

# Recognizing God

## [John 20:1-18](#)

As you know there are four gospels in the Bible. Three of them tell the story of Jesus in a similar way so we call them the synoptic gospels but John sticks out as different. Many of the stories and teachings in John do not appear in the synoptic gospels and vis versa – only John has the wedding at Cana and the foot-washing at the last supper. John does not have Jesus' instituting the eucharist but the others do. So when all four gospels have the same thing, we know its important. The feeding of the five thousand is in all four, and so is Mary Magdalene.

She is mentioned twelve times by name which is more than many of the disciples, and every gospel tells us that she was the first to know about the resurrection. She was the first at the empty tomb – sometimes with other women, sometimes alone. Here in John, she comes alone in the early dawn. And it is to Mary that the angels appear.

She has been called the apostle to the apostles because it is Mary Magdalene, Mary from Magdala, who tells the other disciples that the tomb is empty. She is the first one to proclaim the gospel – the good news of the resurrection – in however confused and stumbling a way. Legend says that she went on to be a great evangelist and was granted an audience with Caesar. She used an egg to describe the tomb and the life that sprang from it, like a chick hatching. Caesar was unimpressed and said there was as much chance of resurrection as of an egg turning red. The egg turned red.

And that, they say, is one of the reasons for Easter eggs.

But here in the garden in the early morning dew, Mary does not know it is Easter. All she knows is that the body of her beloved friend and teacher has been moved. Which is very disturbing. And she is so deep in her grief that until Jesus speaks to her she does not recognize him. This woman, who is important enough to be mentioned by name twelve times, this woman whom some scholars think may have been one of the most important disciples but not listed among the twelve because of her gender, this woman who adored Jesus, did not recognize him.

People of God, this happens to us too.

We do not recognize Jesus when he speaks to us. We do not recognize the hand of God around us. We expect that the voice of God will be a like a clap of thunder or an audible word of grace, and so we look at God and see only the gardener.

I think this is at least partly because we think of God as being distant and separate from us so that the involvement of God is a big cosmic event, like the waters of the Red Sea parting for us. But if God is closer than our breath, because God is our breath, if in fact God is in our cells and in the cells of all beings, if the presence of God is as normal and as unseen as radio waves then everything has the potential to be of God.

But if everything has the potential to be of God, how do we hear God's voice among all the rest?

Mary learned to know Jesus' voice by spending time with him. \*We get to learn God's voice by our desire to love and serve God and by responding to what we think may be God's voice. And we learn to know God's voice and God's presence by paying attention and practicing gratitude.

God's voice is never loud or rude. Jesus did not say, "Mary you idiot it's ME – where has your brain gone?" No, Jesus was gentle and the Holy Spirit is always gentle and courteous. The voice calling us names is always our own.

We can also ask God to be very clear. I often pray that God will tell me something so clearly that I can't miss it; and I pray for all of us the blessing of not being able to miss God's presence. The blessing that even in the midst of our deepest grief and pain we will know the presence and hear the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit.

Because that my friends, is resurrection.

Resurrection is here and now. Resurrection is knowing the presence of the Risen Christ who has conquered sin and who turns our tears into laughter. Can you imagine how Mary felt when she realized that this man standing in front of her, absolutely the same yet strangely different, that this man was Jesus? I imagine that she laughed and she cried and she shook her head with relief and disbelief. Suddenly, everything was different.

Everything is different when we know that God is here with us and that the very worst that life can do cannot separate us in any way from the unconditional, unquenchable, incredible love of God – that even death itself is transformed in the love and light of God. That is the beauty of knowing the resurrection – of knowing that the gardener is really Jesus – it is knowing that death is not death anymore. As the hymn says, "Where o death is now thy sting?"

And the hymn is quoting from St Paul who wrote, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:55-57)

Christ has risen, Christ has risen victorious over the sin matrix, over all the powers of darkness, over all the things that keep us caught and enmeshed in our own little worlds. Christ has broken it all open like an egg.

And inside we find, not a chicken, not a gardener, but the power of the Holy Spirit calling us to new life, calling us to live as though God is really here in our midst, calling us to dare new things because we are secure in the love that knows our name.

People of God, it is easy to go away from here and as we start dealing with the weeds, forget that Christ's resurrection life is available to us, that God is as close as our breath and that we are deeply deeply deeply loved. But that is the reality. That is what is true. Always.

Let us decide here and now to live every day in the light of the resurrection. To live every day as if it is all true. To live every day as though Christ is Risen. Because he is.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!