

The story of our life turns, when we are known and called by name. John 20: 16

Back in 1992 (and here I'm revealing my age), I heard the Red Hot Chilli Peppers' song 'Under the Bridge' for the first time. It was during Lent, just before Easter. I'm not sure if I can express quite well enough in words how deeply it struck me. It wasn't just the words; it wasn't just the music; it wasn't just the deeply personal backstory of Anthony Kiedis who wrote the song. It was also my own story at that time, and of friends and people I loved. My story was very different to Kiedis' story, but there a connection all the same. I was living with my own life challenges back then – as all of us do from time to time.

Somehow, all of those things came together, and the song touched deep into my own life experience. It was emotional and visceral and personal.

Kiedis originally wrote this song as a poem, expressing his experience of isolation and despondency – in a very urban-West-Coast-American kind of way. He wrote of being drawn back into a memory of a not-long-past, absolute-lowest-point in his life, during a time of heroin addiction. That low point was when he was literally and metaphorically under a bridge, abandoning the ones who loved him in favour of the next score, and utterly alone.

A few years later, he was in a different place. But the memory of that pain was still alive and easily brought to the surface. As he remembers, he cries out from the depths of his soul:

I don't wanna ever feel, like I did that day.

Take me to the place I love, take me all the way.

Kiedis was singing about re-lived pain and alienation, and the 'place' he wanted to be instead: with friends and love and trust in his life. Can he go back to remember the way he felt that day when he was under the bridge? No! That was a way he *never* wants to feel again!

If you don't know this song, you can easily do an internet search, watch a video clip, and listen to Kiedis sing this poem of his heart and soul.

Just a warning though: the music style and images of the Red Hot Chilli Peppers performing this song may not be quite your cup of tea. But music and the stories they carry have a way of touching us, even when the musical style isn't ordinarily our cup of tea. So maybe it's worth a listen ... again ... or for the first time.

This particular song has somehow managed to cross boundaries of musical taste, capturing the imagination of people who would never normally listen to alternative '90s American rock. Maybe the music that calls to your soul comes from Gregorio Allegri, or Gurrumul, or The Beatles, Ayub Ogada, Billie Eilish, Arvo Pärt, Aretha Franklin, or the beloved hymns of your particular culture and history?

There's something about the way that music, poetry and stories can touch into the experiences of our lives, even when they are from other people and lives very different to our own. They can still give light to *turning points* in our own experience. And in these graced moments, God can open up our hope and the possibility of a different reality, and pull us in to an alternative way of living and being.

I think there's something like this in the way John's gospel tells the story of Mary in the garden while it was still dark. She is meeting a person she thinks is the gardener, because her tears and sorrow and grief overwhelm her vision. This story is emotional, it's visceral, it's embodied, it's personal. It touches into our own pain, to times where we too could say, '*I don't wanna ever feel, like I did that day.*'

But the story goes on. It tells us about a glimpse of hope that emerges, revealing that something else is possible. And it all turns on someone Mary thought was a stranger, who calls her by name.

The person she thinks is a stranger, speaks to her, "Mary!"

And in this moment, Mary recognises he is no stranger to her at all; and she is no stranger to him.

I wonder when you have experienced something like this? Perhaps there was someone you thought didn't know you from a bar of soap, someone you thought couldn't possibly have cared less about you. And then they called you by name. And in that moment you discovered: 'this person knows who I am!'

How does it make us feel? ... when we thought we were an anonymous, insignificant, faceless person in the crowd? ... and discover, instead, we are someone known by name?

Being known and called by name makes us into people considered by others as being of value and of worth. It means we matter to someone else. It means we are part of a community that considers us an integral part. It signifies that we are cared about, that someone else knows whether we are there or not, and maybe, even, how we are going.

Being known and called by name, tells us we belong here in this community. It pulls us into the life of this community. Being known and called by name includes us, holds us and enfolds us. It gives us a place and a home where we know we belong.

This story of Mary and the risen Jesus, told to us in John's gospel, tells us that it is not just a distant cosmic force, or disembodied principle of goodness, that we believe in or proclaim.

This story of Mary and the risen Jesus, tells us a human-divine story, a story of real life, a story of life lived in God and God living in and with us. This risen Jesus calling Mary's name, is calling our name as well. This risen Jesus touches in to our own real life-saving experience of what it means to be known personally by God, and to know we belong and are cared about for who we are.

In this story, we know our pain, our longing, our hope and our life.

In this story, we hear the One of God, who knows us and speaks to us by our name.

In this story, we are pulled deeply into the life of the beloved community of Jesus, where we are known and called by name.

In this story, we are called into the life of the risen Christ – to know and call each other by name – no longer strangers to each other.

As we emerge ever more from this time of pandemic, we have been asking ourselves how we can connect more deeply into our wider communities. How can we be real, embodied and connected communities, not just with our own preferred group of friends we already know, but wider and deeper and beyond?

Maybe it's as simple and as difficult as coming to know each other by name? ... really knowing each other by name?

May we be shaped, formed and filled with the life of the risen Christ who calls us by name;
for in Christ, we are no longer strangers, but friends.

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