

"Mary"

Imagine the scene at first light on that Easter Sunday morning. It was the custom to visit the tomb of a loved one for three days after the body had been laid to rest. It was believed that the spirit of the dead person hovered around the grave for three days and then it departed. It is probably between 3 and 6am and Mary can wait no longer. No one is allowed to visit on a Sabbath, so this is her first opportunity to anoint Jesus' body.

Isn't she afraid of the soldiers on guard? After all, she is a disciple too. How does she think she is going to roll away a huge stone blocking the entrance? This tomb has also been sealed. How does she think she will manage all this? Other accounts tell us that she is not alone, but a small group of women are surely not strong enough?

The stone, however, has already been rolled away. So, in her fear that Jesus' body has been stolen, she runs to tell Peter and John. In my imagination, I see the three of them running back to the tomb and John who is the youngest outrunning the other two and Mary getting left behind. She has to do what she set out to do that morning, but the body is gone and when the other two leave, she feels bereft. As she weeps, she looks into the tomb and sees two figures where the body has been lying and John tells us that they are angels. Mary, however, is too absorbed in her grief to see them for who they are.

Neither does she notice someone approach her from behind and speak to her. Out of her desperation she says: "if you know where Jesus has been taken, please tell me and I will come and get him". How does she think that she will manage to move the dead weight of his body?

Then Jesus speaks her name and she recognizes him: the Risen Lord. I wonder what it is about the way he speaks her name that moves her immediately from loneliness, confusion and sorrow into recognition? Names are of course supremely important. We have many examples in the Bible of name changes to signify new roles or callings. Abram becomes Abraham after God promises that he will become father of many nations (Gen 17:3-6). Jacob becomes Israel after struggling for God's blessing on his life (Gen 32:22-28).

Within our own families, we may name our babies after relatives or friends to keep the memory of that person alive. I find that when I do visits before funerals, there are often stories about why the deceased was named as they

were or why they had in fact abandoned their given name and taken something totally different. Its not difficult to guess why I was named "Joy" - my parents had been married for 10 years before I was born and so the "Val" that I had always been in the womb became "Joy" after I was born. You wouldn't think you could abbreviate that very much, but my father always had a nickname for me based on a 5-year old's attempt to write her name for the first time. Perhaps you have some memories of names and nicknames from amongst your families and friends. It's good to remebember.



I like to think that Jesus had a few nicknames for people and smiled knowingly as he used them. James and John were known as the "Sons of Thunder" for their tempers and boisterousness. Thomas was "the Doubter."

When Jesus says the name: "Mary" that morning, it has the effect of jolting her from grieving to immediate recognition of who is speaking to her. The speaking of her name turns her around from looking at an empty tomb to facing Jesus and her sorrow, and then to witnessing to his resurrection in the world.

It is very right for us to lament and mourn for what we have lost this past year. There must be a proper time for that. For those opportunities we have not been able to take, for friends and family we have not been able to see and for those close to us who we have not been able to mourn as we would have liked. But let's also remember that God's love is so strong that he tells us that our names are written on the palms of his hands (Isa 49:16) He calls us by name to turn outwards again to the world and fulfil our call.