

# **Lenten Devotion: Unnamed Women**

Isaiah 43:1-3a

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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You don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. You don't know my name; you know me only as Pharaoh's daughter. You don't know my name, but I had a lot to do with shaping the history of Israel. In God's divine wisdom I was chosen to change the course of history when I stood up to my father's cruelty, when I chose to ignore the Pharaoh's decree that all the male children born to the Hebrews should be thrown into the Nile in an effort to quell the rising population of Hebrews in Egypt. I am Pharaoh's daughter. It is I who found the baby, tucked ever so safely in a basket, hidden among the reeds along the banks of the river. I am the one who took pity on the child and offered it my protection, and after he was weaned I took him as my own son. It is I who gave him his name: Moses, because I pulled him out of the water. I loved the child as if he were my very own blood, raising him with all the benefits of palatial living, saving the child who would become the man who you would know as the Great Lawgiver of the Old Testament, the man who would lead the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to nationhood in Canaan. I am Pharaoh's daughter; Moses' adopted mother, and yet you don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. Why don't you know my name?

You don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. You don't know my name, but you do know me as the daughter of Jairus. My father was a leader of a synagogue, elected by the elders of the community. My Dad was

one of the most respected people in the community and as his only daughter, I got a lot of special attention as a child. That was pretty fun. But when I was 12 years of age I got sick, really sick. My father went to Jesus in the hopes that Jesus could heal me, but while Jesus was busy healing someone else, someone came and told my father, Jairus, that I had died. My father's heart broke ... here he had tried to find someone to help me get well, but while he was away from me, I died. I heard later that Jesus said to my father after they had both heard the news of my death, "Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36). My father and Jesus rushed to my house, along with Peter and James and John, the house already filled with noisy mourners and flute-players who had already gathered to play for the last rites of the dead (Mt 9:23). Later I was told that Jesus went into where I was laying, along with three of his disciples, and he told me to rise up. I was dead, but then Jesus raised me from the dead, yet you don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. Why don't you know my name?

You don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. You don't know my name, but you do know me for my generosity. It was during the Passover and Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims who had traveled far to celebrate the Passover in the Holy City. Lots of wealthy people were putting large amounts of money into the treasury. But I couldn't do that, for as a widow I had precious little. But I put in what I could: two mites, two small copper coins which are worth a penny. It wasn't much but it was all that I had, all that I had to live on. Though I tried to slip in quietly and not be noticed, Jesus noticed and praised me by saying, "The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford – she gave

her all!" (Lk 21:3-4, *The Message*) Though I only gave two small copper coins, I am known even to your day for my generosity. But you don't even know my name. The Bible never tells you. Why don't you know my name?

You don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. You don't know my name, but you do know me as one of the women who followed Jesus from Galilee. I followed him. I was with him in those final days, and I was there at the crucifixion. I was there watching, praying, remaining close to Jesus throughout the long hours of his suffering on the cross. I witnessed his horrible death. I saw him placed in the tomb by a man from the Jewish town of Arimathea – Joseph was his name; the Bible tells you that. I helped to prepare the spices and ointments for his burial. And when the sabbath was over, I awakened early on the first day of the week, and I went to the tomb bringing the spices with me. I went with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women to take care of Jesus' body and to prepare it as our customs dictated. I was there with the other women and I saw the stone rolled away from the tomb. We went into the tomb, but Jesus' body was not there. We were puzzled; couldn't figure out what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. We were frightened, but they told us that Jesus had risen, just as Jesus had said he would do! We were the first to hear the news! So we left and went to tell the news to the disciples, but they didn't believe us. They thought we were making it up! I was among the very first to hear the good news that Jesus was risen, but you don't even know my name. The Bible never tells you. Why don't you know my name?

You don't know my name. The Bible never tells you. You know me only in relationship to someone else: someone's daughter, someone's wife,

someone's mother, someone's sister, someone's concubine, someone's slave, someone's maid. You know me only by what I did: saved and raised a child, was the recipient of an amazing miracle, showed generosity worthy of our Lord, stood faithfully by the cross and was among the first to hear the good news of Easter. You don't know my name. Why don't you know my name?

You don't know my name. You probably never asked. I'm the woman who pushes the cart offering you a cup of hot coffee or cocoa at the hospital when your loved one is in surgery. I'm the woman who empties the wastebasket in your office building at night while you're at home relaxing. I'm the woman whom you pass by, who stands at the street corner pulling a cart with all of my belongings. I'm one of the women who cleans your house while you're at work. I'm the checker at your grocery store; the barista who hands you your venti, extra hot, no whip, sugar free, triple shot, caramel macchiato with extra caramel as you hurry through the coffee shop's drive-up window on your way to work. I am the woman to whom you hand your dirty dress shirts in the morning before 10:00, expecting that you'll be able to pick them up later in the day freshly dry-cleaned and pressed to your liking. You don't know my name. You probably never asked.

To know someone's name is to go beyond knowing what someone does, and to begin to get to know them as a whole person. To know them not by their relationship to someone else, but to know them for who they are as an individual. To know someone's name is to begin to recognize that there's far more to them than meets your eye. To know them as a unique individual created and loved by God. God doesn't create anonymous beings, so why don't you know my name? Thankfully, God knows it. God has made me in God's own likeness, and has called me by name. Thanks be to God! Amen.