

SERMON: The Other Disciple  
TEXT: John 20:1-18

4-4-21

I want to take you back to elementary school for a moment. Think about the early years. Kindergarten. Maybe even preschool. Now think about all the times when you had to move about the school as a class. When you went to the cafeteria or the gymnasium, the restrooms or the drinking fountain. The most important thing about that short trip was staying in a straight line. Do you remember how special you felt when the teacher chose you to be the Line Leader? You were the first in line, and all the other kids had to stay behind you. You would be the first to arrive at your destination. You would get your lunch before anyone else. You would have your choice of where to sit. You were Number One. Numero Uno. And you even got to hold the teacher's hand.

There was a lot of competition for this coveted position. Sometimes the selection process generated arguments or even tears. It was a powerful position, to be sure.

I actually remember one specific time when I was chosen to be Line Leader in the first grade. I felt like I was ten feet tall as I held the teacher's hand on our way back to the classroom. But she was looking down at my feet, and she began to

instruct me that I should be pointing my toes outward when I walk or I was sure to become pigeon-toed! So much for feeling special! And just to set the record straight: I did not change the way I walked, and I am not pigeon-toed to this day.

I never paid much attention to THE OTHER DISCIPLE, who races with Peter to verify Mary's report that the tomb was empty. John refers to this anonymous individual several times throughout the Gospel. It's odd that he's never named, and stranger still, that he is always set apart as "the one whom Jesus loved." When I learned it was most likely John referring to himself as THE OTHER DISCIPLE, I decided it was not a very clever disguise, nor very modest.

Clearly, John - THE OTHER DISCIPLE, the one whom Jesus loved - felt especially close to Jesus. After all, John was the one at the foot of the cross when Jesus spoke the words that essentially made him a member of the family. To his mother, Jesus said, "Woman, behold your son." And to John, "Behold, your mother."

But let's pretend for a moment that we don't know who THE OTHER DISCIPLE is. The very idea of an anonymous person being one of the first to witness the resurrection is powerful. It could be anyone. It could be you. Imagine

yourself running with Peter and reaching the tomb first. Feeling a mixture of fear and excitement, you hesitate while Peter enters the tomb, but then you follow him in. Seeing it for yourself, you believe. Jesus has risen from the dead! And you are the disciple whom Jesus loves.

Another way to imagine the identity of the unnamed disciple, is to see him as one whom we would consider “other.” Those “other” people. That one who is not like us. The one we’d rather not have to deal with. The one we don’t understand. The one who doesn’t share our values. The one we definitely don’t like and have great difficulty loving. Let’s put that person - or a representative of that group of people - in the place of THE OTHER DISCIPLE. Let’s imagine they are the one whom Jesus loves. Maybe it’s that homeless person who talks to herself and is always asking for money. It could be a woman or a man. A frightened child or a confused elderly person. Maybe it’s someone who identifies as neither male nor female. Maybe it’s a teenager in detention at the border. Maybe it’s a border patrol officer.

You know, when you’re in first grade, everybody gets a turn to be the line leader and to feel special.

It makes us feel special, too, when we are called by our name. One of my favorite parts of the resurrection story from John is that Mary doesn't recognize Jesus until he says her name. It's another small detail that speaks volumes about their close relationship and their deep affection for one another.

And after Mary recognizes the risen Lord, he commissions her to bring the good news to the other disciples.

One contemporary theologian commented, “[When] Jesus sends [Mary] to his brothers...the message to be relayed is that Jesus is *ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God* (John 20:17). In a prepositional phrase (*to my Father and your Father...*) Jesus speaks the whole purpose of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The one he calls, *Father* is not his *abba* alone. [Abba is a term of affection; like calling your father *daddy*.] In his ministry, and in his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus is opening the way for humanity to have the same relationship with God that he has.” (Mary Hinkle Shore, Commentary on John 20:1-18, April 1, 2018 [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org))

This same theologian imagines it this way: “It may help to think of someone bringing his friends home after school. The house, the food, the video games: all of

them are shared as if all the kids belonged to the same family. Jesus says he is going *to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God* (John 20:17). Like that kid bringing his friends home, Jesus means to share the relationship he and God share with his brothers and sisters. Being sons and daughters of God: this relationship is open now to everyone the Son brings home, and he wants lots of brothers and sisters (see also John 17:24 and Romans 8:29).” (Mary Hinkle Shore, Commentary on John 20:1-18, April 1, 2018 [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org))

We are confirming three young people today at First Presbyterian. Ben, Maybry, and Emma were each baptized in this church as infants. When they were just babies, not old enough to understand what it was to choose God, God chose them, and their parents chose and promised to raise them in the faith. Even the congregation - many who are here today - promised to “guide and nurture them by word and deed, [and] with love and prayer.” Their family of faith “encouraged them to know and follow Christ and to be faithful members of [Christ’s] church.”

Now, as we celebrate his resurrection, it is Jesus who calls to Ben, Maybry, and Emma, to confirm the promises their parents made. Now they are making the choice for themselves to follow Jesus and to live a life of faith. Now they are becoming brothers and sisters of Jesus. Now they can imagine themselves as THE

OTHER DISCIPLE, the one whom Jesus loved. Now, I pray, they can proclaim with Mary, "I have seen the Lord."

Every one of us here and every person we see on the street is that anonymous disciple whom Jesus loves. The risen Jesus speaks your name today and commissions you to share the good news. Everyone has a place in the family of God. May we go forth to love as Jesus loves... to the glory of God!

AMEN.