

Easter Morning Year A
Grace and Holy Trinity Church
John 20:1-18
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It was still dark.
She had been crying.
She was blinded by grief.
She didn't recognize him.

It was still dark.
He was standing watching.
He was moved by love.
He called her by name.

Jesus loves us even when we are too blinded by our own emotions, our own agendas and our own doubts to recognize him. He loves us so much, that he calls us by name.

Mary, oh I love Mary Magdalene, I can really relate to her sometimes, especially when I am looking for something that doesn't turn out to be quite what I was expecting. Mary is walking in the early morning hours to the tomb, she sees it is open and she runs back for help. Thinking that someone has stolen Jesus' body she grabs Simon Peter and the beloved disciple to check things out.

It's not safe to be out on the streets alone with body snatchers about. So they go in and investigate, Simon Peter sees an empty tomb and the beloved disciple sees the same. Linens strewn about, here and there, but no body.

They leave Mary at the tomb. Dumbstruck, trying to figure out what happened, she peers into the tomb.

What does she find? Angels. Angels! But she doesn't react, she doesn't even seem to realize they aren't human- when they ask her why she is crying, she repeats the same thing she said to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. They have taken away my lord and I do not know where they have laid him.

She steps back and nearly falls into a man who she takes to be the gardener, "Sir if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." Another version

of the same refrain they have taken away my lord and I do not know where they have laid him. Tell me where he is and I will leave you alone.

Entire texts thousands upon thousands of pages have been written about why Mary didn't see Jesus. N.T Wright wrote a whole book that we read when I was in seminary about the resurrection and he spends 100's of pages dissecting why Mary didn't recognize Jesus.

Why Mary was so distracted that she didn't know it was not a gardener.

It is only when Jesus calls her by name that she realizes that the man is Christ. But how often do we do the same thing. How often don't we recognize those who we love because of other distractions in our lives, and those who we love we don't expect to be dead?

Imagine all that was probably running through Mary's mind that morning- visit the tomb, prepare the body with the appropriate oils and herbs, pack up for the trip home, settle the bill for the house they had been staying in, figure out what she would do now that Jesus is dead, and all the while dealing with the horrible image of seeing him crucified.

I sometimes have a hard time just remembering to get a loaf of bread, a gallon of milk and a stick of butter at the grocery store, never the less dealing with a traumatic life event such as losing my friend, mentor and savior, and then having to deal with loosing his body. Because Mary wasn't looking for a living walking talking person, of course she didn't recognize him. She saw him die with her own eyes. She saw him buried in the tomb. She was an eyewitness to the trial, and beatings and the crucifixion. She was what I would call grief-blind.

But there are many other kinds of blindness, which we all suffer from at times in our lives. There is career-blindness when nothing matters to us but our jobs our next promotion and our paycheck. There is family-blindness where no one else matters, but our parents, children, or spouses. There is fear-blindness where nothing but what could and will go wrong consumes our minds, if we stay in this blindness for too long, we make this our truth. There is love-blindness where we loose track of all else except for the object of our affections. There is money-blindness where all we care about is the bottom-line, and everything is budgeted and calculated to the penny. There is other-blindness where we worry so much about other people that we can't even begin to consider what it is doing to us. There is self-blindness where we only care about what happens to us and don't consider the consequences for anyone else.

But like Mary we can be called out of our blindness by the very act of being called by name, the act of unconditional, undeserved, unearned love given to us freely by a savior we are never expecting to find.

Jesus loves us even when we are so singularly focused on anything and everything other than Him. Jesus calls us by name even when we cannot recognize that He is standing in front of us. Jesus stands with us when we are blinded by jobs, money, family, fear, and self. Jesus stands with us when we are in the dark and we cannot see our hands in front of our faces. He asks nothing of Mary but to share with her brothers that she has seen the risen Lord. And that is all that he asks of us as well.

It's not quite as easy as that for us, because we haven't seen the risen Lord in the flesh, and there are people out there who are blinded by logic and reason and doubt, who will ask us questions like: "Where is your Jesus now? If you believe in resurrection doesn't that mean Jesus is a zombie? How can you believe in that Hocus Pocus?"

My response to those questions usually involves a bit of a story, and I hope you will indulge me for a moment while I tell you how I came to believe in the risen Jesus, truly.

I was raised in the Episcopal Church. I was an acolyte, a crucifer and a chorister all through middle and high school and I left my family's church to join an Evangelical Christian when I was a senior in high school. Lured by praise music and Christian concerts, I went up for altar calls and testified to my belief in Jesus as the risen Lord, but in truth my faith was fading away and I was pulling away from my foundation.

A few months later when my grandmother suddenly died my faith had already all but vanished. When I was on my own in college and I tried to replace my faith in Christ with faith in books and learning. I studied philosophy and politics, great minds and great theories, and buried my doubt and grief in academic sand.

Four years passed in the blink of an eye, and before I knew it I was a senior. I took a cross-listed course called "Women in Religion". The final project required field research. I went back to my mother's church and asked the Associate priest to distribute an anonymous survey on my behalf.

One of the questions in the survey was: "What is your image of God?" The answers came back nearly as varied as the women who answered them. There was the stock answer: God is the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. But there was also an image of God, which has stuck with me for nearly 15 years. This anonymous woman said she didn't have a visual image of God. She was more of an audio person than a visual one, so she had an audio image of God as the voice of her grandmother.

Ever since I read that response, I have adopted that image of God as my grandmother calling

my name, like she did the last time we saw each other and she called across the street to say goodbye.

Through that simple survey, I was reminded through my audio memory, that Jesus is real, and that God is present and active as the Holy Spirit in the world. Things that I had learned as a child but had not been aware of quite some time suddenly became alive in my heart. Recalling all this was definitely not what I expected in my final assignment in my final year at Temple University.

It was like I was awoken from a bad dream, a dream where there was no God; there was no faith; and there was nothing to believe in. I was shocked.

I imagine likewise that something similar happened to pull Mary out of her doubt, out of her darkness out of her grief, out of her distraction; when she heard the voice of Jesus, a beloved teacher who she knew without seeing.

This was a precursor to a revelation a few years later when on a retreat I heard the voice of my grandmother calling me by name telling me not to be afraid. It was then that I knew beyond a doubt that God loved me and that God had a plan for me and that it included ordination to the priesthood.

Those without faith would probably say that it was an audio hallucination, merely a fabrication in my emotional brain, I wanted to have this kind of divine experience. They would explain away the connection I feel with God through logic and reason and rationality. Some days I give them the benefit of the shadow of doubt, but today, on Easter, I respond as Mary did, with a loving exclamation- Alleluia.

Those with faith, who know and love of God have the greatest opportunity here. We have the chance to be the voice of God in a world. A world which has been blinded by hatred, greed, impatience, extravagance and desire. We have the chance to call our friends and family by name and remind them that the Lord is Risen. We can invite them to our weekly celebrations of the Eucharist, to our homes to discuss why we believe in Christ, with reason with logic and with hope and faith.

We can go to them and tell them, "I have seen the Lord, Alleluia, Alleluia."

Those of us with fading, dying, or faith that is missing in action, I ask you to listen for Christ's call to you. When you least expect it you will hear his voice, it may be masked by the voice of a beloved person so that you will recognize it but He will call you, perhaps He already has, but don't worry he will call again. And when He does I pray that you respond: "I have seen the

Lord, Alleluia, Alleluia."

Thanks be to God, Alleluia, Alleluia.