

Why Are You Weeping?

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple,
the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,
“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,
and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Then Peter and the other disciple set out
and went toward the tomb.

The two were running together, but the other disciple
outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in
and saw the linen wrappings lying there,
but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him,
and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head,
not lying with the linen wrappings
but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first,
also went in, and he saw and believed;
for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;
and she saw two angels in white,
sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying,
one at the head and the other at the feet.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord,
and I do not know where they have laid him."

When she had said this,

she turned around and saw Jesus standing there,
but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?
Whom are you looking for?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him,
"Sir, if you have carried him away,
tell me where you have laid him,
and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to him, "Teacher!"

(in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher)).

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me,

because I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to my sisters and brothers and say to 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";

and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Why Are You Weeping?

John 20:1-18

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Rev. Michael Catanzaro

I.

My friends, I'm going to be a little hard on you this morning; sorry. I know it is *Easter*; kids have been running around looking for baskets and eggs, gobbling chocolate rabbits, separating out the licorice jelly beans, and biting off the heads of peeps. I know you got all dressed up to come to church today, that you have big plans, that you are sitting there in the pews doing the math about when to put the ham in the oven. I know that all of you are beside yourself with joy that spring has finally sprung and wish, even now, you were out enjoying the warmer weather. So, I am especially aware that today's sermon is going to be, as I said, a little hard on you; but there it is, sorry.

II.

Now, usually, when a preacher starts the sermon in such a way, it means he or she is about to use far too many words and say hardly anything at all; but, at least they have the courtesy of giving you a heads-up. However, you've all sat through long, boring, repetitive sermons on many occasions, so you know it is just a matter of putting in the time; that much you can handle.

Today, though, on Easter of all days, the hardness of the sermon isn't an issue of quantity, but *quality*. That isn't to say I'm *planning* on preaching a bad sermon, as in poor quality; though this may, indeed, turn out to *be* the case (please let me know). No, the issue of the quality of *this* sermon has to do with the hardness of tone and scope. I will, however, endeavor to keep it short; so at least you've got that to hold on to.

III.

Truth be told, writing the Easter sermon is about as easy as it gets for a preacher. I mean, come on, that's why we call it the *Good News* of Jesus Christ. It is the happiest of happy endings. Jesus, after the pain and anguish of the cross, after bearing the sins of the entire world, after descending into hell and after three days dead in the tomb, is resurrected. I mean, *nobody* saw *THAT* coming.

True enough, he had been talking about it all along: hinting how the Son of Man must suffer, alluding to being taken where one does not wish to go, making reference to rebuilding in three days the temple torn down. Nonetheless, the disciples just couldn't see it, couldn't wrap their minds around it, never imagined the scope of the situation. And, so, on that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb of Jesus with the lowest of expectations.

IV.

Upon arrival, she is met with a gut-wrenching discovery: the stone has been rolled away, and she assumes someone has made off with the body of Jesus. And so, Mary, in her shock and grief, runs back to tell the other disciples. Peter and the "Beloved Disciple" (whom we understand to be John) bolt out the door upon hearing this news headed for the tomb and racing to see for themselves.

John gets there first, pokes in his head, and sees only the wrappings which once covered the corpse of his friend; but, still, he does not enter. Then, Peter, all full of bluster but still secretly stinging from his denial of Jesus which was foretold, arrives and actually enters the tomb. Emboldened, John joins Peter in the empty tomb, and they saw and they believed, but, still, they did not understand. And so then, then...they went home.

V.

I can tell you, if the story ended here, we wouldn't have half the Easter we have today. Because it was Mary Magdalene, heartbroken, grief stricken and left alone, who lingered outside the tomb and wept; and so the story continued. Finally, after minutes which must have surely felt like hours, Mary wiped her eyes, and mustered the courage and strength not to enter the tomb, but to simply peer into it. And, there, among the linen wrappings, she saw two angels, and they asked her a rather simple, but given the circumstances, ridiculous question, "Why are you weeping?" Still not fathoming the situation, Mary replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

VI.

Then, came a voice from somewhere behind her, again asking the very same question, "Why are you weeping?" Turning to look back, and supposing this to be the gardener, she asked after Jesus' body, where they had taken it and if she, now, could care for it? Then, finally, Jesus (the gardener) spoke her name, "Mary," and, finally, she recognized Jesus, and all the pieces fell into place; she cried out in exasperation and inexplicable relief, "Teacher!" Now, *that* is a good old fashioned Easter! That's the story we've come to know and love and celebrate with colored hard-boiled eggs, country ham and marsh mellow shaped hens. *That's* the Easter story which brings us here today to the church. And so, now we've heard it...again. But if, if...we all went home right now we wouldn't have half the Easter we could have, still, yet today.

VII.

Now for the *hard* part. If we want the milk, not only do we have to buy the cow, we also have to feed the cow, care for the cow, build a barn for the cow, and go out every morning and evening, sit on that stool and actually milk the cow. This morning, like Mary Magdalene on that first Easter, we are faced with the very same question, "Why are you weeping?"

Often times, amid the joy and celebration of Easter, buried behind shouts of "He has risen! and lost amid all the Hallelujahs we forget all about Good Friday. Not just the Good Friday which found Jesus beaten, mocked and crucified, but all the relentless Good Fridays we ourselves are made to endure in this world and in our lives. Why are we weeping? Well, there's an awful lot to weep about, how could we help but not weep?

VIII.

Weep with the families 984,000 people who have died from COVID in this country; and weep with the 167,000 children who have lost a parent.

Weep with the people of Ukraine with 4.5 million refugees, city after city reduced to rubble, and tens of thousands dead due to the vanity and delusion of one man.

Weep with parents in the north country who have lost a child to exploitation through the internet, social media, bullying or gun violence.

Weep with a planet which groans in travail at the consumption of resources, the damage to habitat and eco-system, and a human population which seemingly knows no bounds.

Weep for ourselves as we and our loved ones are treated for cancer, illness and infection, tell our parents one last time how much we love them, recover from surgery and injury, struggle to raise our children, and face our own hardship, depression and despair.

IX.

Now, I don't mean to be such a bummer on Easter but, in all fairness, I *did* warn you I was going to be a little hard on you this morning. And, I *am* sorry. Not for being hard on you, but for how hard life *is* for so *many* of us; God how I wish it wasn't, but it is...isn't it?

So, we gather here today, amid all of this hardship, and that same ridiculous question echoes in our ears, "Why are you weeping?" Well, that is *the* question of Easter Sunday, for this, truly, is the one question that both *challenges* our faith and *drives* our faith; it is this question which causes our faith to either falter and fail, or dance joyfully, like an angel on the head of a pin. And we don't just arrive there at the dance, suddenly out of the blue, and without some serious effort; we've got to work our way toward it, we have to struggle and stretch and seek to find that place and, then, to stay in that place...every day, *every* day.

X.

No day will ever be easier than *this* day, however, that's why we call it the *Good News*. This is what Easter is all about, that is what we are here to celebrate: for God so loved the world that whosoever believeth in him shall not die, but have eternal life. And, just as importantly, that God sent the son into the world not to *judge* the world, but so that the world might be *saved* through him. Finally, this morning, let me say I am in no way encouraging us *not* to cry. By all means, have at it, let it all out. Our tears are justified, and they are righteous. Our pain and loss and suffering is real. However, while we shed these tears, together as a family of faith, let us remember why we can also, even at the very same time, weep tears of joy. He is risen, hallelujah, Amen!