

“Roll Call”
John 20:11-18
Wayne Eberly
April 4, 2021 Easter Sunday

What I am about to tell you will undoubtedly be good news to some of you this morning. I am going to tell you the shortest sermon ever. How is that for good news? But don't get your hopes up. I didn't say I'm going to preach the shortest sermon ever, I just said I was going to tell you the shortest sermon ever. The sermon is so short it is just one word. Here is the shortest sermon ever. “Mary.” Short but sweet. Oh, so sweet.

A woman comes to the tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning. In the Gospel of John this woman comes alone. On that first Easter morning she discovers the stone covering the entrance of the tomb has been removed. Her initial thought is that the body of Jesus has been stolen. Afraid that not only has Jesus died but now his corpse has been violated by ones who have taken his body, she stands outside the tomb crying. Her tears serve as a recurring theme that morning. In the space of just a few verses attention is called to her tears four times. Grief, loss, mourning, sadness, and an unending flow of tears capture the deep despair of this woman who comes to the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning. Just as we think she will be swallowed up in the sadness surrounding her, she meets the gardener who is not the gardener. The gardener is Jesus. She discovers he is not the gardener when Jesus preaches his one-word sermon. “Mary.”

What is the impact of this one-word sermon, this shortest sermon ever? Her tears cease. We hear not another word about crying or weeping. She recognizes Jesus. That one-word sermon opened her eyes. All confusion was swept away. That is not the gardener. That is Jesus. When Jesus preaches his one-word sermon, “Mary”, she turns toward him. The writer who calls this the shortest sermon ever has this to say about the words, “She turned around...”

“In the one or two seconds this turn took, I imagine the world shifting ever so slightly on its axis and at about this turn’s one-second midpoint trajectory, history, too, moved almost imperceptibly from B.C. to A.D. A second before this turn there is a woman in the deepest human despair in the agonizing presence of unconquerable death; a second after the beginning of this turn there is a woman in the deepest possible human elation—in the presence of the death-conquering Central Figure of history. The rush that must have come over this woman in her two-second turn is unimaginable. She is the first person, ever, to experience the personal presence of the Risen Lord.”¹

When Jesus called Mary by name, he was allowing her the gift of experiencing his personal presence. He knew her. He called her by name. And it was him, Jesus, the Risen Lord who called Mary by name. It was not the gardener. Nothing against the gardener. But thank goodness, it was not the gardener. It was the Risen Lord. Only the one who is risen from the dead is able to preach a one-word sermon that shifts the axis of the earth. My hope and my prayer this morning is that you would know that the axis of the world has been shifted, and the shift has been anything but slight. When Jesus rose from the dead the whole order of creation was dramatically changed forever. Life conquered death. My hope and my prayer this morning is that you would know the world has shifted, and that you would know it in a personal way, as personal as if Jesus called your name that day. That first Easter Jesus said, “Mary”, and the axis of her entire world shifted. Her life was changed. Because the axis of the world has shifted, our lives can be changed. That is the hope of Easter.

I want to explore how the axis of the world has shifted through use of what I think is a pretty fun word. The word is synecdoche. Synecdoche is a literary device in which a part of something is substituted for the whole. In the Institutes of the Christian Religion, John

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, “The Gospel of John: A Commentary”, p. 1152.

Calvin writes about the resurrection. He refers to the resurrection as being a synecdoche.² What I think he means is that when we say “Jesus rose from the dead” we are signifying one part of something that has so many other meanings, all of them good. The one word “resurrection” encapsules all sorts of religious imagery. Sins are forgiven. Death is defeated. Our future is filled with hope. Life has purpose. Love wins. The lost are found. Mourning is turned to laughter. We are reconciled to God. We are reconciled to our fellow human beings. Joy bursts forth in our hearts and laughter fills the air. In other words, the axis of the world shifts when Jesus rises from the dead.

- No longer do we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah and say, “Oh, that’s just pie in the sky.” Because Jesus rose from the dead, we hear the prophet’s words as gospel truth. “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together...they will no longer harm or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:6-9) Jesus is the Prince of Peace. When he rose from the dead the axis of the earth shifted. Now we know there will be a day when the peace of Christ will reign over all creation.
- Because Jesus rose from the dead what is promised first in Isaiah and last in Revelation is revealed as so much more than wishful thinking. “He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” The axis of the world shifted for Mary. Jesus wiped away her tears. What happened once for one woman will happen for the whole of humanity when our Savior who rose from the dead says, “I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:1-5 and Isaiah 25:6-9)
- The healing that is so tantalizing as lepers are made clean, as the lame walk, the blind see and the deaf hear, will become healing for all. We will all be made new. We will all be made whole.

² John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion, p. 447. “

- The miracles that marked the gospels when a young girl is brought back to life, when Lazarus lumbers out of his tomb dragging his grave clothes with him will become a tidal wave of new life that sweeps over the whole earth. “We will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will all be changed...Death will be swallowed up in victory. And we will all sing, ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’” (I Corinthians 15:51-55)
- The sweet and tender reunions that are hinted at in the gospels, sheep being carried home on the shoulders of the shepherd, lost coins recovered, and prodigals whose shame is covered with tears of happiness and extended arms of welcome, well, that will be true for this whole world. We will all come home to shouts of joy. We will all be found. We will all be wrapped up in the arms of Jesus. When we say Jesus rose from the dead, we say all that and more.

The axis of the world has shifted. God has set all things right. What God has done for the whole world is something God wants to make personal for all people. It begins with one woman who finds that though weeping may remain for the night, joy comes in the morning. The gardener is not the gardener. Praise the Lord. The gardener is Jesus. And Jesus preached the shortest and sweetest sermon that poor woman could have ever imagined. Jesus said, “Mary.” The axis shifted and it all became intensely personal. My hope and my prayer this morning is that you would recognize the axis of the world has shifted and that you would know it in a way that is deep, intense, profound, and personal...so personal that when Jesus says, “Mary” you hear him saying your name.

We have a friend from Houston who has multiple sclerosis. Because of her MS she spends her days in a wheelchair. She loves a Christian song that was popular a while back. The song is titled, “I can only imagine.” It speaks of what it will be like when we see Jesus face to face. The song speaks about dancing. That song helps our friend imagine the day when she will no longer be bound to a wheelchair, the day when

she will meet Jesus face to face, the day when she will dance. That song reminds her the axis of the world has shifted. One day Jesus will call her by name. One day she will dance and sing and rejoice.

Our friend had a dream. Julie was in her dream. The dream meant so much to our friend she wrote it down. And because Julie was in the dream, she sent a note to Julie about the dream. *I just have to tell you about a dream I had. You had a beautiful dangly feather woven into the side of your hair with a fuscia and turquoise streak on either side of the feather. And you said, "We're going to sing 'I'd Rather Have Jesus' in church on Sunday." Then I said, "I'd better bring Kleenex!"* Julie was reading this letter from our friend out loud. Julie wanted me to hear about the dream. As Julie was reading the letter, we both started to laugh. The idea of Julie waltzing into church with feathers woven into her hair and a fuscia and turquoise streak in her hair was too much for us.

When our friend wrote, "I better bring Kleenex", well that part hit home. She and Julie are kindred souls. Whenever there would be a special song, or someone would give a testimony, or we would worship on a day that ends in the letter y...yeah, just about all the time, for just about any reason, both Julie and our dear friend would melt into a puddle of tears. After the wonderful image of a feather in her hair, and after the comment about the Kleenex, our friend finished her letter by saying, *The cool thing was that in my dream I was walking around--not in a wheelchair! God gives me these "walking dreams" occasionally. Anyways, a person wakes up happy after a dream like that!* I think you can only dream dreams like that, walking dreams as our friend calls them, when you know that Jesus has shifted the axis of this world. When I started work on this sermon, the story about our friend and her walking dreams immediately came to mind. After all, our friend's name is Mary. Our friend's name is the one-word sermon Jesus preached when he rose from the grave. "Mary." The resurrection is deeply personal for our friend named Mary.

My sermon today is titled “Roll Call” because not only did the axis shift that day 2,000 years ago and not only did Jesus preach a one-word sermon when he spoke to Mary, but the axis is shifted and will always be shifted, and what Jesus did that day to Mary he wants to do to you and to me and to all of his beloved children. Our Savior Jesus, who said “I know my sheep by name” knows you by name. Jesus wants to call your name today. Today is a reminder and a witness that we are in the midst of a great roll call. The Son of God is calling every minute of every day. Jesus is calling name after name after name, saying, “I am alive. You are mine. I love you. Now live in me.” Today is resurrection day. Today there is a roll call. Today is resurrection roll call. Can you hear Jesus calling your name?

I shared a lot of good times with a man named Addison. Addison loved gospel music. He had this old white Cadillac with a tape deck. Addison had a box in his car filled with cassette tapes of gospel music. Addison would drive me around while he sang at the top of his voice every gospel song ever known to man. He sang about Noah finding grace in the eyes of the Lord and having a little talk with Jesus and I’ll fly away...and Rock of Ages...In the Garden...in the sweet by and by...leaning on the everlasting arms...and the one that held the spot closest to his heart. It was a song about the great roll call that will take place one day. “When the roll is called up yonder.” That old white Cadillac was the site of many a revival meeting. Addison’s driving was not the best, and when he was caught up in the music it was even worse, and many a time I thought roll call was going to come sooner than I was anticipating as we weaved back and forth on the highway, but I loved his enthusiasm and his faith. Knowing that Jesus had risen from the dead shifted the axis for Addison. He couldn’t wait until he heard the roll call in the great by and by, when Jesus would call his name.

As much as I love the idea of roll call being something that will take place when we all get to heaven, I want to be sure you know roll call begins today. We are at the tomb. The tomb is empty. The axis of the world has shifted. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And Jesus is

taking roll. Jesus is calling names. It's roll call at the resurrection and Jesus is calling your name.

Ernest Hemingway is credited with telling a story about a roll call. The story goes that a Spanish father had a falling out with his son. The son's name was Paco. Paco had run away to Madrid. The father, longing for reconciliation, took out an ad in the largest newspaper. The ad read, PACO MEET ME HOTEL MONTANA NOON TUESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN PAPA. Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father went to the square, he found eight hundred young men named Paco waiting for their father.³ Roll call happened. The name Paco was called out. Eight hundred young men rushed forward when they heard their name called.

I don't know where you are in your life today. After a year of the Coronavirus, a year of fear, a year of isolation, a year of distancing, a year of wearing masks, a year of refraining from hugs and handshakes, a year of missing out on proms and graduations and sports and music, a year when so much has been lost, when so many have been lost, I don't know where you are. I would not be surprised if all of us found ourselves in the same situation as that lonely woman we read about today. She came to a tomb expecting to find what you always find at a tomb. Death. Defeat. Despair. Loneliness. Loss. Sadness. Grief. Sorrow. If her tears are any indication, she came expecting to find every one of those things. Maybe you can see a bit of yourself in this weeping woman. Maybe you can see all of yourself in this weeping woman.

The woman was prepared to find what she expected to find. But what she was not prepared for was to find that the axis of the world had shifted. Jesus had risen from the dead. And he was there. It was not the gardener! As much as we want to chuckle at the case of mistaken identity, it was not the gardener. It was Jesus. And on that day, Jesus had a one-word sermon, the shortest sermon ever, a sermon that was short

³ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, 37, 38.

but ever so sweet. Jesus called her by name. That one-word sermon changed her life. “Mary.” Jesus said, “Mary.” If you have come to the tomb today, turn toward the gardener...no, turn toward Jesus. Jesus has a one-word sermon just for you. Guaranteed to change your life. Jesus wants to call you. Jesus wants to preach a sermon that will change your life. Jesus wants to call your name.

It's roll call today. It's a resurrection roll call. You better sit up straight. You better pay attention. The entire axis of the world has shifted. Your life will never be the same. Today is a resurrection roll call, and Jesus is calling your name.

If you have never heard the old hymn, it goes like this:
*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more
And the morning breaks eternal bright and fair
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore
When the roll is called up yonder I'll be there.*

Today I want to change that old hymn up just a bit:
*When the thunder of the Lord shall sound and roll that stone away
And the morning breaks eternal bright and fair
When the lonely and the brokenhearted gather at the grave
When the roll is called on Easter I'll be there
When the roll is called on Easter...when the roll is called on Easter
When the roll is called on Easter...when the roll is called on Easter I'll be there.*

Today is a resurrection roll call. I hope you can hear Jesus, because Jesus is calling your name.