

Love will rise and call us by name.

There is a lot in a name. Some of us are named honouring an ancestor, and others are called because the name is trending. Spelling variations often come into it, as well as regional and cultural conventions.

The most common male given name in the world is...drum roll...no, not Mohammad (and its variety of spellings, but rather, Nushi. If you think that is a rather sweet-sounding name, you would be right because it is Sanskrit for just that, Sweet.

Sweet.

In Australia, long gone are the days of Bruce and Mate. Oliver is the most common name, followed by the United Kingdom's most famous name, Noah. Charlotte, obviously influenced by Princess Charlotte, has been replaced by Isla. I'm unsure what that is about, but it seems very common. Indeed, it has become a more lyrical name than Sheila or Miranda.

So, what is the most common name in the world? Well, of course, it is the name Jesus called to a woman in a garden on the morning of his resurrection. Mary.

In the garden, looking for the body that had seemed to have gone, was Mary from Magdala. She had come to finish the preparations for Jesus' burial and mourn; it was the right thing to do.

But there, the sealed rock had been removed from the tomb, and the tomb lay empty. Contrary to what I hear about in many marriage preparations, the clothes were neatly folded. Some accounts say two men in white, presumably angels were there, and they imparted the news. "Who are you looking for? He is not here; he is risen."

None of this seemed to make sense to Mary. This was utterly overbearing. Full of grief, no doubt tired from the Sabbath of the Passover and overcome with tiredness, this Sheila had no time for this. These blokey mates just better come clean. In desperation, she looked around and saw another man standing there.

"What have you done with him? Where is he?" She had no idea to whom she spoke, and she supposed he was a gardener. She talked to him in pain and confusion. "Tell me! Where is he? I'll take his body and carry him away!"

Then it all changed. In a word, the most common name was uttered by the man bearing the one character that, above all other things on heaven and earth, gives praise.

"Mary!"

A simple calling by name, and immediately, everything made sense.

"The Son of Man must be handed over, suffer and die, and on the third day rise from the dead."

"Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days."

"Death had been swallowed up in victory."

Now completely overwhelmed again, Mary responded, grabbed hold of Jesus, and patted his risen body. Her hands were all over him, checking him to see if it was him. How do we know it – ah, it's not time for a lesson in Koine Greek, but it is another one of those words that require a paragraph in English to unpack. The closest word we have is 'groped', but the American bible editors of the New Revised Standard thought it might be too far!

Mary grabbed hold of the Risen Lord Jesus and would not let go. Jesus had to tell her to go and tell the others. Both the accounts in the Gospel of John and Luke have this same narrative. A woman was the first person to be trusted with the good news that Jesus was risen. This same woman was to be vilified by the Church in the 5th century, equating her with qualities and fake news.

Others even wrote novels about her, suggesting some coding in her story. I saw the next book by that author in preparation. It was outside the gates of the Chapel of St Matthew, Rosslyn, near Edinburgh. It was in a clear plastic bag with a cardboard sign saying, "Dan Brown's next novel. £3"

Mary did as she was told. "Do not cling to me, Mary. Tell the others that I am risen and will meet them in Galilee." Next weekend, our Orthodox families will celebrate the Paschal Mysteries. They revere Mary of Magdala in this story. She is the proto-apostle: the apostle to the apostles. She is pre-eminent amongst the others as the first to be entrusted with the most precious news.

In calling her by her name, Mary was given new life. Everything past did not matter anymore. Sin, death, and darkness had no hold over her. She was free to embrace the Saviour, knowing that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised coming into the world.

Throughout the Bible, the calling by name has empowered and given new life to many people. Sometimes, the people God spoke to were not those others would expect to have a religious experience. Nor were they talked to in ways that we might have expected.

One was summoned by name from a burning bush. He was a fugitive from Egypt. The bush told him he was going back there and, what is more, would rescue God's people.

Another couple was visited by three angelic figures who dined with the elderly pair. They told them they were going to have a child. The woman laughed. She was desperate to be a mother, but at 80? Be careful what you ask for!

The boy Samuel kept bugging Eli when hearing voices in the night. Eventually, Eli realised and was able to assure him that it was okay to answer the voice.

Elijah ran away from doing God's stuff, and God chased him up a mountain and treated him to an earthquake, gale-force winds and fire. And then God spoke to him in the stillness that

followed. Zechariah was struck dumb for talking back to the altar of incense in the temple. Saul of Tarsus was blinded on the road and told to stop persecuting the early Church. And Mary, a messenger called Gabriel, greeted her by name and told her she was to have a baby who would be the Saviour of all.

Her husband received a vision. The Wise Seers from the East were warned in a dream. Jacob wrestled all night with God. John the Divine had an exciting afternoon after eating a scroll.

God speaks to us, and not always in the way we might expect.

And claiming that we speak to God to gain kudos from our peers, then God may well talk to us through the officers of the Community Assessment team!

We are always in the presence of Christ, but the Good Shepherd is the one who knows all of us by name. This was very much part of another way that Jesus speaks to us. We glimpse the holiness around us using parables or stories based on everyday things. Those parables, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, talk to me, calling my name.

"The kingdom of heaven is like..." begins Jesus. Immediately, a journey into the thin place between heaven and earth is opened.

Sometimes, calling our name is through something that only we might notice immediately or after the moment has passed. God is like that.

Yesterday, one of our parishioners was invited to journey with First Nation elders to a place where bunjils nest. The wedge-tail eagles guided them to this sacred place. On our candle, lovingly prepared by Ethan, we are ushered into a deeper area of understanding the resurrected Jesus by the same imagery.

Our creator knit us in our mother's womb and carved out our life for us in the palm of his hand. This is the same creator who, as Good Shepherd, calls us by name. We respond to that calling because, as his sheep, we know his voice. Every time we enter that thin space, it is the same call.

In times of depth, sorrow or confusion, this Lord calls us all by name. We are asked, like Mary, to embrace the Lord. But like Mary, there is a caveat, a special meaning for us. Like Mary, we will be asked not to cling to Jesus or the Holy Spirit but to go from this place back into the world. Living out our baptismal commitment there, we do as we have been commanded and reminded every week: love and serve the Lord.

The call from God is not just for the moment but to enter into eternity. For some, the calling by Jesus may seem like that endless Holy Saturday of waiting, waiting, waiting. And then, in the stillness of the new day, a voice calls. The voice doesn't say "Cooee" or "Hey you!" it calls you by name. Your Christian name, in essence, or to be.

Mary was given a new task – letting go of the risen Lord and sent to proclaim his presence.

At our baptism, which shortly we will renew, we are asked to 'name this child.'  
This is the same name that many of us are still known by.

Easter Dawn/Day 2023

When we need newness in life, the Lord is with us.  
IF only we would hear his voice...

Moses.  
Abraham.  
Samuel.  
Zechariah.  
Mary.  
Saul.

Graham, David, Alan, Dorothy, Audrey...

The Risen Lord is calling us.  
We know not how or when, but when we do hear it, even though we will want to hold onto that moment forever, there we will begin a new journey of our lives, embracing not just Jesus but the thin place of forgiveness, renewal, and the promise of life everlasting.

May you hear the voice of God and, with courage, allow yourselves to embrace life fully, life in all its magnificence, no matter how challenging our road may be.