

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018  
Easter Sunday  
St Faith's Havant  
The Venerable Dr Joanne Grenfell  
John 20.1-18

I wonder if you have ever had the experience of moving house, or moving school, or beginning at a new workplace. And as you walk along the street, or corridor, or into the kitchen, you think that you recognize someone you know, only to realize that you can't – you aren't where you thought you were. I lived in Canada for a year when I was a student, and my first few months were continually like that – in a shopping mall, I'd glance across and think that I saw an old friend, look to greet them . . . and then have to put myself right. I was thousands of miles away . . . this couldn't be.

People who grieve often describe having similar experiences. We know it can't happen, but we long for the person in front of us to be the one that we have lost. We long to hear our name called out from across the street, and feel the pleasure that comes from knowing that we are wanted and loved by someone we treasure.

John's account of the first Easter morning gives us an example of one of Jesus's beloved apostles, Mary, being recognized and knowing that she is loved by Jesus. This story of deep but unexpected recognition sets out a charter of hope for the Easter community that's arisen around the memories of Jesus. In it, we see a dramatic image of what kind of community comes to birth and thrives in the wake of Easter. This image of Jesus the gardener calling out to Mary tells us about the hope that we bear together in the church.

Mary struggles to recognize Jesus and it takes her a long while to who he is – it reminds me of Luke's account of the disciples seeing the real

presence of Jesus when he breaks bread with them. In John's gospel the recognition turns on the fact that Jesus calls her name. She recognizes him as "teacher" not when he initially addresses her with a question about the reasons for her distress, but only when he addresses her by name, "Mary."

I wonder if you also remember the story of the good shepherd – the sheep hear his voice, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10.3). And then the good shepherd says, I know my own and my own know me. So it's not surprising that Mary recognizes the risen Christ when this good shepherd's voice is heard calling her name.

How did you get your name? Do you have a name that runs in the family? Was there a film star or pop idol that your dad rather liked? Are you a Kylie or a Jason because your mum watched Neighbours every day on tv when she went on maternity leave? Do you, like me, have one of the most popular names from the year that you were born? There were a lot of Joannes in 1972, and a lot of Davids – my brother's name – in 1976. Names are part of who we are and the family and world that we're born into. When nobody knows or calls your name, then you stand outside the embrace of the surrounding community. But when your name is known and called, then you are enfolded in community. When Mary's name was called by the risen Jesus, she was enfolded into the company of heaven, and she recognized the One who now lives directly within and from the life of God.

The Easter community is a community whose members have heard the Good Shepherd's voice calling their names. The Easter community is also a community of people which is committed to calling the names of those who can't speak for themselves or who have no one to speak for them. By calling people's names – in our prayers, on a war memorial, on a grave stone, in a baptism register, in a year's mind – we are testifying

that God knows and calls the names of “the least of these” We are showing that we all can belong.

I don't just mean remembering those who are dead, but those who are alive and forgotten. Who is in danger of losing their name in our society? Who is being forgotten?

Some groups of people come to mind for me at the moment. I'm thinking of those who sleep rough around this church, whose needs you've been trying so hard to address over the winter; and others in the Portsmouth area. They have no address: do they also have no name, or, as a church can you still find a way to honour each of them and see them as individuals who are not forgotten?

I'm also thinking of an old lady I used to visit in a care home when she was being looked after in her final years, with dementia. All of the residents had a small picture of themselves and a name tag and a brief description of them on a card on their door. Interestingly, they never forgot their own names, but they certainly forgot each other's, which made forming relationships hard; and so the cards helped them to be named and present to each other.

I'm also thinking of those who are affected by the government's changes to universal credit rules, where any children beyond the first and second will not be counted for benefits. If each child is a blessing and a gift from God, who will remember, who will name, the third, fourth, fifth children in the poorest families? These are the questions that our Easter community should be asking, as we seek the flourishing of all those whom God has made. When we know resurrection ourselves, when we have experienced Jesus bursting from the tomb, rising to connect heaven and earth in glorious praise, then we have a duty to look out for

those who might otherwise be overlooked, so that they too know the joy of hearing their names called.

This Easter, please know that your name is called by the risen Jesus. It has been called out since before the day of your baptism and it will be called out on the day of your death. Whatever crosses you have borne, God reaches out to meet you. Know that you belong in this community of Easter people. And know that because your name is called by the good shepherd, you are called together to seek out all those who are afflicted by greed, insensitivity, and injustice, and to bring them home. Together, let's tell the world, with Mary that we have seen the Risen Lord, and that we want to be known as Christ's Easter people.