

WHOM ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Text: John 20:1-18
LHUMC 3/31/13
(Easter)

I. Introduction

A. Do you have a favorite search engine?

1. I'm a "Google guy" myself. It's my homepage, so when I go online, it's the first thing that I see. And that's good, because usually Google is the first thing I need.
2. Others like Bing, or Yahoo.
3. I just heard on the news the other day that some 17-year old kid in Great Britain developed a new search app for your smart phone that Yahoo bought from him for three million dollars.
4. Which just goes to show what a "search-obsessed" culture we have become.
5. But there may be nothing else that has changed how we do things more than the practice of the internet search.
6. It has certainly made my life easier—working on sermons takes a lot less time than it used to, and I use real books to do so a lot less.
7. I just have to remember as I search for Biblical references and Biblical Commentaries online that you can't always believe everything you read online, so I've developed this "filter" over the years.
8. It really is remarkable that whenever we are searching for some piece of information, all it takes is a few key strokes and in a few seconds you get literally millions of places to look for whatever the answer is that you are seeking.

B. I bring this up because in the midst of the Easter story, Jesus asks a question of Mary Magdalene for which a search engine won't work (show picture). That's not going to make it.

1. It is a question so personal, so crucial, so life-forming, so life-changing that the fastest, most powerful search engine just won't cut it.
2. In the end, this question "Whom are you looking for" is between us and God.
3. And the irony is that in this age when so many answers to so many questions are just a few clicks away, Jesus' question is one that even in our search-obsessed culture, a whole lot of people (even

ourselves sometimes, if we are honest) are searching in vain to find an answer to.

4. It is a question that some people spend a lifetime trying to answer as they search for what life is really all about and what and who really matters in life.
5. And it's not that our culture doesn't give us lots of possible answers, obsessed as we are with celebrities and sports stars and material things that tempt us with possible answers as to who or what we are looking for to bring meaning to our lives.

II. I want to talk about Mary Magdalene today because as I've pondered her Easter story, I'm thinking that even today, she gives us some clues about what it takes to not just search for the answer to Jesus' question, but to find the answer. Amidst the confusion and even panic of that first Easter, Mary shows us some things. So what exactly does she do that can show us the way to finding whom it is we are looking for?

A. She was determined not to forget Jesus.

1. It takes a certain determination to get up, all by yourself, early in the morning, while it is still dark, and head out to the cemetery.
2. Particularly in light of the sadness and the violence of the preceding days.
3. Particularly in light of the fact that the authorities would have still been out and about, looking for the followers of the one they had just gotten rid of (or so they thought).
4. And even beyond that, a cemetery is not where we tend to want to go when it's dark.
5. We don't know what she was expecting to find when she got up and headed out to the tomb—maybe it was just to confirm for herself what had happened to Jesus.
6. Maybe it was just to begin the process of never forgetting who he was and what he had gone through.
7. But it is pretty significant that she was the only one among Jesus' followers to do so.
8. And when she got there, she found a scene that defied her expectations, to say the least.
9. So even if her story had ended there, we can learn something from Mary.
 - a) Something about not forgetting Jesus, when the world offers us so many options of who or what to follow.

b) Or something about not forgetting Jesus when life is dark, when we've been through the kind of things that she had just been through.

10. Because the truth is that if she hadn't had the determination to go out there to begin with, she wouldn't have seen what she saw.

B. She hung around.

1. I've sometimes wondered if a deeper comment is being made in the fact that the two men in the story, Simon Peter and this other unnamed disciple—when they see the empty tomb, they immediately leave and head back home, while Mary hangs around.
2. Is it saying somehow at some level that we men have shorter attention spans? We men who if we have control of the remote can watch four basketball games simultaneously? That can't be!
3. But whether a deeper comment is being made or not, Mary, (and again Mary alone) hung around. She alone stayed at the empty tomb.
4. Her story leads me to remember a definition of faith that I once heard—something to the effect that faith is the “willingness to hang around with God in all circumstances in life.”
5. If that's true, then Mary was also a pretty good example of that kind of faith.
6. Because she hung around, she alone was confronted by the one for whom she was looking.
7. Willimon story: “A woman reported to me (I've wondered since if her name was Mary Magdalene) on a dramatic conversion that she had experienced in her life. She said that belief had always been a problem for her. Since she was young, she had greeted the faith of the church with nothing but doubts, questions, and misgivings. Yet here she was, mid-life, being given the faith that she had not had. She said that she had a vivid experience of the risen Christ. She said that it was if a “light came on in my life and things fell into place and I finally understood. I saw, and I (finally) believed. I asked her if she knew why she had been given this gift of faith now, at this particular time. She responded, “I have no idea why the light finally came on and things fell into place, right now at this specific time. I just know that I kept standing up every Sunday and saying the words of the Apostles' Creed, saying them over and over again, saying them from memory but not really from my heart. If you had stopped one Sunday and asked me, “Do you really believe what you are saying about the resurrection, about the

virgin birth, and all the rest?” I don’t know that I would have been able to answer affirmatively. But one day, I did believe. I am so very glad I stood up, for all those hundreds of Sundays, and affirmed what I believed before I believed it.” And Willimon says, “I am so glad she stayed. Sometimes you need to stay here, linger for a while before the mystery of the crucifixion of Jesus, as well as the empty tomb, and the resurrection of Jesus. You need to keep on keeping on, following the rituals of the church, put one foot in front of another in the grand Easter procession, keep receiving the body and blood of Christ, just hold on, (and hang out) until you have the faith you hope to have.

8. I think sometimes the problem we have on our quest to figure out whom we are looking for is simply that we do have short attention spans sometimes.
9. If Jesus doesn’t show up right away, when we most need him, in the ways that we most need him, we lack the patience and the willingness to hang around that Mary had.
10. And then the danger is to turn to every fad, every quick fix, every fleeting solution that is out there (and there are many) and think we have found what we have been looking for.
11. And then the further danger is that we will miss the true answer when he appears.

C. She listened.

1. Another key component to Mary’s story is that even when Jesus first appeared, she didn’t really get it—she didn’t really recognize him for who he really was.
2. It wasn’t until she heard him speak her name that she called him by his name—“Rabboni—Teacher!”
3. I am a firm believer that we all receive calls to ministry from Jesus.
4. Part of that comes from my own experience as someone who was always active in church long before I finally heard a call to pastoral ministry, which is something a little different. I didn’t finally hear Jesus call my name in that way until I was close to thirty. But even before that, Jesus was constantly calling my name.
5. And Mary’s story tells the truth that the risen Christ is always calling our name.
6. The problem is that we don’t always recognize the call and the one who is giving it for what and who they are, and that keeps us from answering it.

7. Mary's story reminds us to always be listening for Jesus to call our name, and then to realize that sometimes we will answer the call before we even recognize Jesus as the one who is giving it.
 8. As I look back at my own life, there were plenty of times that with the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, I now know that whatever I was doing came from a willingness to hear my "name being called".
 9. I may not have understood at the time that it was Jesus doing the calling.
 10. But listening is the key.
 11. And also to know that sometimes Jesus calls our name through the words of other people who are calling us to serve in some way.
 12. But we've got to be listening, and when we hear our names, we may just find whom we have been looking for all along.
- D. She went.
1. Over the next few weeks, we will be looking at some of the great stories in the Bible of the so-called "post-resurrection" appearances of Jesus.
 2. And what we will discover again is that when Jesus shows up after Easter, he always speaks with action verbs. "Feel my hands and my side", "Cast your nets", "Feed my sheep" are among the instructions we will hear Jesus give us in those stories.
 3. Today it's even more basic than that—Jesus tells Mary as she embraces him two things—first "let go" and then "go".
 4. And that is what she does—as much as she undoubtedly wanted to just keep hanging out with Jesus.
 5. And when she does, she becomes once again the first and only one to do something—namely to spread the good news of Easter. And what could be more important than that?
 6. And so Mary becomes a reminder for us that ultimately, "Easter" isn't a noun (as in today is Easter) or even an adjective (as in "we are an Easter people), as much as it is a verb.
 7. She reminds us that after the determination and the hanging around, and the listening, the real answer to what Easter is all about comes when we go.
 8. For her and for us, the Easter story is a call to action—that we are called to go and to spread the good news, to share with the world the answer that we too have discovered outside the empty tomb, the answer of not just whom we have been looking for, but whom the world has been looking for.

III. Conclusion

- A. We wanted to finish today's service by hearing from Mary Magdalene herself. Because to hear from her is different than hearing about her.
- B. So I invite Mary to come to share her story.
- C. And then we will see and hear a video of a song she might very well have sung as she went from the tomb and out into the world to tell her story. (Monologue and video)
- D. So whom are we looking for? Today especially, we remember that the risen Christ is still present, with us, around us. He is present in the good times and the bad times. He still calls us by name, he still is found in the faces of those in our world and community need him the most, who need us the most.
- E. We don't need Google to tell us that—the story of Mary Magdalene and the story of Easter tell us that.
- F. Thanks be to God for raising this one that we have been looking for to new life so that we may have new life in him.

