

When the Shepherd Calls Our Name

Approaching the tomb with Mary | KAY SORVIK

EARLY ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, *while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So 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." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know

that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:1-18)

It was dark. In both the literal and figurative sense of the phrase, "it is darkest before the dawn," it was dark. It was dark outside and it was dark in that heavy black-hole emotional way. Mary got up that early morning with a heavy heart to go about a task that was not pleasant, but which she needed, she wanted, to do. She was going to tend to the dead body of her friend and teacher and Savior, Jesus.

We don't know much about Mary Magdalene. She was from Magdala, a small village on the Sea of Galilee. She had been possessed by seven demons, which the Gospel of Luke does not explicitly say Jesus cast out, but given her devotion to Jesus, it seems to be implied. Mary, along with Joanna, Susanna, and others, traveled with



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Jesus and his twelve disciples, and Luke states that these women provided support to the group from their own resources.

We don't know much about Mary Magdalene, but we do know that her life had to have been changed when those demons were cast out, and her life had to have been changed when she decided to follow Jesus in his ministry, and her life had to have been changed when she decided to fund that ministry.

We don't know much about Mary Magdalene, but we do know that on that Friday afternoon when Jesus was hung on a cross, most of the twelve disciples had left, but she was there when Jesus died. She was also there at the grave when Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen and laid it in the tomb.

It seems as though it would not be reading too much into the story to believe that on that dark morning, Mary faced a darkness in her soul. Having spent all of that time with Jesus, she had just witnessed the brutal death of her friend and her teacher and her Savior—the man who had saved her from her own torment. Now she found herself alone and it was dark.

And when she arrived at that tomb and found the stone rolled away and the body gone, she must

have felt a devastation that would be hard to describe in words. At a time when she must have thought it couldn't get any worse, it did.

We gather on Easter Sunday morning to celebrate resurrection, but for Mary on that Sunday morning there was only darkness and devastation and desecration. When Mary saw the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, her first response was not to think, "Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed!" but rather to think that his body had been stolen. What next? Could it get any darker?

Mary ran to tell the news to Peter and the other disciples, and Peter and John went back with her to the tomb to witness for themselves what Mary reported. Having seen with their own eyes, they were not yet quite able to put together what Jesus had told them about his death and resurrection. Peter and John left and went back home, but Mary stayed in the garden.

We don't know much about Mary Magdalene, but we do know she was devoted. From those first moments in Galilee, she had stayed by Jesus's side,

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giving all of herself, her time, and her resources to follow Jesus. She was all in. She had found the most significant relationship of her life in being a follower of Jesus. But now he was dead and gone—literally gone! What was she to do, how was she to go on? She could only weep.

Most of us can relate to her experience of darkness that morning. At one time or another we have probably all found ourselves there—in that dark place. Maybe it was literally in front of an open grave when we experienced that darkness—a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend gone and the “dark night of the soul” set in. Maybe it was the day our dream died. Things didn’t work out the way we planned—we didn’t get the education, the job, the family, the resources, the life we dreamed of back when we used to dream. Maybe it was the day when our hope for a better self, or a better circumstance or a better world died. We reflect on our life and realize that we are not who we want to be, our life is not carefree, our world is falling apart. And in that darkness, like Mary, we find ourselves weeping.

We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene, but we know darkness and we know weeping and we know loss. And in the midst of that weeping, in the midst of that darkness, comfort and hope come in the simplest of ways.

After hours of compounding grief, of sleep deprivation, of darkness, of tear-clouded eyes, Mary found herself in a conversation with a man she thought was the gardener. He asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for at the tomb. The darkness had blinded her eyes and she did not recognize who was standing right next to her. So she asked the presumed gardener to tell her where

Jesus’s body was, if he had taken it away. Mary’s eyes may not have seen, but her ears heard the most beautiful sound—her own name, spoken by Jesus.

We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene, but Jesus did. He was her friend, her teacher, her Savior, and he only needed to say her name, “Mary,” for her to realize his presence with her. “Rabboni”—teacher—she said.

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “the sheep hear [the shepherd’s] voice. He calls his own sheep by name” (10:3).

A name is a powerful thing. My parents gave me a “short and sweet” name, “Kay.” And when I was young I had my share of nicknames—KayKay, Kayker, Cake, Cook, Cookie, along with other less appreciated nicknames (Dodo bird—thanks to my brother). But there is one name that my mother has called me through all these years—Kay-key. And that name always gets my attention, because it is spoken with such affection and love. I know it is my mom when I hear that name.

I imagine when Mary heard her name spoken by Jesus on that dark morning, everything changed. She knew the Shepherd’s voice, she knew her teacher’s voice. She knew her name was being spoken with love and affection. Her heart no longer was heavy but was filled with joy and hope and love, all because her teacher spoke her name and was present with her.

Everything changed. The cross no longer was a sign of defeat, but of victory. The empty tomb no longer represented death, but resurrection. The darkness of the morning was gone and the light of day radiated all around. The joy that comes in the morning had arrived. Everything changed

because Jesus spoke her name.

We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene. We know her name and we know Jesus spoke her name and invited her to continue to follow. We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene, but we know that God called out her name through the person of Jesus Christ. God called her name in love. We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene, but we can know the one she knew and loved the most.

On Easter Sunday morning, we are reminded that God calls out the name of each one of us. He calls us out of darkness. He calls us out of the darkness of sin and reminds us that he died and he rose so that we might be forgiven of our sin. He calls us out of the darkness of despair, of loneliness, of loss, of pain, of illness, of hopelessness to a place of joy and light. All because God calls out our name in love.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

We don’t know much about Mary Magdalene, but because of her running to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead, we too can know the most important name there is to know—Jesus. And he knows your name and he calls it out in love. Have you heard him call your name? Have you answered? He was Mary’s friend and teacher and Savior and he desires to have that relationship with each one of us. He longs to change our darkness to light and our sadness to joy. May we listen to his call so that we might know the joy that Mary experienced that first Easter morning and together declare, “Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!” Alleluia! And amen. ■