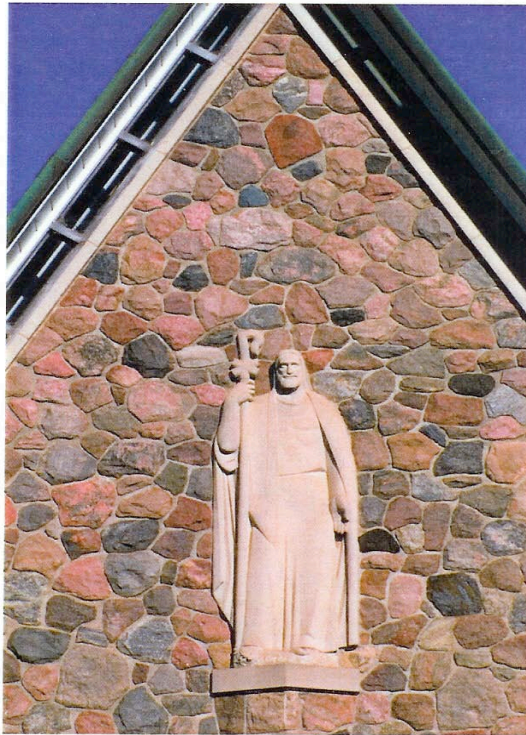
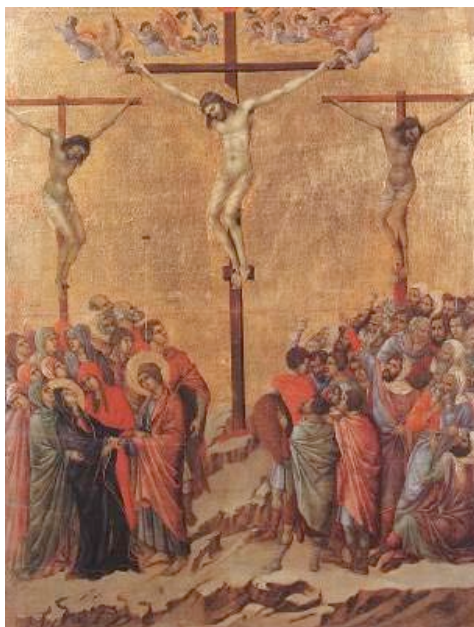


**MEDITATIONS FROM
ORIOLE – YORK MILLS
UNITED CHURCH**



**YOUR NAME IS BEING CALLED!
Easter Sunday 2008
Reverend Chris Miller**

This is one in a series of selected sermons and resources from Oriole – York Mills United Church. It is offered as a public service in the spirit of sharing and strengthening our Christian faith. We hope readers benefit from the insights they provide.



Crucifixion 1308-11, Duccio di Buoninsegna

On the left are Christ's followers amongst whom are Mary of Clopas, Mary Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene (in red with her long hair unbound) and John the Evangelist.

Additional copies are available upon request. Please contact us at:
Oriole – York Mills United Church Church of the Good Shepherd
2609 Bayview Avenue
North York, Ontario M2L 1B5
416-447-5941
orioleyorkmills@rogers.com

YOUR NAME IS BEING CALLED!

John 20:1-18



Descent from the Cross Rubens, Pieter 1612-14

Several men - Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, St John and two servants - carefully lower the body of Christ in a brilliant white shroud. They are assisted by several women, including Jesus' mother. Christ's foot rests on the shoulder of Mary Magdalene, who dried his feet with her hair.

When I was a young college student fresh out of high school and hundreds of miles from home, I was invited to dinner one

evening at the home of one of my professors. A third-year student was also invited. As we talked, this other student called the professor “Ray,” which was his first name. Apparently my jaw dropped to the floor because I received a note in my mailbox the next day from the other student explaining why he called the prof by his first name. I called all my teachers Mr. or Mrs. or Miss or Dr. -- first names were not the norm for me or for most students, I thought. We were students and usually younger; they were our teachers and usually older. Thus, there was the distance. At some point, I don’t remember when exactly, Dr. “Smith” asked me to call him “Ray” too. Something significant happened then. The normal politeness associated with being acquaintances had shifted to a new and deeper stage of friendship. He obviously felt we had been together for some while and had gotten to know one another. So it was appropriate now for me to call him by his first name.

The Scripture passage this Easter morning gives us a moment something like the one I have described. It is a moment when it becomes clear that something extraordinary has taken place, not only to Jesus but also to the way the disciples begin relating to Jesus and to God. Up to this point, Jesus had spoken about God as “the Father” or “the Father who sent me” or “my Father.” He had been calling his followers “disciples,” “servants” and “friends.” But because of his resurrection, everything has now changed -- and remarkably so. There is an *amazing new feeling* to the Risen Christ’s words: “Go to **my brothers** and tell them, ‘I go to **my Father** and **your Father**, to **my God** and **your God.**’”

Something has clearly changed. A new relationship has sprung to life like a sudden spring flower. The disciples are welcomed into a new world: a world where they can know God the way Jesus knows God, where they can be intimate children with their Father in Heaven. With God!

This welcome reminds me of Jesus' story about the prodigal who went off in disgrace into a far country. The son was estranged from his family -- especially his father. The far country almost became the death of the son. But eventually he wanted to escape its grasp and return to his father's house. The connection with Easter is that, by his resurrection, Jesus has now broken the grip of human estrangement from God and made a way back to God from the ultimate far country of death. A way back into the Father's presence. And everyone who believes Jesus is welcomed there in his name as a beloved son or daughter.

This is a **stunning invitation** – from one level of relationship with God to another. We see this invitation acted out so dramatically through Mary Magdalene, one of the central characters in John's Gospel. So this morning we are going to be with Mary Magdalene. It's her time. And it's our time.

The drama began earlier when Mary and some other women went to the last place they had seen Jesus -- and watched his body being wrapped and laid in the tomb.



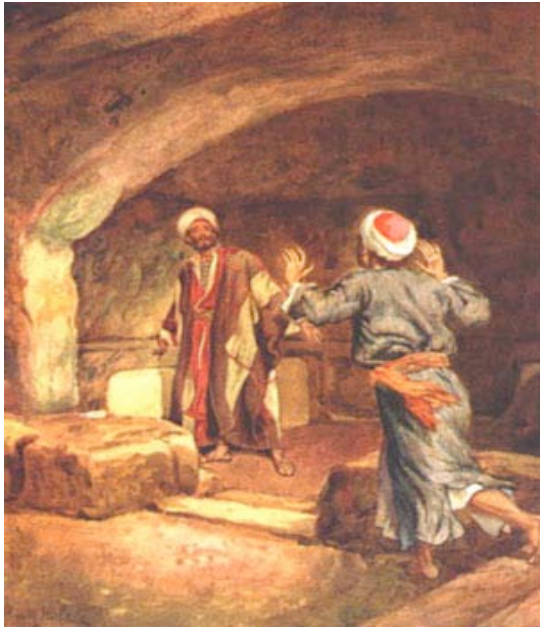
The Entombment, Bouts, Dieric the Elder c1450

Three days later, they took spices to give him a proper burial. But they found the tomb open -- and no body. Later, Mary is back alone and weeping helplessly outside the tomb. Her world has fallen apart. She is in shock and grief. The one who meant so much to her, who healed her of deep, deep hurts and pain -- “seven evil spirits,” the Scripture says -- was now dead. And for her, even worse, the body of the one she loved was nowhere to be found. Mary was devastated.

Let’s stand with her as she weeps cruel tears. But let’s not stand alone this morning. Think of someone you know, or perhaps

have seen or read about, who has cried bitterly this week. Let's bring that person too and let's stand together with Mary at the empty tomb.

Let's not be in a hurry to move along. Tears have their own natural rhythm. Hold the people and their tears, and perhaps your own tears, in your mind and heart as you stand together outside the tomb. Now let's stoop down and look into the tomb itself. But be prepared for a surprise!



**The Beloved Disciple Joins Peter in the Tomb
William Hole, 1908**

Now it's time to listen to whomever you have brought with you to stand with Mary at the tomb. Listen to the person say, "They have taken away . . . my home, my husband, my wife, my children, my rights, my dignity, my hopes, my life."

Listen to Mary say: "They have taken away my master! The one who gave me hope, who gave me my life back – the one whom I love."

It is as if your grief and the world's grief today and Mary's grief all meet together outside the empty tomb.

As you stand with Mary and reflect on her answer, ponder too the answers to why the world weeps today.

But, now, someone else is there with Mary. Look! Turn around! Turn around! Who is standing there?

As we stand there and listen, we overhear Mary's conversation with the gardener -- the Risen Jesus whom she did not recognize at first.

"Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?"

"Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him."

"Mary."

"Teacher!"



**Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen as a Gardener
Cornelisz Van Oostsanen, Jacob 1507**

As we stand there and listen, let the weeping pain of the people we are with speak to Jesus, whether or not they know who He is.

Now listen for our names.

I wonder what Mary heard when Jesus called her name. She heard a greeting from someone she had not recognized, of course. But when she heard her name, she recognized the voice!

It was a wonderful voice, full of comfort, but maybe with even a gentle rebuke *and* an invitation all wrapped up together. It was as if Jesus was lovingly chiding her with a “Come on, Mary! Don’t you know me?”

That’s part of the astounding mystery of resurrection life with Jesus. Mary knew Jesus well -- she even tried to hug him as no doubt she did before his crucifixion. Yet, at the same time, she did not know him. He told her not to keep clinging to him. She called the Risen Jesus "Rabboni." She called him, understandably enough, the old, familiar Hebrew term she was used to even as she tried to comprehend this new event in the history of the world. But now he was so much more than “Teacher.” Now he was Jesus the Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords. He was the same. He was different. He was alive, with a new life, the likes of which she had never seen before and could hardly imagine.

For Mary, one word remade her world and transformed her life forever after. And the word was her own name! What a memorable confirmation of the personal way Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, connects with his people – those he loves and who love Him.

Mary responded with ecstatic joy **when she heard his voice calling her name**. In Chapter 10 of John’s Gospel is this remarkable statement: **“The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name and they recognize his voice.”**

I wonder what the weeping people you have brought with you in your mind to the empty tomb will hear **when their names**

are called by the Risen Christ. Will they hear the hope he offers? Will they hear the love in his voice? Will they hear joy? forgiveness? acceptance? healing? belonging?

I wonder what **you** hear **when you hear your own name being called by the Risen Jesus.** My brother? My sister? My beloved? Your Father? Your God?

A concluding thought to this dramatic encounter of Mary Magdalene with the Resurrected Jesus. Mary was the *first person to see Jesus* after he was raised from the dead. She was the *first person to tell Jesus' disciples that Jesus was alive!* "I have seen the Master," Mary cried, "and this is what he said."

There is nothing like fresh, firsthand evidence, is there? If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a story about the people who saw the Risen Jesus, they would not have dreamed of giving the central role to a woman – let alone Mary Magdalene!

Jesus calls to each of us today as well. He knows all our names. He is calling your name. Will you believe and follow the Risen Jesus? "Believe" is the word Jesus used when he said to his disciple Thomas who doubted, "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have come to believe."

May it be so for you and for me.



The Pieta, Michelangelo Buonarroti 1499