

**SERMON – 22/5/22**  
**'Mary Magdalene'**

John 20:1-18

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary... Go to my brothers and tell them.'" (John 20:16-17)

You know, I might never have become parish minister in Kinross. There were a couple of significant moments when I thought it might actually be someone else who was meant to be called here. In the nervous melee of a day of interviews here in the church, poor Ewan Cathcart, who was convenor of the Nominating Committee managed to introduce me to the Committee as the Rev. David Reid. Well, other Rev. David Reids *are* available but although my middle name is David, the name I am always called by is Alan. Then, on the day of my induction here, again a nerve-racking occasion for all involved, poor Derek Lawson, then Moderator of the Presbytery of Perth (whom incidentally I met yesterday at the General Assembly), managed to address me on various occasions during the service as *Ian* Reid. There have been some illustrious ministers by the name of Ian Reid, but I'm not one of them – my name is Alan. Maybe you were supposed to have somebody else, although I don't think so.

My name is Alan and I'm very comfortable with that name. I've never been called anything else – well, not to my face anyway – and I usually answer to it, unless I'm smitten with that occasional temporary deafness that afflicts husbands when their wife has something urgent for them to do. The Lord famously said to the prophet Isaiah (as He has said to countless millions of others before and since) 'I have called you by your name; you are mine... You are my witnesses.' (Isaiah 43:1,10) Well I want to remind you that just as with Mary on the resurrection morning, today the Lord Jesus is calling each one of us by our name and calling us to be His witnesses.

We come to a close today of this short series of sermons on people who encountered Jesus – they have not been major characters in the Gospels, people whose characters we get to know, but they *have* all been people who are called by name, people like you and me – Nathaniel the sceptic, Mary the mother

of Jesus, Nicodemus the insider (and of course, by contrast to him, the nameless woman at the well, the outsider), Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, and today Mary Magdalene who may or may not be the same Mary we looked at last week. The point is that Jesus meets each of these people where they are at whatever point they may be on the journey of faith – Nathaniel and the woman at the well are on the fringes, meeting Jesus for the first time; Mary, Jesus' mother, and Mary the sister of Lazarus are people who have had a close relationship with Him over many years; Nicodemus is trying to make sense of who Jesus is in the context of his religious upbringing; but whatever the context, Jesus seeks to relate to them, so wherever you are on the journey this morning Christ is not distant – He comes to us all here today offering to enter into a relationship with us.

On the first Easter morning Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark. As we come so many years later, although it is not dark and we are not coming to the actual tomb, many of us come with similar questions and anxieties and emotions to those that were on Mary's mind. Perhaps we are conscious that others are here with us each too with their own thoughts and concerns or perhaps we are actually oblivious to others, just caught up with our own search, our own longings, our own lives. Perhaps we are conscious of the angels or perhaps we entertain them unawares. Perhaps we think ourselves confident in faith or perhaps we are all too well aware of the gaps in our knowledge of the things of God and the shortcomings in our understanding of spiritual matters. In the moment we all are just who we are.

The man in the garden says to Mary, 'Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' and she articulates her anxieties about the missing body. Perhaps we can't even put our thoughts into words – I know I often struggle to do so. But into the moment Jesus speaks – aren't you just longing to know what He will say, how He will explain, how He will work things out, what light He will shed?

'Mary' – that's all He says. Just a name. But it's her name. And it's my name, and it's your name He says today. I am with you, He is saying.

If I might be forgiven for jumbling up my seasons this morning, there is a line which I love in the Christmas carol 'Christians, awake, salute the happy morn.' The shepherds go to Bethlehem to see the newborn and then they go and spread the word about what they had seen and heard. The carol describes them as 'the first apostles of His infant fame.' These ordinary shepherds who have no status or special training are genuinely and wonderfully 'apostles' – literally 'sent ones'. We don't know their names but God did and He called them to come and see Jesus and to go and bear witness to that by telling others. It is of the greatest significance, I believe, in the passage we read this morning that it is not Simon Peter or John who are first on the scene at the empty tomb, but Mary Magdalene – it is *she* who is the first messenger of the resurrection, running to tell those who for the cultural reasons of the day would, as men, be the ones who later took on the status of apostles. And when they have gone back to their homes, believing but puzzled, Mary stays, weeping over what she can see but can not understand – how many of us can relate to that! – and there it happens. In seeking Jesus, she finds Him, or rather He finds her.

'Mary' - what a moment, what a surge of joy must have coursed through her body. She obviously lunges for Him and is about to squeeze the life out of Him again with a hug, for He says 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.' But there is that pattern again: He commissions her to go and tell what she has seen - "Go to my brothers and tell them."

To all of us here this morning, whatever stage we are at along the journey of faith, whether baptised or unbaptised, whether new believers or 'far ben' in the faith, whether active in church or lapsed, I say listen for the voice of God Himself – He is calling you by name today. Come and see what He has done; come and see the Man of Sorrows who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and taken them with Him in His own body to the grave; come and see the empty tomb – Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And whatever you have witnessed of these things, go and tell in whatever way you can.

If you hear God calling your name this morning and you have never stood and professed your faith publicly, then maybe that's

the next step you need to take. Tell others that you belong to God in Christ. "I have called you by your name; you are mine," says the Lord. Perhaps you are already a church member, a regular churchgoer, active in some area of congregational life but that still, small voice is insistently calling you by name – what does He want of you? You are called to go and bear witness to what you have experienced of God, to tell others your own unique story of Christ. No-one else can tell it the way you can to the people that only you can reach with the Good News. It may mean that you should more open about your faith among those with whom you have to do day by day; it may mean that you take up some role in the life of the congregation; it may mean that God is calling you to enter into some particular form of service or ministry recognised by the church. The Church of Scotland may be in a particular mess at the moment and the future of the institutional church may never have been more uncertain, but this is not about the institution, it's about the Gospel, it's about our relationship with Jesus, it's about our discipleship and what is certain is this, the people of God are called, each one of us by name, to tell a needy world of a Risen Saviour.

I have never once regretted responding to the insistent call I heard as a 16 year-old – follow me. Although I didn't know then quite where it would lead or exactly what service I might be asked to give, and although there's hardly a week goes by that I don't question what it might look like next week or next year – probably never more so than in these past few months – I know that it was Alan who was called, not David or Ian. Age is an irrelevance, gender and status are an irrelevance. It's not about what you are but about who you are in God's sight and who you can become under His prompting. I believe that God is calling each and every one of us here by name today, calling us to take a step forward in faith from where we are at the moment to press on and share with all those we meet whatever it is we know of the Jesus who meets us, risen from the tomb.

"Jesus said, 'Mary... Go to my brothers and tell them.'" All of you, each of you, called by name by God Himself, go and tell.