

Why Are You Weeping?

John 20:1-18 (Easter Sunday - April 12, 2020)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she left and ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she told them, "and we don't know where they put him!" So Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. Bending over, he saw the linen cloths lying there, yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was following him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there. The cloth that had been on Jesus' head was not lying with the linen cloths, but was folded up in a separate place by itself. Then the other disciple, who arrived at the tomb first, also entered. He saw and believed. (They still did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, weeping. As she wept, she bent over, looking into the tomb. She saw two angels in white clothes sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. They asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She told them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him." After she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you carried him off, tell me where you laid him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and replied in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means, "Teacher"). Jesus told her, "Do not continue to cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father—to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" She also told them the things he said to her.

A woman's eyes well up and tears start to flow as the man she loves is down on one knee. A tear is shed at the first sight and sound of a newborn baby. A family cries when their loved one returns home safely from active duty. A father's eyes shed a tear or two as arm in arm he walks his daughter down the aisle toward her soon to be husband. Tears run down our cheeks for different reasons. Those events are joyous and the outpouring of that emotion sometimes brings tears. Yet tears also flow from the outpouring of another emotion. Eyes well up and we just can't hold them back - tears of sadness. Sometimes it is easy to understand why someone is crying. Other times it isn't quite so easy, but in the case of Mary Magdalene on that Easter morning, it was quite obvious why she was weeping uncontrollably at Jesus' tomb.

As Mary Magdalene stood outside the empty tomb of Jesus weeping these were not the little tears that might run down the cheek and are easily wiped away. Her tears were flowing uncontrollably. They were hopeless tears of the fear and sadness that filled her heart. The angel asked her that tender question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" I'm pretty certain he knew the answer, but he wanted Mary to consider what reason she had for such hopeless tears. Her tears were all related to what she didn't see. Jesus' lifeless body was not there in that tomb where she saw it placed late Friday afternoon.

Mary along with other women had witnessed those horrible events. She watched from a distance weeping and wailing for her Lord as they drove nails like tent stakes into his hands and feet. She saw him being raised up in the hot sun, the agony he endured, the darkened sky in the afternoon. She probably heard some of the things that Jesus said and cried out. She saw him bow his head and breathe his last, but she didn't know what all this meant as her grief consumed her. She saw Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus place his lifeless body into the tomb, maybe she even helped. As the stone was rolled in front of that tomb, you understand the tears she must have wept. Walking away from the grave at the end of the day, she felt the grief and pain of loss. Her Lord, her teacher, her friend Jesus was dead.

Now it was Sunday morning, very early. The sun was barely peeking above the horizon. So Mary and some other women were going to the tomb. Mary and these women were going out to the tomb to do one last labor of love for their Lord's body who was hastily buried on Friday. They had prepared spices and perfumes for his body to mask some of the odors of rotting flesh. However when she got closer to the tomb, from a distance she saw the stone already moved away. Right away she assumed the worst: His body was gone. So she turned and left while the other women continued on toward the tomb, Mary went to tell Peter and John what she had seen. Listen to the fear and sadness in her voice as she report what she concluded to be the case. **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they put him!"** Then later after Peter and John investigated for themselves walking into the tomb and seeing the grave clothes just laying there, they returned to where they were staying. We could talk about their reactions but, let's keep focusing on Mary.

As Peter and John left, Mary was left standing there weeping, sobbing uncontrollably as her grief was taken to a new level. Not only was she grieving the death of Jesus, but now it seemed her greatest fear was realized. The reality of death's separation was felt in Mary's heart. Jesus was completely gone. Not even his body remained. There was nothing left of him for her to cling to. There was nothing more she could do for Jesus. How her heart ached with sadness and fear that she would never see him again.

Then one of the angels in the tomb who was just sitting there asked that tender question. "Woman, why are you weeping?" It's in Mary's response that we see clearly her hopeless fear and sadness. **"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him."** Then she heard another voice from behind her, but she couldn't recognize who it was. Perhaps it was the sunlight from behind him, but maybe it was her tears of hopeless grief, sadness, and fear that blurred her vision so that she could really only see a silhouette. She couldn't see that it was Jesus himself who was the man standing behind her asking her the same question, **"Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?"**

As the living Jesus asked Mary, so he asks you today. "Why are you weeping?" He of course knows the answer just as he knew why Mary was weeping, but like Mary, we have a tendency to weep hopelessly and inconsolably because such sadness fills our lives. We weep because of the fears that sadness leads us to feel. There is so much that pushes you and I to weep tears of hopelessness. What causes you to weep right now? Do you weep out of worry that this COVID-19 virus will affect you or your loved ones directly? If it does, are you afraid that it will result in death? Do you weep because the economy looks like it's falling apart? Has it affected you personally with job loss? Are you afraid that your job might be in jeopardy? Do you weep wondering if life will ever return to some kind of "normal"? Are you worried that the "new normal" will be filled with even more struggles and sorrows and pain? Is it something else that is personally causing you sadness? What is it that is causing you to weep those hopeless tears of sadness and fear? With all that we see and experience in this world of sin, like Mary, our tendency toward hopeless weeping clouds our vision of the living and victorious Jesus who has conquered sin and death.

Jesus was standing there right in front of Mary as she turned to face the voice who had asked her the question. But through tear-filled eyes, she didn't recognize that it was Jesus standing right there until he called her by name. That voice was familiar to her. Perhaps it was the way he said her name. Could it really be? It was Jesus! All of a sudden she had no more reason to weep uncontrollable tears of sadness as tears of joy now filled her eyes. Her fear was lifted and confidence filled her heart in Jesus as her words rejoiced at Jesus standing right there alive. "Rabboni! Teacher!" With this new found joy and confidence she ran back to the disciples again. You can hear the unbridled joy in her words. **"I have seen the Lord!"**

Today as we peer into the empty tomb, we don't see Jesus laying there lifeless, but we see him alive calling us through his Word comforting us that he has risen from the dead. Jesus' victory today proves he has conquered sin by smashing its consequence of death in complete defeat. His victory over death means we are assured the victory over death too. We have no need to fear it's coming. Paul wrote at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, about our certainty in death. **"Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (15:54b-57)** We have the certainty of life in heaven when life in this world is done because the grave could not hold Jesus.

Yet that's not all his victory means for us. As we trust in him every day, Jesus' victory over death itself gives us victory over every one of our fears and sadnesses. It was that way for Mary as she shouted with great joy when she recognized Jesus. No longer was she weeping. Can you see all those hopeless tears of sadness and fear melt away. It was as if the living Jesus had wiped them away from her cheeks just by calling her name.

There will be times when we are saddened by things that happen in our life. There will be times when we are afraid. The temptations will always be there to weep those fears and sadness hopelessly as if Jesus was not there. Yet even when we are afraid or sad, Jesus stands victorious in front of us and we know he has not abandoned us. When our complete confidence is placed in the one who defeated the undefeatable for us, he wipes our tears of fear and sadness from our cheeks. Confident in the living Jesus, this is our wondrous and joy filled confession: **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:37-38)

My friends, the living Jesus is our confidence in life and in death. And because he lives it is as the hymn writer said:

He lives to silence all my fears;
He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart;
He lives all blessings to impart.

He lives all glory to his name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
"I know that my Redeemer lives! Amen