

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

When Jesus Calls Your Name – John 20:1-18

Introduction: Have you ever stopped to think about how in life, the way someone calls your name, you can tell what kind of message you're going to get? Think about it!

When you a child and your parents called your name, sometimes they would say it in a very calm, gentle, loving manner, and you would just know that everything was OK. But at other times, your name would be called quite differently. Sometimes, it would be called in a very loud, sudden and sharp tone and you'd immediately know that something was very wrong! And if you ever heard your full name being called...well, that usually meant big trouble. That meant that the crime had already been committed, investigated, and tried by your parents, and the sentence was about to be pronounced. That meant there was not going to be any negotiation, no plea bargaining, and no stay of execution...except for a very stern and lengthy tongue lashing before the punishment came.

Now the only reason I know that is because, growing up, I heard my brother and sister's full names called quite often. But I don't ever recall...well, I guess I'd better stop right there before I tell a big one right here in the pulpit!

On this Easter Sunday, as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, I want us to look at the very first person Jesus spoke to following His resurrection and how He called her name. I want us to discover what that meant for her, but even more importantly, what it means for us today when Jesus calls our name.

Let's read **John 20:1-18**.

The very first person that Jesus speaks to on Easter morning was Mary Magdalene. This was the lady Jesus had earlier driven seven demons out of. And with a grateful heart, Mary Magdalene chose to follow Jesus and provide support for His ministry. And as Jesus was dying on the cross, Mary Magdalene was right there with Jesus all the way – even helping take His body from the cross to the tomb where He was buried.

Now, there has been much speculation and conjecture that Mary Magdalene and Jesus had a much more amorous relationship. The author of The DaVinci Code and the authors of certain earlier Gnostic documents would like you to believe that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus and that they had children together. However, there is absolutely no reliable evidence that supports that claim. In fact, those types of documents were written to either sell books or to try to discredit Christianity.

But really, Mary Magdalene was just a common woman who was devoted to Jesus. And on the morning of His resurrection, she was the one who lingered at the tomb in disbelief that someone had come in the middle of the night, and taken the body of her Lord away. And because she was there, she was the first one Jesus chose to reveal Himself to after His resurrection.

As we read, Mary didn't even recognize Jesus at first. This is not surprising because the only thing Mary had on her mind standing there at that moment looking at an empty tomb was grief and confusion. So certainly Mary wasn't even thinking about the possibility that Jesus had risen from the dead.

But then Jesus called her name. With just one word – "*Mary*" – everything changed. Mary immediately recognized Jesus and reached out to Him to embrace her risen Lord.

What I want us to see today is that when Jesus called Mary's name, it completely changed her life forever. But more than that, I want us to understand that Jesus is still in the business of calling names and changing lives. I know when He called mine, He changed me and it was for the better.

So this morning, I'd like us to think about how Jesus calls our name and what that means. First, when Jesus calls your name.

1. It Confirms the Resurrection

Think about what Mary had just experienced during those past three days. Mary was in Jerusalem during Passover. She knew about and perhaps even stood in the crowd that day when Jesus was brought before Pilate and sentenced to die. She perhaps watched in helpless horror as He was whipped and beaten and mocked by the Roman soldiers. Perhaps she was in the crowd that lined the Via Dolorosa as Jesus carried His own cross to Golgotha. And we know she was at the cross, watching Jesus suffer and die as an innocent man. She looked on

in extreme sorrow as He breathed His last, and as His side was pierced with the spear. Then she even helped as His lifeless body was placed in Joseph's tomb, and watched as the Romans rolled that huge stone across the entrance. There was no doubt in her mind that Jesus was dead.

So when Mary heard Jesus calling her name, as He had done many times before, she knew it was Him. She didn't know how it happened, but somehow she knew that Jesus was alive! And Scripture makes it clear that this was not just a dream or a apparition, or a voice inside her head. This was literally the resurrected Jesus because it says that Jesus had to tell Mary to stop holding on to Him. You can't hold on to a voice or a figment of your imagination. So, for Mary, hearing His voice calling her name was proof enough to her that Jesus was alive.

Do you believe Jesus is alive today? Have you heard Him calling your name? You know, many people still don't believe in a resurrected Jesus. In spite of all the Scriptural evidence, the historical records, and the testimonies of those who knew Him best – His disciples, many people refuse to believe.

A recent Harris poll found that roughly a third of the people in the United States do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Maybe you're one of them. But to the skeptics and the unbelievers, I would simply ask you to consider this: Every one of the disciples suffered persecution for the cause of Christ. And every one, with the exception of John, died a violent death as a result of holding to their belief that Jesus had in fact been resurrected from the grave. They staked their very lives on this one fact. Now I know people who are willing to die for a cause, that's not too uncommon. But how many people you know are willing to suffer and die for a lie?

The fact is, Jesus resurrection has been unmistakably and undeniably confirmed, and it is the most important and pivotal event in human history. And what you believe about the resurrection is the most crucial decision you'll ever make.

You see, you can believe that Jesus was a good man or that He went around doing a lot of good things. You can even believe that Jesus died on a cross and you would be correct in your beliefs in a historical person named Jesus. But unless you believe in Jesus' resurrection, you won't believe that He is the Son of God who died for you sins. Unless you believe in the resurrection, you can't believe that Jesus has power over death.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, here's what the apostle Paul had to say about the importance of the resurrection: *"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."* **1 Corinthians 15:16, 17 (NIV)**

If the resurrection isn't true, then Jesus is a liar, because He spoke about His resurrection as a fact. And if Jesus lied about that, then how can we believe anything else He said? So, it's not enough to simply believe in a historical Jesus who lived and died like everyone else. You must believe in Jesus' resurrection or else Jesus' claims of giving eternal life have no foundation. It was Jesus who said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* **John 14:6 (NIV)**. That is why Paul said, *"...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**.

So, when Jesus calls your name whether in Scripture or through a personal witness, or even in a gospel message such as this, He is confirming the reality of His resurrection. In fact, He may be calling your name right now. Do you hear Him in your heart? Secondly, when Jesus calls your name:

2. It Creates a New Relationship

That first Easter morning, Jesus created a whole new relationship with Mary. Now, as I said earlier, Mary was just an ordinary lady in ancient Palestine, There was really nothing significant about Mary that distinguished her from among the millions of people living in that land.

But Jesus chose her to be the first one to speak to after His resurrection. He didn't go to the people who were responsible for unjustly sending Him to the cross to die, and say, *"I'm back! And now I'm gonna show you guys who's the boss!"* He didn't go to Pilate and say, *"You should have stuck to your conviction and let me go. Now I'm going to take over your throne."* He didn't go first to any of those people. He chose to speak to Mary first, and I think He was making a couple of points by doing so.

First, I believe Jesus was making the point my speaking first to Mary that every person has worth in His sight, no matter who they are. In the eyes of the world, there was nothing significant about Mary. But in the eyes of Jesus, she was significant because she was created to have fellowship with Him.

Secondly, I believe Jesus first spoke to Mary because she thought her relationship with Jesus was over. After all, she was at the tomb that morning looking for a dead body to anoint with spices. All that was left to do was the customary Jewish burial ritual that couldn't be done on Friday because of the Sabbath. So this was Mary's last goodbye. For all intents and purposes, her relationship with Jesus was over.

So, when Jesus called Mary's name, He was also letting her know that their relationship wasn't over, but was in fact, just beginning. From this point on, their relationship would take on a whole new dimension. Mary's relationship with Jesus would no longer be based on the physical presence of Jesus, but rather on her faith in something far better – a permanent relationship with the risen Savior and with God. That is why Jesus told Mary to let go of Him. He wanted her to understand that the nature of their relationship had changed and that she had another job to do – tell others about his resurrection.

When Jesus calls a sinner to repentance, He's trying to let him or her know that He desires a personal and intimate relationship with them. He's their creator yes, but He wants to create a new life in them – a life that can be lived to the fullest, and a life that will never end.

Perhaps there are some of you here this morning who have never experienced the abundant life and joy that comes from a personal relationship with the risen Christ. But the resurrection means that Jesus has made it possible for you, like Mary, to have that kind of lasting relationship.

When Jesus calls your name, He confirms the reality of the resurrection and He creates the possibility for a brand new relationship. But that relationship doesn't just happen automatically, because lastly, when Jesus calls your name:

3. It Calls for a Response

When Jesus called Mary's name, she had to choose how to respond. She could have ignored Him. After all, until He called her name, she just figured it was the gardener. But even when she did recognize His voice, she could have just ignored Him.

She could have doubted Jesus. She could have said to herself, "*Jesus is dead. This can't be Him. People don't come back to life after they're dead!*"

She also could have chosen to reject Jesus. Even if she believed that this really was Jesus and that He was alive, she could have just rejected what that meant for her life and just went back to her old way of life.

But Mary chose to embrace Jesus. She probably didn't comprehend or understand everything at this point, but based on what she knew she made a decision to embrace Jesus and to follow Him. She had to believe that He had indeed been raised from the dead and that His death and resurrection offered her a permanent, intimate relationship with Him.

This morning, Jesus is calling some of your names. He's confirmed in your heart the reality of the resurrection. He's calling you to enter into a new relationship with Him. And He's also calling you to respond to His invitation.

Like Mary, you have several choices this morning. You can choose to ignore Him and leave here the same way you came in – lost and without Christ.

Or you could choose to doubt that Jesus is alive, and leave here trusting in your own ability to get to heaven.

Or, you can reject Jesus this morning. You might believe in Jesus as a good man, and even believe that He rose from the grave, but you just won't accept God's offer of salvation.

But I urge you to do as Mary did and choose to embrace Jesus. I urge you to accept His death on the cross as the payment for your sin. I urge you to embrace the forgiveness He offers you. I urge you to accept His resurrection as His providing the way for you to have a relationship with God.

Conclusion: This morning, if you believe in the reality of the resurrection, then listen to the voice of Jesus as He calls your name. He's inviting you to enter into a new relationship with God. Respond to His voice and embrace Him today. Making this choice won't make all your problems disappear, because we live in a world that is full of sin, so we'll still have problems. In fact, Jesus promised that we'd always have problems in this world.

But responding to Jesus and accepting Him as your Lord and Savior will change your life, for only He can calm your fears about the future and ease your worries about your eternity.

Right now I'm going to ask everyone to close your eyes and bow your head. This morning, if you would like to embrace Jesus, I'm going to ask you to silently repeat a short prayer after me. The words of this prayer aren't some magic words, but if you really mean them from your heart, then Jesus has promised to give you eternal life – a joyful abundant life for now and for eternity.

Dear God, Thank you for calling my name. I believe in the reality of the resurrection. I believe that Jesus came to die for my sins and that His resurrection proved His power over death. I confess to you that I am a sinner. I'm sorry for my sins and I ask You to forgive my sins based on what Jesus did on the cross. I am deciding today to embrace Jesus and to make Him my Forgiver and my Master. In Jesus' name, Amen