

Sermon for the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, 22.vii.2007
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Bogue, Pennsylvania
8:30, Missa Brevis; 10:00 a.m. ELW Service of the Word
Ruth 1:6-18; Psalm 73:23-29; Acts 13:26-33a; John 20:1-2, 11-18

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

We Americans have been on an instant first-name basis with one another and with anyone we meet for quite sometime now. This seems to have begun in the North, though some blame California. In any case, it has since spread all over the country and to much of the English-speaking world. For this reason, one of the most powerful sentences in the entire Bible may make little impression on us. It is hardly a complete sentence as far as grammar is concerned, and yet this sentence, consisting of a single word, *is* complete in its content and in its impact, which we can feel right down two thousand years to the present

day, a fact which the Church commemorates and celebrates in festive raiment this day. We need to hear it as it was first heard in the 16th chapter of today's Gospel. Listen again carefully, or you will miss it:

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

-- John 20:16

I cannot think of many instances in which Our Lord addresses people by their first names. Those times in which He does, it seems to be in an effort to get the other person's attention, as, for example, when He addresses Simon Peter on the subject of faith, and cowardice and the nurture of His Church, or Simon the Pharisee, to whom He had something to say after that Simon objected to a young woman's love and tears, the young woman whose brother, Lazarus, He raised from the dead by calling his

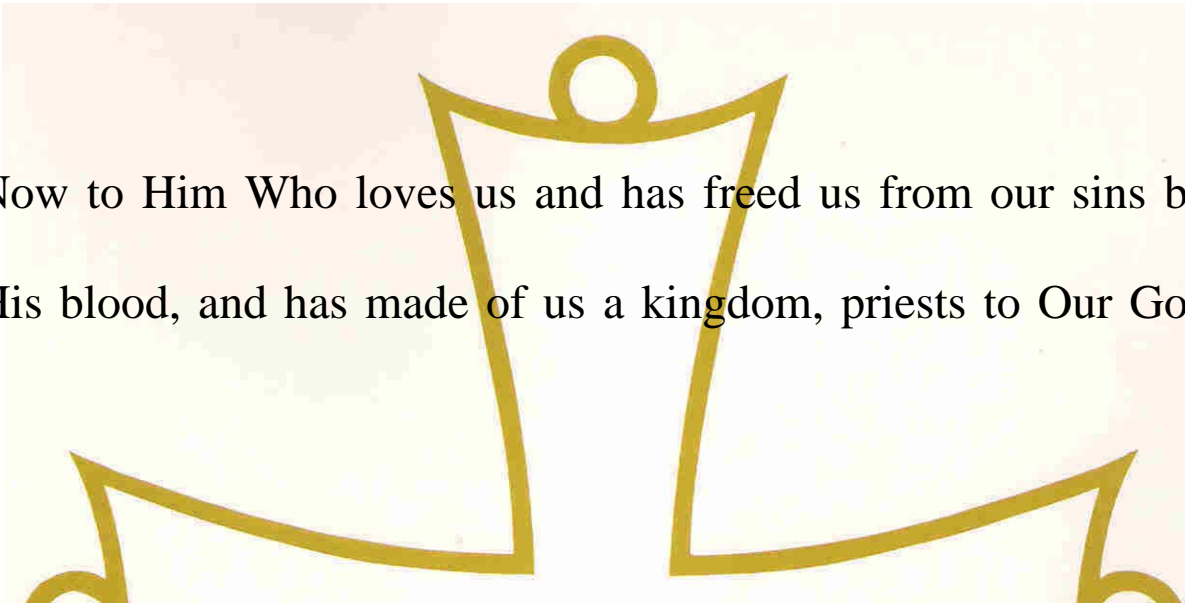
name, the young woman who stands before Him now in despair on the first morning of His rising, who cannot see Him through her tears.

One word spoken by Him, her name, ‘Mary,’ answered all her questions and filled her heart with joy and with the power to proclaim that joy, to proclaim it even to those who refuse to believe it, even to those who considered her to be unfit to be an evangelist, the least likely of all to proclaim that her Lord *lives*, and that He had spoken to *her*. Of all of His Disciples, Mary Magdalene and Peter stand out in the memory of the Church. In the case of Mary Magdalene, I believe this is because we hear *our* names called out by Jesus in the story of Mary’s witness to the Resurrection. In remembering the grace that enabled Mary Magdalene to overcome her sorrow and despair, we remember what it truly means to believe, to be saved by grace alone through faith.

Despite the first-name basis on which our society has chosen to put itself, so that not only complete strangers at either end of a phone solicitation but people vastly separated by age and experience or by responsibility address one another like school buddies, we know how deep most of that chatter goes. To be treated as a unit with the shortest label possible, the first name, whether at the doctor's office or at the pharmacy or in the nursing home, whether by a phone solicitor or by the auto mechanic, is not to be known or recognized personally, as though family and the family name meant nothing. So, perhaps when we witness a Baptism and the giving of that name or those names that will be the 'Christian name' of the new member of Christ's Church, or when we are exhorted to remember that it is the Triune God Who has named us as we remember *our* Baptism, that it is also the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that we bear, or, when the pastor

calls out our Christian name before feeding us with the Body and Blood of Christ or in other blessing, we may not hear what Mary heard, but we most certainly should.

The One in Three Who created and redeemed the life that bears your name and mine knows each of us more intimately than our families and closest friends possibly can. The Almighty does not speak simply for affect. The One Who chose, out of sheer love, to take on your humanity and to suffer all that any of us can ever suffer, calls out your name. If you cannot see clearly through the tears of grief or bitterness or regret, then *listen* with the ears of faith to the One Who calls you by name in His Word and in His Sacrament. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God

and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and
the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G.