

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

April 17, 2022  
Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18  
Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:1-2,14-24  
1 Corinthians 15:19-26

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I want to take you back this morning to your childhood. To that moment of amazement on Easter morning. Baskets with dyed eggs and big chocolate bunnies. The morning hustle getting ready for church. Putting on your best clothes (even though you would have rather worn tattered blue jeans). A sanctuary full of flowers. And, of course, food...especially deviled eggs.

As a little girl Easter was so easy. I didn't wonder how this miracle could be...I didn't speculate on the logistics of the resurrection. It was simply a beautiful day full of joy and wonder. Of course it was easy. I had been singing songs like Jesus Loves Me, This little light of mine and he's got the whole world in his hands ever since I could remember. The equation was simple. God was good and God had given his only son for just me. For me...Emily. And I believed it.

Looking back, as a child church was a safe, welcoming place to be. I was loved and I felt it. So, it was easy to call myself a Christian from a very early age. And that made Easter a no-brainer of a celebration. And when it came time to say "Alleluia" Praise God on Easter morning, I was all in.

But, as an adult, I often wonder...did everyone have that kind of joyful experience growing up? Was church that same welcoming place for others? Did we all shout Alleluia together with the same certitude and comfort?

Unfortunately, I know that's not the case. Life gets complicated. We doubt. We make mistakes (some much bigger than others). We experience loss. We are told we aren't welcome or worthy of God's love. And...we start to wrestle with the idea of God's unconditional love for us. Because if the church hasn't loved you well, if you haven't felt that you are good enough just as you are, if life has thrown you one too many curves, you might find it hard to claim your own Alleluia and praise God on Easter Sunday.

So, this morning I want us to focus on the power Alleluia for you. The moment when we can all say with our whole heart Praise God. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Let's start with a little philosophical context. We know that words have power and they matter. Especially for faith. In fact, words are ultimately *performative* in nature. Meaning, they act as a catalyst for social and spiritual change and when embodied, they transform our relationships with others and with ourselves and ultimately, with God.

The Rev. Dr. Danielle Tumminio Hansen says that "words don't just describe our reality, they actually change our reality. So when a priest says, "I now pronounce that you are married to one another," those words literally transform the relationship between two people who were

once not married to two people who are.”<sup>1</sup> And think about the words at our Baptism...I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those words transform who we are. They have power. They are performative.

Alleluia (Praise God) has the same kind of power.

Hansen goes on to say, “During Lent we remove the word from our liturgies all together so that our hearts don’t express joy but help us focus on a time of solemn confession and repentance.” We remove joyful praise to transform our hearts into a reflective space of honest confession. “And we wait. We wait for 40 days until the time on Easter that we can shout once again our praise to God.” We claim that we have been changed. We claim the performative power of Alleluia.

And when we say it, we celebrate our transformation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hansen concludes that this word “is the best of the best of our faith. And we are proclaiming with this one word the value we place on God and his love for us.”

The best of our faith. The value we place on God. The indication of our acceptance of God’s love for us. The celebration of our heart’s transformation.

But here’s the thing...What if you aren’t so sure about God’s love? How do you shout Alleluia when people you love are suffering? How do you shout Alleluia when injustice is thriving in the world? How do you shout Alleluia when hate and bigotry and violence overshadow every single news story? How do you shout Alleluia if you have been hurt by faith? What then?

When you come here on Easter, do you say the word just because everyone else is saying it? Or, are you claiming Alleluia as a performative agent in your own life? Now, if you are one of the people struggling with how this might look, let me give you an example.

There was one very powerful performative word in our Gospel reading this morning. Did you catch it?

As Mary is weeping, full of despair and disbelief, she hears one word. She hears her name. Mary. And that word, that moment transformed her heart. She moves from disbelief and fear to belief and joy. Her grief turns to rejoicing and she experiences Alleluia.

What if you could hear your name? What might that heal within your heart if you were able to stand there like Mary and hear Jesus personally call your name? How might it be that performative word that finally allows your soul to sing?

Easter is nothing less than the most powerful performative act of our Christian faith. And the words we say today are full of abundant grace and forgiveness, acceptance and welcome no

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.huffpost.com/author/danielle-tumminio>

matter where we have been, what we have done, how we have been hurt. God claims us fully, just as we are so that we can shout Alleluia with a renewed sense of trust and commitment to our belovedness as a child of God.

One of my favorite invitations to communion states this... This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord. It is made ready for those who love him and for those who want to love him more. So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been here long, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come, because it is the Lord who invites you. It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

What performative words did you hear in that invitation? Let me suggest that it is these words...Come, because it is the Lord who invites you. *You*. I want you to hear your name being called out just as Mary heard her name at the tomb. Hear your name. Be Invited. Be Forgiven. Be Redeemed. And be Loved.

Because Jesus calls your name each and every day. At the end of our Eucharistic prayer, after the breaking of the bread you hear these performative words every Sunday...The Gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving. Let these words transform you.

Because Christ died for you. And you. And you. And you.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Amen.