

Easter Sunday
Year B

Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 118:1-2.14-24
Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18

He is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. That is the story of Easter - no suspense and no drama. Just a simple statement of fact. But, is that really the story of Easter, or is that what people expect to hear on this day? The Gospel reading from John's Gospel has no suspense. The facts are laid out plainly and it is evident to the reader that Jesus is alive. So, can we just get on with the service and be early for lunch?

The Gospel reading really contains two stories about relationships. In the opening story, Mary Magdalene approaches the tomb and sees the stone has been rolled away. Her mind jumps to the conclusion that the body of Jesus has been stolen and she reports such to the disciples. Anyone who has read much about ancient history knows that tomb robbing was very common, even though people went to great lengths to thwart the efforts of those who would do such things.

Upon hearing Mary's report, Peter and the Beloved Disciple race to the tomb. Perhaps because he was younger, or perhaps of his closer relationship to Jesus, the Beloved Disciple arrives at the tomb first, but does not go in. Peter, however, stays true to his impetuous nature and goes right in. It is the Beloved Disciple, though, who is recorded as seeing the grave linens cast aside first and believes that Jesus' body was not stolen, but that He has risen from the dead. But, neither of these two disciples understands the implication of these facts so they just go home. End of story - for them.

Our attention is refocused on Mary. She has followed the two disciples back to the tomb and is grieving the unknown. When she sees someone standing nearby, she asks where the body has been placed. There is no suspense for the reader; we are told it is Jesus, but Mary has not comprehended this. It is only when Jesus calls her by name that her eyes are opened. In the ancient world, it was understood that a name was more than a simple moniker and that one's name expressed a person's essence. To know the name of a person was to know that person's total character and nature. Mary likely recognized His voice and, by calling her name, Jesus reestablishes the relationship they shared in His human life. It is that reestablishing of the relationship which comes through hearing our name that we are able to see the truth before us and be invited back into the community which we thought was lost.

The Beloved Disciple and Mary both signify beloved communities with Jesus. One believed through what he saw, the other through hearing her name spoken. Both are means of gathering people into relationships once thought broken.

When we greet people by name, we touch the inner core of their being. Like the sheep hearing the voice of the shepherd, people react to hearing their name called out - of being recognized as who they are - as beloved members of a community. By saying people's names, we are

announcing that they are important to us; that they are part of our beloved community. Nothing is more personal than our name and hearing it from those around us draws us closer to one another.

Jesus calls each of us by name as we approach the empty tomb. Jesus knows that we will respond because He is our shepherd and we know His voice. We may not expect to see a physical body or hear an audible voice, but we know in our hearts that Jesus lives because we sense that tugging that only comes from God. In our minds and hearts, we hear Jesus calling our name and we can only respond as Mary did - Teacher, Lord. And we can only do what she did - proclaim that we have seen the Lord.