

# St James United Church



## Message for April 5, 2026 Easter Sunday

“Named and Lifted Up” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Acts 10:34-43; and John 20:11-18.

*Children are given Easter eggs with candy and affirming messages inside of them.*

What do you think of those statements? They are all ways to say how special we think you are, which is really a way for us to say, “I love you.” Do you know another way we say “I love you” to people? By saying their name. Now sometimes when I was your age, my parents might have said my name firmly because they were upset, but it was still “I love you” because they wanted me to do better and to make things right between us. Most of the time people say our names gently, playfully, always lovingly, saying we’re in relationship with each other. And in the reading that we just heard, there’s a moment like that for someone named Mary Magdalene.

It is an extraordinary moment because as we heard, Mary was crying, upset because a few days before her friend Jesus had been killed by people who didn’t like what he said and did in God’s name. Mary though liked what he said and did, liked how he loved everyone, shown in sharing meals with people that others thought were sinful, healing and forgiving people, challenging people with power to be kind and treat others fairly. He was showing people that they were special, and that God thought so too. Mary was at the tomb because she wanted to show Jesus how much he still meant to her. As she wept though, he appeared through an amazing act of God, raised from death, changed from how he’d been. In that moment he showed her that death hadn’t changed how he felt about her, that what he had taught about God hadn’t changed either. Because of this he’d be with her and all his other followers to help them love everyone, help them show people how special they were. It’s why he told Mary he was going ahead of them. The promise he made to her he promises us. This is what we celebrate today. Jesus is still helping us. There are colouring sheets for you to explore this while I talk with the older people.

So older people, everything I said to our younger ones applies but I want to go deeper. Now what I said may have implied that Jesus was killed for being nice. He was nice but that wasn’t the threat. The way he treated people was part of God’s alternative vision for the world, one different from the imperial system of hierarchy, power and violence they lived in, a pyramid where people looked down on those beneath them, sought favours from those above. It was a system that fostered death. Jesus embodied a way that nurtured abundant life, God’s vision of the world as a circle, everyone having a place in it, loved and in turn loving others, sharing with one another. That was attractive to those marginalized by the system, which was why many rallied to him and shouted “Hosanna, save us” when he came to the capital. Of course, that threatened those at the

top, which is why they crucified him, the method for those deemed domestic terrorists. So why didn't people rally to him again? Because he didn't start a revolt. As attractive as God's alternative was, they couldn't shake their attachment to dominance, not recognizing that putting them over the Romans would change nothing at all.

God's alternative only comes with a gentler approach, beginning with Jesus saying Mary's name. In his tone she knew his love for her hadn't changed, God's love hadn't either, that God's vision of the world was still in play, but would only come with one person lifted from shame at a time. Shame is how the system worked. Hierarchy structures levels of deprivation. That can't stand for long because according to psychological studies, when we're deprived of our physical needs we will rise up, unless we also feel shame about ourselves, our status, bodies, sexuality. Then we feel we're supposed to be deprived. Now that said, this takes a toll. We can only carry that for so long without a release valve, which is why we need others below us, people more shameful than we are, and beyond that enemies, people to be excluded. When Jesus was executed, I'm sure it felt to Mary that the system built on shame had won, the alternative vision Jesus taught, the one based on love, died with him. With that all her shame came rushing back. I think it is one reason he tells her not to grab onto him, not to hold those feelings, but to be lifted by the love she felt as he spoke her name, the love by God she felt and with it the feeling of worth, having agency again which she and other women didn't have in her culture, a feeling of being included in God's circle of caring once again, the beloved community that the church is supposed to embody.

And in that he commissioned her to pick up where he left off, and so she went to tell the others of her experience. It may be why she was called Magdalene, not from a place called Magdala but as some scholars suggest seen as a *migdal*, a tower. She held on to the vision that the Risen Jesus reignited in her heart, but she didn't preach it or embody it on her own. She did so with the rest of the disciples, and with a promise that he would be with them, that he would keep saying their names with love and in that enable them to speak to others with love. We hear Peter do that in Acts as he preaches to Cornelius and his household. Cornelius was a Roman centurion and so an enemy by faith and a representative of the empire. But in God's world there is no room for enemies, disparate groups to be reconciled with each other, everyone with a place in the circle.

I'm sure that as I explored this story, you recognized some elements still in play in our world, people still feeling shame, deprived, scapegoated, marginalized. It is hard to shake off our attachment to dominance, but Jesus is still with us, the Risen one lifting us from it and the shame that gives it power, one heart at a time as he says our names - Alice, Amy, Paul, Bayo, Sasha, I love you, you're worthy, now go lift up others, trusting that I am with you. It's why we reaffirmed our baptism before the readings today, so we could feel that love. We are shown that too as we share in communion. So, friends, on this Easter Sunday, I pray we hear the Risen One naming us, lifting us in love, and feel empowered to accept his call to lift others. From that the vision of the world Jesus preached will be born, the world lifted from the way of death into abundant life. Amen.