

CARBONDALE CUMMUNITY UMC

# Called by Name...

---

Easter 2014

**Pastor Brad Walston**

**4/20/2014**

John 20:1-18, Romans 6:4, 6-7

**Sermon April 7 – Called by Name, John 20:11-18, Romans 6:4, 6-7**

He is risen! (*He is risen, indeed!*)

...and here's some good news: so are you! Jesus the risen Christ calls each of us, by name, into our own resurrection.

Did you ever notice when you go out to eat how absurd some of the names of the menu items can be? I mean you can't just order pancakes with strawberries or blueberries on top, you have to order the Rooty Tooty Fresh and Fruity. At Denny's they don't just serve bacon and eggs; it's an All American Grand Slam! And my favorite – instead of an egg sandwich you can order “Moons Over My Hammy!”

One author writes, “A name can't begin to encompass the sum of all her parts. But that's the magic of names, isn't it? That the complex, contradictory individuals we are can be called up complete and whole in another mind through the simple sorcery of a name.”

And another one I saw recently... -- “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.” So true....

What is it about a name? Would a rose by any other name really smell as sweet? What if we called it a ‘stink blossom?’ Why does a name hold such power? In the beginning, the universe the earth and everything in it was created by the word of God. In ancient times, people believed that knowing the name of something gave a person power over it. Adam was given the dubious honor of naming every living thing on the planet. How do we explain the look in my mother's eye when she was lying in her hospital bed and she heard me say my name, “Mom, it's Brad.”

Who here hasn't called a child or been called by – not by just their first name but all three names when they've been less than well behaved? Bradley James Walston! I knew I was in for it... When we hear our own name we know that the message is specifically for us. Happy birthday, Brad! Congratulations, Trevor, on a new personal best! This is big part of the Easter message in the passage we're looking at today.

OK – so Mary’s alone at the tomb. Here’s what I think happened: Mary is the first one to arrive at the tomb at before sunrise that morning. The Greek word is *proi*, which is the last of the four watches of the night – between 3 – 6 am. When she gets there, in the dimness of the predawn light she sees that the huge stone slab that was covering the opening of the tomb has been moved. Perhaps they had had taken him to inflict more and even greater indignities on her Lord and master – maybe it was just grave robbers. But she loved Jesus so much! She can’t face this situation alone so she runs back to the house to get help.

Two disciples, Peter and John raced back to the tomb, and I think in their hurry they left poor Mary in the dust, so by the time she gets back to the tomb, they had already grabbed the linens and split; so there she stands -- alone – crying not just because her friend and teacher is dead, but because those two jerks she calls friends have just ditched her...in a graveyard! – and she’s standing there and she’s angry and she’s sad, she’s confused, and certainly frustrated. It’s only sunrise and already she’s having a really bad day – probably ready to cash it in and go back to bed!

This is weird...Peter and John were just in there, right, and they didn’t see any angels – there’s no mention of them. But then Mary peeks in and sees two strangers in white robes sitting where the body was, and she doesn’t even bat an eye! “Who are you?” I might have said – “What are you doing in here?” I might have said... But she isn’t the least bit freaked out! When they talk to her, she just answers them like she sees angels every day!

There is a gentle nudge in their question; do you hear it? – “Woman – why are you crying?” Jesus asks her the same thing, “Why are you crying?” – It must be important because it’s in there twice – the Bible is like that - ... but who wouldn’t be crying? But doesn’t it feel almost as if they are saying, "This is no time for weeping"? Think Tom Hanks in *A League of Their Own*, “There’s no crying in Easter!”

“This is no time for crying, but for rejoicing and praising and thanks giving.” -- WHAT?!? -- Rejoicing?!? But it also implies that Mary should have known that. Jesus told the disciples more than once that he would rise again on the third day. One of the things that always gets me about the disciples is how dense they could be sometimes.

Kinda like us? They never really heard Jesus' repeated reminders that He would rise again on the third day; and until the end they never really believed that he was going to die in the first place.

Martin Luther (the original) once spent three days in a dark depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in black mourning clothes. "Who's dead?" he asked her.

"God," she answered.

Luther scolded her, saying, "What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die."

"Well, the way you've been acting I was sure He had!"

But you see? Martin Luther and Mary – they're like us! We find ourselves in these rotten circumstances, and good Christians that we are, all God's amazing promises go right out the window! That was the trap Mary was caught in that day. Jesus only has to say one word. And Mary instantly recognized his voice, like we recognize the voice of a loved one on the telephone.

So let's back up -- Mary's crying and she's carrying on – she's accusing Jesus of stealing His OWN body – because she thinks he's the gardener -- and if He knows where it is He should tell her, right, so she can just go and get it, and take it – I don't know, home with her? Blinded by her misery, she has no idea who she's talking to - or what she's doing.

And Jesus - He just looks at her. He just looks at her with that incredible tenderness and compassion that only Jesus ever had – that we can only imagine -- .... and she's sniffing and weeping – and you know none of us are very attractive when we're crying, right? We're certainly not at our best! All leaking and runny and snotty – she's a mess. Yuck!

Mary is lost. She's stuck in that dark place of Good Friday. She can't see past the grief. She can't press on through the hopelessness. She can't see the cross as a sign of triumph and victory... not yet; because Mary, in her blindness, can see only defeat, failure, and loss.

But that's how it goes, isn't it? When we're at our worst – all ugly and lost – self-centered and narcissistic -- addicted, abused or abandoned! Maybe you're afraid. Maybe you're angry... It doesn't matter! When we're blind and stuck in our dark places, in our 'me-me-me-ness,' the places where we've come up short, in other words, our SIN... When we're in that place, Jesus just stands there looking at us, waiting, and when we stop to take a breath – IF we stop to take a breath -- we can hear Him call us by name.

I haven't had a drink in over 10 years – thank God! But was a real problem for me. I never went anywhere without my flask or knowing when or where I would have access to another drink. I had to plan everything I did around what liquor might be available, and I almost always had a 'car cocktail.'

I was at my worst – sick every day, unemployed and unemployable – this close to eviction! This goes on for years for some of us – it did for me. It went on for years – Blinded by my own misery. Me and Mary – and maybe you too! We're blinded by our self-centeredness. We don't see anything but ourselves -- my problems and my discomfort -- my stuff. Blinded by our sin.

Then one day I heard it... Alcoholics in recovery refer to it as a "brief moment of clarity." Looking back I know that that moment, that flash of awareness – maybe I stopped for second to breathe -- that was the moment when I heard Jesus call me – by name – into Easter.

From hopeless drunk to Easter! -- And it wasn't even Easter! It was June -- June 26<sup>th</sup> 2003, in fact. But it was an Easter; I recognized not only my Savior, but I recognized myself for a second. I saw two things in that moment -- the Brad I had become, and the Brad I could be. I could see the Easter Brad -- the new creation! It was a resurrection moment.

I love what Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: Chapter 6:1-2,6-7: And just to clarify, because Paul uses the word five times in three sentences, Sin can be defined as those moments when we fall short of God's hope for us. Missing the mark, if you will.

Anyway, Paul writes, *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?<sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ...<sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,<sup>[a]</sup> that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”*

Let's look at verses 6 & 7, *“<sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”*

*“For we know that our old self”* – that's me – *“was crucified with him”* -- that's Jesus – *“so that the body ruled by sin”* – me again – *“might be done away with,”* [also translated as “rendered powerless”] -- The old Brad is gone! Step One in AA, btw, is *“...admitting we were powerless...”* – and going on, *“...that we should no longer be slaves to sin”* — which doesn't mean that I don't sin, but my life isn't completely controlled by it -- much! And he finishes up with *“...anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”* -- Set free! -- The old Brad is gone!

So get this – so I was dead in my afflictions, right? -- it sounds so biblical – my afflictions! – that's my alcoholism – my self-centeredness – my sin. Not dead-dead, but I might as well have been, I was raised into a new life – look at me!

Back to Romans 6:4: *“...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”* That's you and me! WE can live a new life because we have been given the freedom to follow Christ through His resurrection and into our own! You are a new creation! The old is gone!

When Jesus calls us and we finally acknowledge him – when we finally recognize him through our tears – in our blindness – from that dark place – it is at that moment, that resurrection moment; it is at that moment when we truly see ourselves...as we are and as we can be – maybe this very morning -- called by name to follow Jesus into Easter. Amen.