Easter – What’s In A Name?

Matthew 28:1-10;  Kimby Young

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Believe it or not, the Easter sermon is probably the hardest sermon of the church year. Probably because you who are gathered here to celebrate on this wonderful day. You already know the story. You are here because you know the story. You feel the story. You experience the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You know what it means. You know that God loves you – or you wouldn’t be here today. Even if you have your doubts. Even if you are just here to please your family. Still you know, I hope you know, that God loves you. That anything is possible. That hope is real. There is reason to celebrate. Love wins. I hope you know that Jesus forgives us and helps us to start over. New life is possible in Jesus Christ. You know the power of resurrection. The power of new life. And you are here to celebrate that resurrection – the resurrection of Jesus and the new life made possible for all of us. You are here to celebrate salvation and new beginnings and life and hope and goodness. You are here to celebrate love – God’s love in Jesus Christ who saves us. We celebrate.

Jesus Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

What more is there to say? Well, a lot more. But you do want to get to lunch.

So I started thinking about all the ways we know Jesus, all the ways God comes to us and speaks to us. In today’s story there are angels and earthquakes and lightning and rolling stones and empty tombs. There are clear messages like “Do not be afraid!” and there are less clear messages like “go and tell.” Fear and great joy are mixed together in the same sentence – the same moment. And there is the promise of life now and life eternal. There is promise that we can know God and be with God because of Jesus. We can know God as we are already known by God. We belong to God. God calls each of us by name.

How do you know Jesus? How do you experience God’s presence? We call Jesus – Savior, Lord, Messiah, Friend. In fact we name Jesus in so many different ways that it might be impossible to count. Early in my ministry I started compiling a list of names of Jesus – ways that we know and call on Jesus and came up with more than a hundred names. If you add the names of God, I collected another hundred. And I know my list is incomplete. How do you know Jesus? How do you call on God?

As You came in today you should have picked up a card with one of the many names of Jesus. If you didn’t pick one up, be sure to grab one on the way out. I am going to make some of you uncomfortable right now, but I want us to hear and speak the name of Jesus on this day of resurrection. So call out the names on your cards – just the name, not the scripture, that is just for you. And if more than one person speaks at a time, just repeat until we hear the many names. Call out the names of Jesus.

(Names called)

I have a great belief in the power of God to inspire – to reach us in unique ways. The Holy Spirit moves – inspiritus – and we hear what we need to hear. We receive God’s grace. If we listen and wait and trust God. I invite you to take this name of Jesus that was given to you today, and live with it for the season ahead. Perhaps this is a familiar way that you know Jesus – as friend or redeemer. Perhaps it is a new revelation or a new way of thinking about God that is not so familiar or comfortable for you. I believe the randomness of the way you received this word today, is God speaking to you. Not lighting or earthquake, not angel or empty tomb, perhaps. But nonetheless open to you, open for inspiration, open for a message from God to you this day and in the days ahead. So lift this name of Jesus today. Lift the name of Jesus every day. And listen for God’s voice leading you in the days ahead, leading you in the way of love.

By God’s grace may you be blessed and inspired. In the name of Jesus.