

So, the story of Jesus' resurrection.

It's over-arching theme is newness.

Life after death.

Rebirth.

Turning over a new leaf, new beginnings, fresh starts.

This is symbolized by eggs turning into baby chicks, caterpillars into butterflies, blossoming flowers.

We know this.

The irony is that if you think about it, there's nothing new about the Resurrection story.

We've been telling this same story for millennia.

If there's one story that all Christians know, to some extent, it's this one.

We've not only committed it to memory, but we've cemented it in our imaginations through art and literature.

Heck, even non-Christians know about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, it's embedded in our collective consciousness.

So, there might not be anything new about the story, so-to-speak, but each Gospel version of the story is a little different.

And there are 3 things that I want you to take away from John's version that we heard this morning and they are 3 things that Jesus says to Mary of Magdala.

When she is standing outside the tomb, weeping, she sees Jesus, but she doesn't recognize him.

She thinks he's the gardener, until he identifies her.

The first thing I want you to remember is that he says her name, "Mary..." (20:16).

Then, when she instantly realizes it's him, she calls him rabbouni, (which means 'rabbi') then he says the second thing that I want you to remember.

He says, "Do not hold onto me..." (20:17).

And lastly, he gives her instructions, as he says, "Go to my brothers and tell them," (20:17) or in short hand, go and tell.

So the 3 things he says are, 'Mary,' 'do not hold onto me,' 'go and tell.'

We'll explore why all of these short phrases combined encapsulate the many different meanings of Jesus' resurrection.

On the one hand, the resurrection story is universal.

We hear that Jesus died and rose for all of us.

We hear the ubiquitous message that love wins, good triumphs over evil, and so on and so forth.

These make for good bumper stickers, but they don't prevent me from becoming despondent.

The skeptic in me admits that this resurrection message is often hard to believe.

I mean, whenever I hear one more story about how money has corrupted a person or institution that I trusted, my commitment to the resurrection message, my conviction that love wins, washes away just a little, like a slowly-eroding shoreline.

Or, just this past week, when I heard that there had been yet *another* terror attack in Europe, this time in Brussels, and one just before that in Ankara, Turkey.

And when I heard people on the news saying things like, "We were expecting this." "We aren't surprised."

and when I hear the names of the people who were killed and the testimonies from their families, my unwavering belief that good will win out over evil, well, my belief wavers a little.

How can love possibly win when it seems that we are hearing about mass killings on a regular basis?

When they have become business as usual, I find it hard to believe that hatred isn't winning.

And yet, it's in those moments when I am in the bottom of the pit of despair that God calls me by name, like Jesus called Mary.

That universal message of love conquering all suddenly becomes personal.

Hearing my name reaffirms my commitment to Christ and to the Gospel message, and it's like God is whispering, "Angela, you're better than those thoughts that you're having."

And the love-overcomes-all message of the resurrection is like a hand that pulls me out of my mental tailspin.

It compels me to stand up, dust myself off, and recommit myself to the belief that we are all called by name.

*"In a world where things are often not as they should be (injustice, indifference, selfishness, despair), the resurrection of Jesus offers me a lens through which I am able to see and know things as they were intended to be.*

*This is a lens I need.*

*The Resurrection means that I can not only embrace God's promise of a better world, but I can also choose to participate in this abundance because death succumbs to life.*

*I need the [message of the] Resurrection so that amidst deficiency, I can see what it means to choose love over anything that isn't love." (Mullin, Shane. "Why I Need the Resurrection." Patheos.com)*

Because it is our job is to love without concern or condition, to show extravagant love in the face of the worst kind of atrocities, which have the power to completely derail us, if we'd let them.

To have resurrection faith is to recommit ourselves day in and day out,

slowly plodding up the ramp towards greater understanding and commitment to the belief that we are made in the image of a God of abundant, extravagant love.

So that next time I hear awful news, which might otherwise cause me to go down that tunnel of despair, I stay standing instead.

But for me, this commitment to hope against all odds isn't intuitive.

It doesn't come naturally.

If I was left to my own devices with no moral framework, I probably would have given into the notion a long time ago that we are all depraved.

And that's precisely why I need to be called by name, just like Mary was, to be reminded that I am beloved and that every other person is too.

But there has to be a happy medium between this universal message of "love conquers all" to the very personal belief that we all have an individual relationship with a God who calls us and knows us by name.

That's where Jesus' second important words come into the picture, as he tells Mary, "don't hold onto me."

When we are afraid, we cling to what we know.

It's in these moments that we vilify anyone who isn't like us.

We become suspicious of anyone or anything we don't understand, and we run the risk of creating God in our image, who conveniently agrees with everything we believe.

This is especially tempting during these trying times, when our conceptions of enemy and ally, good and bad, are all being challenged.

But we can't give into that fear.

We have to trust that Jesus' message of love and peace surpasses our understanding and his love might even extend to people we can't stand.

We cannot hold onto Jesus and use our theology of him (otherwise known as our Christology) to justify how we categorize and label people in this world.

When Jesus tells Mary not to hold onto him, I think he's saying, don't try to contain me.

Don't limit your understanding of my existence to who I was as a mortal human, because I am beyond that now.

I am ever living, beyond all space and time and I will still be in relationship with you, but it won't be the way it was before.

Now I live for everyone, that my message of love might extend to the ends of the Earth, that everyone might know that they are sacred and beloved.

Before his death, Mary might have understood Jesus as a friend or mentor or even a partner,

but now he's asking her to be a believer who knows that she belongs to the household of God along with the rest of humanity.

And that brings us to the last of Jesus' important words to Mary, he says, "Go and tell."

Or in other words, don't be like the other disciples who came to the tomb.

In this version of the story, Peter and the other disciple, he's unnamed, but described as "the one whom Jesus loved," (20:2), they don't go and tell.

In fact, Jesus doesn't have a chance to tell them what to do because they run away.

But this isn't a value judgment.

I might have run away too if I visited the tomb of a loved one and discovered that their body was gone.

That would be terrifying.

But nevertheless, they each ran to the tomb, having somewhat of a contest, as the Gospel writer includes the detail that the beloved disciple outran Peter and got there first.

But after they looked in the tomb and saw the linen wrappings, they returned to their homes.

There was no going and telling.

It's a good thing Mary was there, otherwise the miracle of the resurrection story might have never been told.

Jesus tells us not to be like Peter and the beloved disciple, don't keep the news to ourselves.

Don't revel in the fact that we are called by name and keep Jesus in a box in the back of our minds where we can take him out when we need him.

Jesus tells Mary, I have called you by name for a reason.

I need you to keep my message alive in this hurting world.

Don't linger here, waiting for me, go back into the suffering places and that's where you'll find me, amongst those who need to hear my liberating message of love.

This is a call for our whole lives and how to live them.

The world should be able to see in the ways that we live our lives, how we treat people, and what decisions we make, our own passion for the truth that Christ has risen and that indeed, love wins.

Friends, this story is over two thousand years old.

It's hardly new, but it's our job to keep it fresh, to keep the message alive and pulsating through the networks of our lives.

So may you be guided by the Trinitarian message that you are called by name, you must not hold onto Jesus by limiting the power of his message or corrupt it for your own devices, and you are called to go and tell and spread this revolutionary message with all those who cross your path.

It's not new, but it still has the power to change us individually and communally, if only we'll let it.

So, when you wake up tomorrow, remember that it's not business as usual, it's not just another Monday after Easter Sunday that rolls around every year.

It's a new opportunity to help make God's love and justice real in this world.

And strengthened by the conviction that you are called by name, and may you be a beacon of love sent forth to remind others that they are too.

Amen.