

Year B

John 20:1-18

One of the surprising aspects for first time Commissioners to the Church of Scotland's General Assembly in Edinburgh is that for many the most moving moment of the Assembly occurs during the final session on Friday afternoon. Some Commissioners don't even last that long and are on their way home when the names of those ministers who have died since the last Assembly are read out by the recently retired Moderator along with the name of the last Parish in

which they served. It's usually a long list but one finds oneself listening intently to all the personal names and all the Parishes and by implication the people who have served their local churches through the ministries. It's very moving. It's moving because it means something when a name is spoken. We all have names which are, of course, personal to us.

I've told you the story about 'Fruit Stand' before but it's worth telling again!

When the 1960s ended, San Francisco's Ashbury district reverted to high rent, and many hippies moved down the coast to Santa

Cruz. They got married and had children. But they didn't name their children Melissa or Jack. People in the mountains around Santa Cruz grew accustomed to their children playing with the likes of Frisbee or with little Time Warp or Spring Fever. And eventually Moonbeam, Earth, Love and Precious, Promise all ended up in public school.

That's when the nursery teachers first met Fruit Stand. Every autumn, according to tradition, parents bravely apply name tags to their children, kiss them good-bye and send them off to school on the bus. So it was for

Fruit Stand. The teachers thought the boy's name was odd, but they tried to make the best of it.

"Would you like to play with the blocks, Fruit Stand?" they offered. And later, "Fruit Stand, how about a snack?" He accepted hesitantly. By the end of the day, his name didn't seem much odder than Heather's or Sun Ray's.

At bell time, the teachers led the children out to the buses. "Fruit Stand, do you know which one is your bus?"

He didn't answer. That wasn't strange. He hadn't answered them all day. Lots of children are shy on the first day of school. It

didn't matter. The teachers had instructed the parents to write the names of their children's bus stops on the reverse side of their name tags. The teacher simply turned over the tag. There, neatly printed, was the word "Anthony."¹ Poor Anthony!

We may like our names - we may dislike them or even be indifferent to them, but they are personal to us and it matters when our name is uttered and we are recognised and included. Mary did not recognise Jesus until her name was uttered. In John 10, Jesus said in relation to the Good Shepherd; "The

¹ Luanne Oleas in Salinas, Calif., Reader's Digest.

sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”² Mary recognised him when he spoke her name.

For more than 50 years, Lale Sokolov lived with a secret - one born in the horrors of wartime Europe, in a place that witnessed some of the worst of human outrages.

It would not be shared until he was in his 80s, thousands of miles from that place.

Lale had been the Tattooist of Auschwitz.

The journalist, Heather Morris, has written a book - *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* - based on how he tattooed a serial number on the arms

² John 10:3

of those at the camp who weren't sent to the gas chambers.

"The horrors of surviving nearly three years in a concentration camp left him with a lifetime of fear and paranoia," Heather Morris says.

"The story took three years to untangle. I had to earn his trust and it took time before he was willing to embark on the deep self-scrutiny that parts of his story required."

He feared that he would be viewed as a Nazi collaborator. Keeping the secret, or what he described as a burden of guilt, would protect his family, he thought.

It was only after his wife Gita died that he "unburdened" himself, revealing a tale of survival.

In April 1942, aged 26, Lale was taken to Auschwitz, the Nazis' biggest death camp.

When the Nazis came to his hometown, Lale had offered himself as a strong, able-bodied young man in the hope that it would save the rest of his family from being split up. Unlike his siblings, he was unemployed and unmarried.

At that time, he did not know of the horrors that went on at the camp in occupied south-west Poland.

On arrival, the Nazis exchanged his name for a number: 32407.

Prisoner number 32407 was set to work like many others, constructing new housing blocks as the camp expanded. Partly because of his skills with languages - he knew Slovakian, German, Russian, French, Hungarian and a bit of Polish - Lale was made the main camp tattooist. It was his horrific job to remove the names of every person before him and replace the name with a soul-less number.³

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-42568390>

Jesus knows our name and the wonderful good news on this Resurrection Day is that he turns to us and calls us by name.

We only know a little bit about the early Church. We know some things because they are stated in the New Testament. We know other things by reading between the lines. But one of the sure facts that we do know from a considerable amount of biblical evidence is that the New Testament Church was beset by rivalry and competition. Paul wrote at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians; “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the

Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?⁴ Rather depressingly, the new Church struggled with the destructive implications of in-fighting. So it comes as no surprise that the beloved disciple, who is

⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

presumably John himself, and Simon Peter are described in John's Gospel as racing one another to the tomb. We have a footrace for truth. John is fleet of foot and sharper in intelligence. While it's true that Peter entered the tomb before John, John understood the implications of its vacancy long before Peter did. Now, I don't doubt that the writer of John's Gospel intended no slur on Peter, instead he wished to emphasise that the disciple who experienced a special love was quick to respond to that love. Nonetheless the rest of the New Testament conflict tradition is not far from

this story, a fact that is especially apparent when we remember that John's Gospel is, in all likelihood, a late first century document, written in the context of church rivalry.

On this Easter Sunday we are reminded of our worldliness; our tendency to look at the person beside us, instead of looking to Jesus. The challenge is to listen for our name, because it will be spoken by the Saviour who loves you as intently as he loved John. And when we hear that name to take off in pursuit of the new age, the new creation that dawns on this Easter day. We will not allow ourselves to be swallowed up

by the ways of the old creation. Instead, we
go in, we see and we believe. May God bless
you all on this special day. Amen.