

John 20:1-18

20:1 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.

20:2 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."

20:3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.

20:4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

20:5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

20:6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,

20:7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

20:8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed,

20:9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

20:10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

20:11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb,

20:12 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.

20:13 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."

20:14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

20:15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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."

20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

20:17 Jesus said to her, "Do not touch 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.'"

20:18 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.

Sermon: The Next Right Thing

Our family has a great affinity for Disney's *Frozen* franchise, but especially *Frozen Two*. For starters, this is the first movie Jacqueline and I took Mary Allen to see in the theatre – she wasn't more than three at the time – and never, ever having seen a screen so large, she proclaimed of the film, "It's the Biggest Frozen Movie Ever!"

Frozen Two also happened to become available on streaming during the first month of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it literally saved our lives. Our girls probably watched the film three times a day, and with their attention occupied, Jacqueline and I managed to do some work from home, not to mention, we received a change of pace from the constant screenings of *Moana* and *Paw Patrol* the six months prior. To this day, our DVD copy of *Frozen Two* is a road trip staple.

Another interesting tidbit. We watched *Frozen Two* for the first the time that pandemic season on Good Friday. The movie was, then, as it is now, a muse for an Easter Sermon. Here's why.

At the height of the drama that is *Frozen Two*, Princess Anna finds herself overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. Anna has lost her sister, Elsa, the friend she holds most dear. The future Anna hopes for, the future she longs for, the future she believes in has vanished. Her words, in song, evoke despair:

*I've seen dark before, but not like this
This is cold, this is empty, this is numb
The life I knew is over, the lights are out
Hello, darkness, I'm ready to succumb
I follow you around, I always have*

*But you've gone to a place I cannot find
This grief has a gravity, it pulls me down*

I see a lot of Mary Magdalene, and indeed all the faithful women who followed Jesus, in Princess Anna. Like Anna, Mary Magdalene had found her compass – her friendship with Jesus illumined how love can transform loneliness. In Jesus, Mary met someone who looked past all the pretension, all the systematic bureaucracy that defined worth and value. Jesus was rooted in humanity. He was a teacher and a master who served his disciples; he was a man who treated women as helpmates; he was a prophet who wasn't persuaded by power; he was a host who offered an open table; he was a neighbor, even to his enemies. Jesus was Mary's friend. And Jesus loved her, because like all of us, Mary was a child of God. And Mary, seeing the life of Jesus, believed, with all her heart, that one life, lived with all of God's potential, would change the world. Mary believed that the life of Jesus revealed God, not just now, but from *now on*.

And then Friday happened. What piercing, shocking grief. At first, it's like a movie or a play. "Oh, that's clever," you say, "A little suspense before the encore." But the matinee ended with a final curtain, and Friday afternoon turned to Friday evening, and the grief hung over an impossibly-long Saturday.

Like Anna, I imagine Mary's grief had a gravity that pulled her down.

In *Frozen Two*, Anna finds her strength from an inner voice. Her song continues:

*You are lost, hope is gone
But you must go on
And do the next right thing*

*Can there be a day beyond this night?
I don't know anymore what is true
I can't find my direction, I'm all alone
The only star that guided me was you
How to rise from the floor?
But it's not you I'm rising for
Just do the next right thing
Take a step, step again
It is all that I can do
The next right thing
I won't look too far ahead
It's too much for me to take
But break it down to this next breath, this next step
This next choice is one that I can make
So I'll walk through this night
Stumbling blindly toward the light
And do the next right thing
And, with it done, what comes then?
When it's clear that everything will never be the same again
Then I'll make the choice to hear that voice
And do the next right thing*

I believe that Mary Magdalene heard a strong inner voice, perhaps what we articulate today as God's Spirit. Somehow, somehow, Mary was determined to do the next right thing. Perhaps, she, of all those who shared in that final meal with Jesus, best understood what he was talking about.

Yes, today's text includes a spirited foot race featuring Peter and the Beloved Disciple, and their affirmation/confirmation of exactly nothing. Maybe all the exercise wore them out, but upon seeing the empty tomb, the two men return home. This display of impassiveness

resembles their inaction while Jesus was at trial, and on a cross – they stayed away. Hiding, silent, bewildered, paralyzed with shock, and doubt, and grief, and shame.

But it's Mary who's putting one foot in front of the other. Amid a world that will never be the same again, Mary, along with Jesus' mother Mary, stays with Jesus at Golgotha. And over the weekend, Mary makes all the preparations to prepare his body for burial. And on Sunday morning, Mary overcomes the quicksand of her grief and takes the first heavy steps from her home to the tomb. When she sees the tomb is empty, Mary acts; she calls for the disciples to help. And when they return home, prior to chauvinistic authors giving them credit for unspoken witness, it is Mary who demands more. "Okay, yes, this tomb is empty, but that's not good enough. I've got to look again. I've got to find my friend. I've got to be present. I've got to do the next right thing," she says.

And she hears her name. "Mary." Imagine that, God speaks her name, in a language she can comprehend, from the lips of a friend, who is ascending from this world to the next.

"Don't cling to me," her friend says. "What you have known will always be so. I need you to let the others know that they, too, can hear God call their name."

So...Mary does the next right thing. Mary squeezes her friend tight, perhaps even grabs fistfuls of his robe in her shaking hands; she feels the energy of that embrace, the energy that love brings, and gently kisses him on the cheek, and lets him go. And in a daze, half skip, half run, half wobble, she travels down the road to tell the others, "Jesus, our friend, has returned. He greeted me by name, and wishes to greet you, too! I have seen him with my own eyes, I have heard him with my

own ears, I have hugged him with my own arms, and I have kissed him with my own lips. I know his presence in my heart, and soon, so will you!”

You wanna know what the story of resurrection is? I believe it’s two-fold. The first part is knowing our names. Yes, my name is Robert, Bob for short, after my grandfather, and each of you have given names, too. And collectively, as a group, we call ourselves Millbrook Baptist Church. But what it means to know our names, is to live our names. It means, recognizing that as created beings, I, Bob, each of you, and us, Millbrook, we have been made in the image of God, each of us empowered to do the next right things of God.

The second part of resurrection, I believe, is being able to hear God call us by name when everything will never be the same again.

For when we recognize our name, and when we are open to hearing God’s call, burning bushes cannot be consumed, passing storms cannot drown out God’s still small voice, even in silence, and large stones are rolled away to reveal new life: God’s presence joins us, greets us, fills us, equips us, empowers us, emboldens us, transforms us.

On that very first Easter morning, Mary knew her name, and she heard it spoken aloud as well. Mary reminded others that they, too had a name God is eager to speak aloud. And Mary must have been persuasive, because two thousand years later, she’s telling us the same.

Because of Mary, I witness resurrection in countless things: animated movies; daffodils in March; the kindness and exuberance of my children; the healing powers of broken bread and shared wine; needed rhythms restored by Sabbath; a bright morning sun, that somehow tells

The Next Right Thing
Bob Stillerman
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me of an Easter hope in the newest of ways. Yes, Miss Mary's weaving together all sorts of resurrection tales!

Millbrook Baptist Church, this Easter morning, Miss Mary, in the footsteps of Jesus, invites us to hear God call our name. And know this, not even the powers of death, will prevent God from rolling away the stones that keep our hearts from hearing such a call. God's drama is good, y'all. It's grand, and gracious, and ever-unfolding. And we are part of it!!!

Millbrook Baptist Church, God is calling our name. May we hear it right now! And may each of us do the next right thing: encourage our neighbors to hear their names, too. Amen.