

[Easter Sunday 2018 Jesus Mary First Luth]

EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 1, 2018

FIRST, MARSHALL

PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; JOHN 20:1-18

What's in a Name?

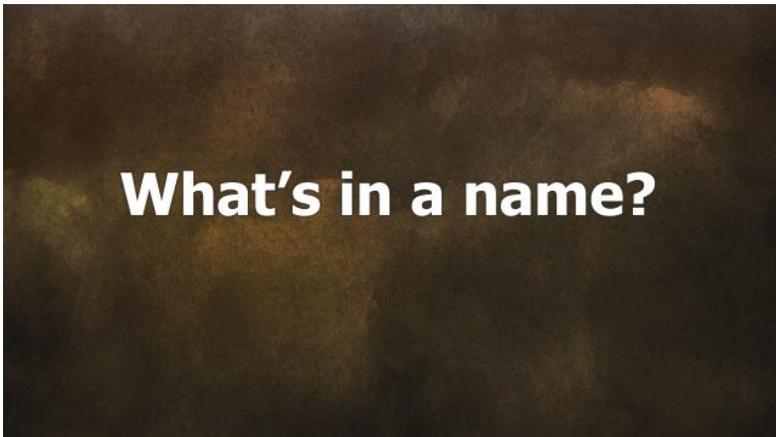
Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Bible drama just read, you heard again the amazing story of the first Easter morning. It was a day that began in darkness and despair...but quickly morphed into light – and then into absolute *de*-light, a true roller-coaster ride of sentiments and feelings.

On the one hand, you and I can only imagine the emotionally jarring journey that Jesus' followers were forced to face. Yet, on the other, we're no strangers to the hollow feeling of grief and loss ourselves. We know what it's like to wander through that dark valley of shadows and tears, and we know how slowly those journeys can sometimes move: from grief to grace, from fear to faith, from the dark of night to the dawn of a brand new day.

This morning I want to focus on three people in our story – two of whom need no introduction: JESUS and MARY MAGDALENE. That leaves the final person to introduce – the one in John's Gospel who goes without a name, who is known only as: *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. Those are the three main actors: *Jesus, Mary, and...the disciple whom Jesus loved*.



What's in a name?

At our First Communion Classes here, I always talk about the **names** we've been given – why our parents chose our names and what, if anything, they might mean.

Many of us seem to have at least **one** name that's tied to a loved one in a family, or to a family tradition of sorts. For example, some of you know that my full name is ROBERT SCOTT FULLER. But I was never a Robert or a Bob. Robert was my dad's name, so I guess they thought it'd be less confusing to just call me Scott.

I didn't really like my name in grade school. I mean, SCOTT rhymes with POT...which really isn't all that bad. But...SCOTTY rhymes with...well, you get the picture!!

On the other hand, SCOTT is my name and it's vastly better than being a non-entity, a no-body, having no name at all. In our son's first year at the Air Force Academy, he and his classmates were denied the use of their first names. It was FULLER this and FULLER that...but never MARK.

Then one day, having stood at attention for what seemed like an eternity, Mark said that he thought he was dreaming. He could have sworn that he'd heard someone whisper, MARK!

Unwilling to turn his head for fear of retribution, he stretched his eyes to the side as far as he could see... And there, just within his range of vision, stood a friend, from Alaska, a SENIOR cadet who was free to speak his name and give him a moment of grace. The fact that he also handed Mark a hot burrito from a Mexican restaurant in town was just icing on the cake!

In the end, though, there's really very little about the great majority of our names that's of any significance to the rest of the world. Most of our names have been and/or will be used by lots of other people through the ages.

But...what makes a difference – in some circumstances, all the difference in the world – is WHO speaks our name. This is the key to understanding our Gospel story this Easter morning – it's the key to understanding *our* story as God's beloved children.



We join the First Easter cast of characters where we found them: in the dark – both in the *world outside* AND in the depths of their *hearts*. They were filled with fear:

- they were afraid of the night,
- they were afraid of death,
- they were afraid of the dark night of the soul,
- they were afraid of the living nightmare they had witnessed – being forced to watch their friend, their teacher, their dreams for the future, die on that bloody cross.

We can only imagine the depth of Mary's concern when she arrives at that terrible tomb. Her heart...is filled with grief. Her soul...is suffering with despair – and it only goes downhill from there!! Just when she thinks it can't get any worse, Mary looks up to see that the stone is gone from the entrance to the tomb, and, as she quickly discovers, so, too, is Jesus' body...

Worst case scenario?? Mary's sure that the Lord's enemies have added insult to injury, so she runs back to the disciples and cries, *They've stolen his body!!* Two of the men race back and discover that she's telling the truth: the grave is *stone cold* and *empty*.

The men soon leave...but Mary remains, refusing to give up her search for Jesus' body. One more time she stoops to look in the tomb to see if his corpse really is gone...

Two men sitting inside ask her a curious question: *Woman, why are you weeping? Seriously??* Even though we know what's about to happen, we also know **exactly** why Mary is weeping – her heart feels **empty**, **abandoned**, **abused** and **alone**.

When she stands up, she turns and meets...whom she believes...is the gardener – and her conversation is repeated. Says the man,

Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

And then...*it happens*...



One simple word is spoken,
 one proper noun is pronounced,
 one common name is called...and EVERYTHING
in the world, *under* the world and *above* the world **CHANGES!!!**

It's a reality-altering, life-changing, death-defying declaration...
 four little letters – *Mary*, says Jesus,
 and her thoughts are ripped from death to life,
 from darkness to light,
 from despair to delight...

And as unbelievable a blessing it is for Mary...this is **also** one of God's
 greatest gifts for **you** and **me** as **well**. For as Jesus spoke Mary's name...so
 God's Spirit speaks your name and mine.

Sure it comes in different tones and forms:

in a very loud noise, or...a still, small voice...

or even in the sound of sheer silence – but...this we know to be true:

God is speaking your name and mine, he's calling to me, calling to you...

And I'm pretty confident that the Lord's voice sounds a lot like...

A mechanic or a nurse, a tax accountant or cop,

A neighbor, a family member, a stranger or a friend...

And it often happens when our hearts are hurting – or floating on cloud nine.

That voice speaks...and everything within us hears...

The voice that called the world into existence,

The voice that separated light from darkness,

The voice that raised Lazarus from the dead,

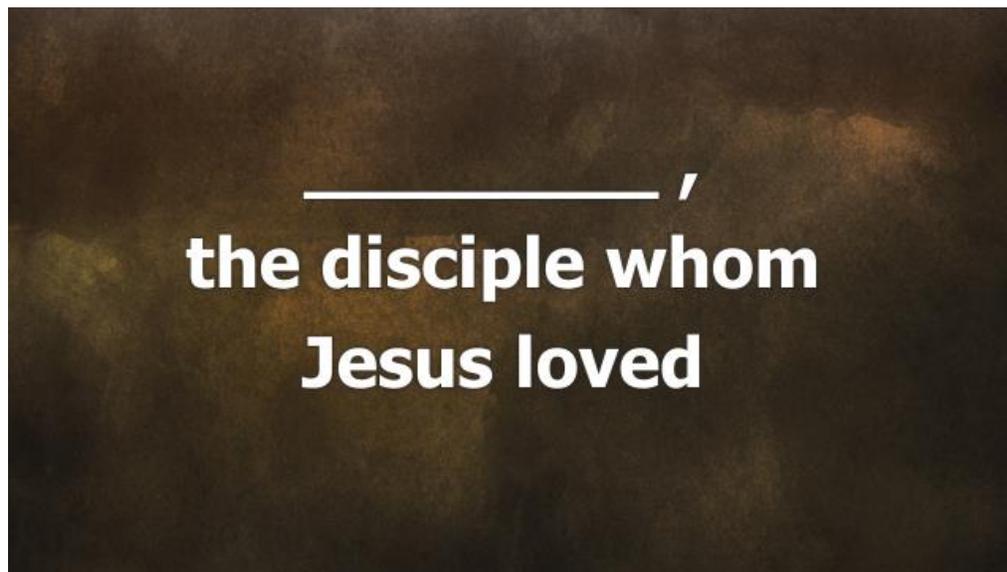
The voice that always welcomed the last, the lost, the least and the lowly...

And when that happens, then we find our hearts filled with a sense of security, serenity, and significance. In this way, you and I have had our names written into this Easter story. It's right there in the printed word, John chapter 20, v. 2, after Mary first came to the tomb and saw the stone rolled away. We're told that

*She ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, **They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.***

...the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved.

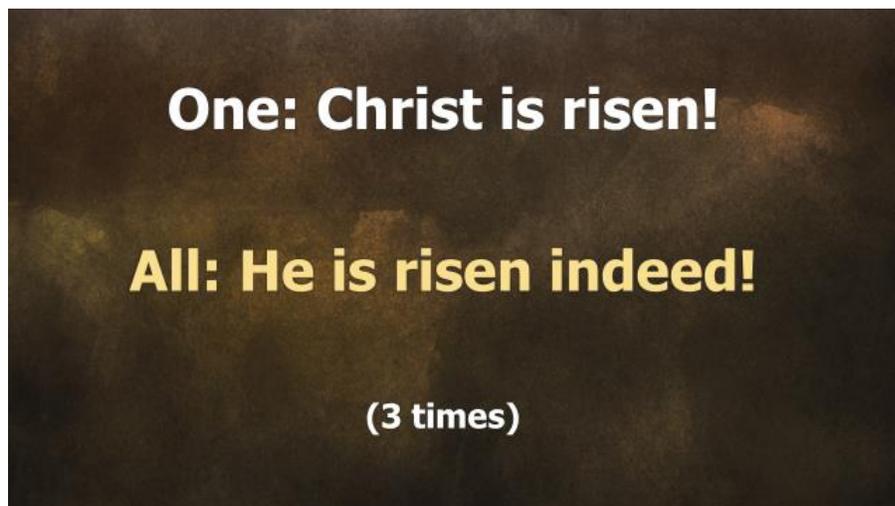
Now **some** scholars say that this unnamed disciple is a secret way for the real author of the Gospel to brag about his special relationship with Jesus... without actually bragging, and that may be true. But I like what others have said...that *the unnamed disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved*, is really a blank that's meant to be filled in with your name and mine.



Jesus, Mary and...TONYA, the disciple whom Jesus loved.
Jesus, Mary and...KARL, the disciple whom Jesus loved.
Jesus, Mary and...YOUR NAME, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

You get the picture: we're not meant to be mere readers of this story, or bystanders in this divine drama. Instead, the Spirit calls us to be actors – on center stage – performing our parts in this powerful play – for God's sake, and for the sake of the world.

You and I are called by God, named by Jesus, and sent by the Holy Spirit to live, and love, and serve our Lord, so that all people, all creation might believe in Jesus Christ and have life in his name. That's the good news for us on this wonderful Easter morning.



Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) X 3

Amen.