

CALLED BY NAME

Scriptures: John 20:1-18

Sunday 1 April 2018
by Norm SD Esdon

EASTER SUNDAY

Poem quoted in sermon & Barb Carr's bulletin cover art is on p.6. "The Resurrection." Oh, my! *Hereafter?* Or *Here-and-now*. We could spend the rest of our lives arguing whether the hereafter is real. I know you're all dying to find out. Because the reality is, we literally DO have to die to find out – at least, based on what we know now. This morning I'm going to focus on the here-and-now.

BUT – not without saying something about the hereafter.

Speaking personally, although I can't describe, explain, prove, or disprove it, I TRUST that there's SOMETHING after death. I leave that in God's hands.

Actually, it's no more difficult for me to wrap my head around THAT than around the mind-blowing things I keep learning from science.

Here's one example:

Before Stephen Hawking, scientists believed that nothing could survive falling into a black hole.

But Hawking showed that black holes could actually emit thermal radiation (now named "Hawking Radiation" in his honour.)

Based on his new calculations, black holes are not the end of everything; they're both an ending and a beginning – a kind of stellar "life after death."

Scientists have to be prepared to junk everything they believe about something in the light of new information that doesn't fit with what they believed before.

It's actually UNscientific to claim that life after death is impossible.

A true scientist would say,

"Based on what we know now, life after death is improbable."

With new instruments, new information from a new Stephen Hawking ... Who knows?

But let's not waste the rest of this life (or this hour!) arguing about whether there's a next life.

Instead, let's explore what resurrection might mean here and now.

Let's examine what happens to Mary Magdalene at the tomb.

Mary gets "called by name."

Now, who wouldn't rather be called by name? Better that than "There,"

as in "Hello there!?" (Ministers learn this very quickly at the door after church!

Sometimes, if I forgot someone's name, I managed to redeem myself by remembering the name of their dog or cat!!)

When someone calls us by name, it feels good.

They're acknowledging who we are. They're addressing us as a unique human being.

Well, unique, that is, if you don't happen to have someone else's name.

I have MY FATHER'S name. And he had HIS father's name.

That makes me "Norman the Third."

And, as if that weren't bad enough, I made the mistake of telling this to my francophone friends at cadet camp.

Then I became "Norman t'e T'ird"! (I'm trusting I won't regret telling YOU that!)

Being called by our own name

can spark a more engaging conversation, a deeper relationship.

And this is what we've been trying to do with our "Called by Name" name-tags – to spark a more engaging conversation in our interpersonal/interchurch relationships.

Mary doesn't know Jesus till he calls her by name from outside the tomb.

Suddenly, her grief, her despair, her loss of all hope, is transformed.

She has her own new beginning out of this dark ending.

Her faith in Jesus' way of self-sharing love is given new life – resurrected.

Mary has HER OWN resurrection – then and there.

And there's the key to what resurrection can mean for US here and now –

when our faith touches us personally "in whatever situation we're in at this moment," we experience a deepening, a more engaging conversation with our faith.

It means more to us because it has touched us WHERE WE LIVE.

And this very often happens in our DARK times.

Mary was at the TOMB of one she LOVED,

one whose way of life she was passionate about following.

Not only had he been crucified, but now his body was gone. Insult added to injury.

Mary was in her OWN dark tomb of deep despair.

But these are often the very moments our resurrection finds us, calls us by name.

I know this from my own experience. My faith had been more of a head-trip until I had to wrestle with my own dark tomb (that is, "closet") of despair –

wrestling with how to reconcile both my sexual and my spiritual orientations.
What understanding of Jesus' way of self-sharing love could embrace both?
Only in that struggle did I hear myself called by name.

I heard this through scriptures like these three
(Maybe you will, too – here & now):

- the one where Jesus asks his disciples,
“But what about YOU? Who do YOU say I am?”
- And the one where God tells Moses,
“The place where YOU stand is holy ground. And if someone asks
you my name, tell them it's ‘I AM WHO I AM’; tell them ‘I AM’ sent you.”
- And the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel (or God), ending up with a limp, but
ALSO blessed with a new name. (Imagine how a Norman the Third would hear THAT!)

It's through our limps, our dark times, our Good Fridays
that we come to our Easter Sundays.

And if we pray away our Good Friday (as I tried to pray away my orientation),
we may pray away our Easter, too – we may pray away the very situation
that would call us by name to our own resurrection.

By the way, I'm not setting myself up as a model, here.
I'm just sharing my personal experience of being called by name –
of having my trust in Jesus' way of self-sharing love resurrected.
I'm trying to practise what I'm preaching while I'm preaching it
by sharing this personal experience of my faith.

And PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF OUR FAITH is what we're talking about here –
having our faith call us by name.

Robin Meyers, in his book, “Spiritual Defiance,” writes:

*... without passion there is no persuasion,
and there is no passion without personal involvement.¹*

Personal experience – being called by name –
fuels our passion for Jesus' way of self-sharing love;
and it's that PASSION that's most persuasive –
NOT arguments to prove the existence of an afterlife, or even of God –

or of any of the thousand other dogmatic shocks the Church is heir to. This passion arising from personal experience – being called by name – THAT’S what will catch the attention of others. And it’s THROUGH this passion that THEY’ll be able to hear THEMSELVES called by name.

We so-called “liberal/progressive” Christians have been uncomfortable with the over the top “personal testimonies” of our more conservative cousins. So we’ve tended to avoid saying ANYTHING personal about our faith.

Maybe, though, it’s time to consider adopting something of THEIR approach – their recognizing that SOME kind of personal relationship with Jesus – one where we hear him calling us by name – is INDISPENSABLE for putting his self-sharing love into action with PASSION – with CONVICTION – with the ENERGY we need to keep our social-justice from burning out. This personal connection can resurrect our faith in Jesus’ way of self-sharing love. It can give our life a new beginning, a life after death – here and now.

And this is true for us not just personally, but also collectively – as the Church. ***I think the Church, much more than a refit, needs a rebirth – a resurrection.*** We, the Church, need to listen again ***outside the tomb of “our used-to-be”*** for our faith calling us by name.

Robin Meyers, borrowing from another author, suggests some thought-provoking ways the Church could be resurrected. Here are four he lists under the shocking heading: “If the Church were Christian,”²

- Inviting questions would be valued more than supplying answers.
 - Encouraging personal exploration would be more important than communal uniformity.
- [These first two are what we’ll be doing in our upcoming “combined-with-Chalmers” discussion group, “Reconsidering what it means to be Church,” starting two weeks from today after church, led by Rev Wayne Hilliker, Lynn Freeman, and me. (See more info in today’s bulletin.)*
- Also, Robin Meyers will be the guest speaker at Chalmers’ “Hilliker Preaching Lectureship” September 29 & 30 this year. (See today’s bulletin for this, too.)*

The next two in the list are: “If the Church were Christian” ...

- Gracious behavior would be more important than right belief.

- This life would be more important than the afterlife.

And that brings us back to where we started.

When Jesus called Mary Magdalene by name,
her faith in Jesus' way of self-sharing love was resurrected;
she was given a new beginning here and now, a life with new meaning and new hope.

If we, both individually and as the Church, keep our spiritual ears open,
we'll be able to experience OUR OWN resurrection.

We'll hear the Eternal humming in OUR everyday space-time.

Outside the black hole of "our used to be"

we'll hear our faith calling US – by name – embracing us – HERE AND NOW –

in a ruby-throat humming / a book that speaks our truth / our cat's grateful
rumble / an estranged friend's 'I'm-sorry' / our partner's first 'I-love-you' /
our new-born's first cry / our parent's last words.³

We'll live EVERY SINGLE DAY with hope – of resurrection –

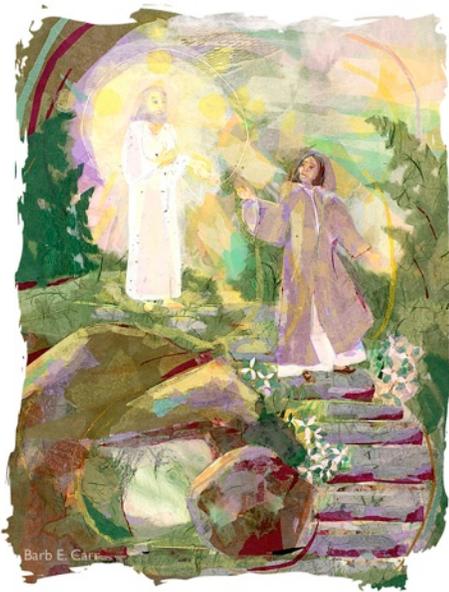
both here and now and hereafter.

So – Happy Easter!

¹ Robin Meyers, *Spiritual Defiance*, p.10

² Robin Meyers, *The Underground Church*.
Meyers combines here all the topics of the table of contents from Philip Gully's book,
"If the Church were Christian."

³ Norm SD Esdon, *Poems for God-Questers*, p.57



CALLED BY NAME

*Creator of sacred space and time
our Monday-to-Monday
race for gold
leaves no earthly time or space
for the sacred – empties
even our Sunday of
your humming presence.*

*We stand weeping outside
the empty pew – mourning
what used to be –
the Sunday-best pew,
the black-and-white pulpit,
the heaped-up offering plate,
the seam-bursting Sunday school,
and the crowds that used to create
sacred space and time between
arrival and departure.*

*In despairing desperation
we tinker with time
adding Wednesday evening
to Sunday morning;
we decorate space with
felt-board and flip-chart
guitar and sing-along
slides put to music
dance and applause
quicken the pace
passing the peace
come-forward communion
come back for coffee –
And still – the empty pew ...*

*... Then – one day – we hear you;
In everyday space-time we hear
you calling us – by name –
embracing us in
a ruby-throat humming
over our scarlet cup;
a book that speaks our truth
page after page;
our cat's grateful rumble
under a smoothing hand;
an estranged friend's I'm-sorry;
our partner's first I-love-you;
our new-born's first cry;
our parent's last words.*

*Your humming in these
sets our soul humming,
recreates in us
your sacred time and space,
be it Sunday, Wednesday,
any day – or place.*

*Re-creator of sacred space-time,
when we despair of the empty pew,
when we mourn our used-to-be,
help us trust your **yet-can-be**
that others might hear
– through us –
you calling them
by name.*

by Norm SD Esdon;
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