mary Ann Bird ----- and so on --- -- each and every one of us here today ----- listen.

This is truly the wonder --- mystery ----- power ---- and awe ----- that is Easter.

And like Easter itself ----- God calling out to us ----- God whispering into our ear ----- is not just a one time event --- it is ongoing and forever.

Easter is not just a moment ---- or a day -----or even just a 50 day season in the church year ----- it is a way of life --- new life ---- everlasting life in Jesus Christ --- discipleship --- sanctification.

Jesus is forever calling us home --- calling out to us ---- in the middle of our sometimes confused and anxious --- broken lives --- “You ----- are my beloved child.”

Offering new and everlasting life --- new and everlasting relationship with Him.

And that is the true meaning ----- the true ---- wonder – mystery ---- power - ----- and awe ---- that is Easter.

Hallelujah ----- He is Risen!

Say it with me ----- Hallelujah ----- He is Risen!

May the wonder --- mystery --- power ----- and awe ----- of Easter remain in your hearts --- now and forever.

Hallelujah ---- He is Risen.

Amen.