

Jesus Risen – Calls Each One by Name Sermon on John 20: 11-23 & John 21

Sisters and brothers,

believe it or not, I am not done with the Easter stories.

Two weeks ago I looked with you at the Gospel of Matthew with the angel sitting on a stone, and the two women called by Jesus to walk back to Galilee where he'd be waiting for them and be with them.

For today I had a look at the Gospel of John which Jean Vanier, the Canadian theologian and philosopher, calls the gospel of relationship.

And the picture on the front page of our bulletin shows us Mary walking back to the disciples in the upper room and telling them the good news of Jesus' resurrection; painted by an Indian artist 30 years ago. (some of you know it ☺)

As you can't be done with the Easter stories, you can never be done with the Gospel of John. It is so fascinating and mysterious – it will probably make me think and especially wonder a whole life long...

The Gospel of John was written around 90-95 A.D. by someone who calls himself the "beloved disciple". Did this disciple think Jesus loved him more than the others? No. Rather, this name reveals to us this disciples deepest identity, which is also the deepest identity of each one of us. Our identity is not, as people often think, our role or what we do. Our deepest need is to be loved. And our deepest identity is to be the beloved of Jesus.

Why did John write this book?

He explains clearly, at the end of chapter 20, that it was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, and that in believing you will have life in his name".

It was written that we will have life!

This is the Gospel of life, written so that we might become fully living!

For John life is relationship, life is communion, life is friendship.

It talks of growing relationships with Jesus. It talks of people's meetings turn into friendships. There is the word abide or dwell one in another... There is growth, a deep togetherness, and the desire to give life.

Do you remember Good Friday?

The last words of Jesus on the cross are: "Woman, here is your son." Then he looks at John and says: "Here is your mother." It is said that "from that moment John took Mary as his own", as his mother. Thereafter John cared for Mary.

John talks about Jesus in the light of the gentle understanding he had about Jesus and the relationships with which he blessed people.

The Gospel of John started with a marvellous relationship that is the source of all relationships: In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was in relationship with

God, and the Logos was God. Now in the chapters 20 & 21 it finishes with another beautiful relationship.

On this day, close to the tomb where the body of Jesus had been laid, we find Mary of Magdala, her heart filled with grief. She is a woman who has suffered a broken relationship. She was alone, afraid and depressed because her beloved friend was dead – killed under traumatizing circumstances. Her heart is profoundly broken.

On this first day of the week, Mary comes to the tomb because she wants to anoint the body of the one she has loved so much.

But when she arrives, she discovers that the huge stone that had covered the tomb has been moved. Jesus' body is not there! Someone has stolen the body of her beloved friend! So, she runs to the disciples and tells them: "Someone has stolen the body of my lord!" Peter and the beloved disciple come running, and they see that the tomb is empty. They depart, leaving Mary alone and in tears.

She looks into the tomb one more time. She sees two angels, one at the head of the place where Jesus had lain, and the other at the foot. They ask her: "Why are you crying?" She is so blinded by her tears, her grief and her despair that she does not ask herself what the two angels are doing there.

In her sorrow, Mary is unable to recognize the signs of God. She is blinded by her sadness.

...can't see the signs of God calling her to come out of the grief and live.

Finally she turns round, and what does she see?

She sees a man, whom she takes to be the gardener. It is in fact Jesus, but she doesn't recognize him.

He says, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Mary replies: "If it is you who has taken the body of my lord, tell me where you have put him, so that I may go and find him and take him away."

"Mary!"

Jesus calls Mary by name – tenderly, with the tone of a lover.

Jesus is not just saying "Hello!"

No, he says her name, and he says it with love and gentleness.

I imagine a smile and a glow on his face...

And Mary!

She is obviously thrilled to see Jesus.

To see him alive.

And Jesus must have been full of joy seeing Mary too.

Mary throws herself at his feet.

"Rabboni!" she cries. "Master! My love!"

What a bizarre moment in a relationship!

When Jesus called Mary by name, they both knew the tradition of the old words of Isaiah "Be not afraid. I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, and you are mine. So in a way, Jesus is now saying: "I will always be with you, Mary. Always!"

Mary understandably wants to hug him, hold him, feel him.

But here Jesus says, “Do not hold onto me. I have not yet gone to the father. Go to the brothers. Tell them I will go up to my father and your father, to my God and your God.” Then he sends her off.

It must have been difficult for her to be sent off to the brothers who had not been very friendly to her who – as we see in the reading – do not believe her.

But she goes back into the real world with all its beauty and its pain.

She goes out and shares the story of Jesus’ resurrection with her friends and with the world.

We can imagine her preaching and sharing her hope.

And inspired by her we can do the same.

But back to our Gospel texts.

Evening comes and Jesus stands among his disciples in the upper room. They are inside, with the doors closed, and he comes into their midst. They are grieving and afraid of the Jewish authorities.

“Peace to you,” Jesus says, showing them his hands and his side. “It is really I. Peace to you.”

When Jesus said “Peace”, it was probably a little like when he looked at Mary and said her name.

Each one of them must have felt reunited with Jesus, with his presence, with his words: “I love you. I live a covenant with you. I will always be with you.” And they can feel that the relationship goes on...

Jesus’ mission was to announce the good news to the poor, the deliverance of captives, the restoration of sight to the blind, and the liberation of the oppressed. He came to save all those who are downtrodden and unable to live life fully.

And now he sends his disciples to do the same.

They know they cannot do it alone. They know that alone they would not have the strength. They need the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus breathes on each one saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

There is something extraordinarily beautiful here. Jesus is kind of telling each of them, “You will not be able to do this alone. If you think you can, there is the risk that you will become caught up in yourself and in thinking you are someone special.”

We are not someone special; our deepest identity is to be friends of Jesus.

He sends us to enter into relationship with the poor and the oppressed.

We, the friends of Jesus, will discover that Jesus is hidden in the poor, and that Jesus will change us through our relationship with them. That is why we all need to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, by a force that will enable us to break down walls of self-protection and fear... Jesus wants to liberate us from fear, in giving us new resources through his spirit.

Then Jesus calls the disciples to be signs of forgiveness.

The unique role of Jesus’ disciples is to forgive!

But forgiveness is not some great and glorious thing to do. It is to enter into relationship with the last and the least and raise those by saying: “You are you, and you are important!”

It becomes clear that if others accept this love, their sins are forgiven, and we are in communion; there is relationship. And the love and grace we need for these relationships is not our own little love but it will be given to us by God.

Jesus' message is: "Be compassionate as your God is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

This forgiveness comes through relationship: because we love and welcome the love of others.

A few days later, the risen Jesus is standing on the shores of Lake Galilee. The disciples under the lead of Peter had taken their little boat in the night and had gone out fishing. They had worked all night, without catching anything. Now, at dawn, they see a man standing on the shore. And the man calls out: "Hey children, did you catch anything?" "No," they call back.

"Cast the nets on the other side."

So the disciples cast their nets on the other side of the boat, and immediately the nets filled with many fish.

The beloved disciple recognizes Jesus right away. He cries "It is the Lord!"

So Peter throws himself into the water, rushing to be with Jesus.

Jesus has prepared a small fire on the beach, with some fish and some bread. Jesus says simply and with care and tenderness, because he loves these men: "Come, have some breakfast."

Just imagine the smell of the grilled fish. Delicious. Mouth-watering after a night out fishing. A small everyday gesture: a fire, the warm fish, the fresh bread!

They eat their breakfast, happy to be with Jesus.

Then Jesus takes Peter aside.

It is a serious moment. Even grave.

"Simon, son of John: Do you love me more than these others?"

"You know everything, Lord. You now that I love you!"

"Feed my lambs."

Then Jesus asks again: Simon, son of John: Do you love me?"

"You know everything, Lord. You know that I love you!"

"Tend my sheep."

A third time Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John: Do you love me?"

"You know everything, Lord. You know that I love you!"

"Feed my sheep."

Peter had denied Jesus three times. Now he says three times, "You know that I love you!" Not only is Peter forgiven. He is confirmed in his role as the rock, the leader...

After that Jesus says to Peter, "When you were young, you put on your own belt, and you went where you wanted. When you grow old, someone else will put on your belt, and will lead you where you do not want to go. Follow me!"

The Gospel of John, says Jean Vanier, leads us to "dwell in Jesus", to become his beloved friends. The last word of Jesus in this gospel is that the message of John will remain, or dwell, until the end of the time, when Jesus returns.

That is the end of the Gospel of John.
The sun is rising.
Hope is set free.
Jesus is the light of the world.
And he is calling us all to become his beloved friends.
Amen.