

## Thoughts from our Minister, Andrew Taylor.

### It only takes one word.

I don't know how you answer the telephone. In our family there has been something of a split. I have followed my mother's example and tend either to give our phone number or give my name. My brother, like my father, simply lifts the receiver and says 'Hallo'. My younger daughter does the same. However each gives quite a particular and personal inflection to the word. Its not that I am likely to get confused between those two. I've got the hang of their voices, and, like me, I imagine you can identify quite a lot of people on the basis of them saying just one word to you.

It might well be your name, and that, said or called out to you, can not only tell you who it is calling or speaking, but give you much of the message that they want to impart. Do you remember how the tone attached to the calling of your name by your parents told you how the call was motivated by concern, curiosity, anger or exasperation? And your reply, maybe just of the word 'what' could be equally eloquent. It only takes a word.

Our scripture reading this morning from John 20 turns around single word exchanges. The world has been turned upside down. It is only a week since Mary, in company with the other followers of Jesus, had been part of that joyous celebration as Jesus, feted by the crowd rode into Jerusalem. Since then it had all fallen apart, and who knew what was going to happen? The disciples were devastated and demoralized, bowed down with guilt and fear. Peter, usually the strongest of the strong looked like a ghost of a man, preoccupied with what he said was his failure and his denial. In the main it had been left to the women to attend what was surely going to be the most awful time of their lives - to stand helplessly by whilst Jesus had slowly and agonizingly died up there on a cross, surrounded by low life and rude soldiery. It had been an unspeakable torment for his mother, with whom the other women had stood. The disciples? Well some of them had put in an appearance, but the rest were keeping their heads well down Then at the end some kindness had been shown. Simon of Aramathea and Nicodemus had negotiated with Pilate for Jesus' body, but it had been getting very late in the day, the Sabbath, with all its restrictions had borne down on them. Jesus' body had been buried, but without all the attentions and niceties that should have been taken - just wrapped, at least they'd done that, stuck in the tomb and left. All yesterday they could only sit, waiting for this morning when they could come and attend to things as they should be attended to.

And just when you thought it couldn't get worse, it did. Mary, with the other women had turned up at the tomb to find it open and empty. No sign of the body. Of course they had gone and told the disciples all about it, and that did finally rally Peter. Not one overly given to running, he had run all the way to the tomb, barged right in there, examined the place closely, and confirmed there was no sign of the body. So he and the other disciple gone back home to tell the others, to see if they could make any more sense of it all, and poor Mary had just been left there. Everyone was so wrapped up in themselves that they had no time to think about how it was all effecting others, least of all Mary. Then through her tears and confusion she senses someone else is present. Who else was likely to be around at that time? Probably one of the men who worked the grounds - Simon was a fairly wealthy man after all - it might be worth asking him if he had seen anything. And then the word - that one word - it was all it took.

We have reminded ourselves how just one word can carry a weight of meaning. It is not fanciful to reflect on the meanings that announcement of her name would have had for Mary. After all, we know something of the nature of Jesus, and something of the history of Mary. It is not fanciful to believe in the overtones of love that would have been in that word, 'Mary', the reminders of the forgiveness that she had known and experienced whatever she might have done in the past, the recognition of her as an individual, known and treasured by the man who was like no other she had ever known. And she only needs to make a one word response: 'Rabboni!' The translations vary for that word. 'Teacher' is one of the terms sometimes used, but on balance the commentators seem to prefer and endorse the term we used in our earlier song; 'Master', or even more specifically 'my dear Lord'. Other languages often seem to embrace in one word what English uses two or three to express, and it is the same here. If we use that last translation 'my dear Lord' Mary is responding to the expression of love, acceptance, forgiveness and salvation that were wrapped up in Jesus' calling of her name with one equally meaningful and complex. 'My' speaks of the personal relationship and commitment that Mary is making. It is just between Mary and Jesus, there is no-one else. 'Dear' marks the deep love that is the quality of that relationship, unequivocal and unconditional. 'Lord' is an acknowledgement of the authority that Mary is ascribing to Jesus - he rules over her, and she willingly submits to that rule.

'Mary...Rabboni'. Was there ever an exchange when so much was expressed in so few words. It only takes a word. And though this is a story of an exchange from two thousand years ago, we should not fool ourselves into thinking that it ended there, nor that such an exchange is or was unique to Mary and Jesus. For Jesus, the risen Christ, calls each one of us, by name. And as with Mary, it is called in

tones that speak of undying love; that speak of a perfect knowledge and understanding of us, our past and present failings; that speak of full forgiveness and salvation being offered to us through him who calls us and died for us on the cross. Forgiveness and salvation are on offer in Jesus calling our name; whether we fully receive it depends on the reply we make. 'Master, my dear Lord' said Mary, 'Rabboni', I submit willingly and lovingly to your rule.

Jesus is calling, risen and victorious he is calling each and everyone of us. He waits for us to recognize him and to make our response. It only takes a word.