

“Why Are You Weeping?”

John 20:11-18

19:40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 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.” 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes. (ESV)

Yesterday I was at one of the local woodworking stores. You often find me there on Saturday afternoons. A lot of the guys know me; they call me “pastor.” Every now and then someone would grab me by the chisels and ask me a theological question. Yesterday was one of those days. I was looking at a gooseneck lamp that I’m sure would make my dovetails better if I could have it. One of the guys who works there was standing by the cash register. He said, “Pastor Tom? Can I ask you a question?” “Of course you can.” He said, “What does your religion believe about Easter?” I learned well from Jesus, I said, “What does *your* religion believe about Easter?” He said, “Well, I’m Catholic. We believe Jesus—I guess He died on Friday, right? Then He rises again on Sunday, right?” I said, “Yep. That’s what we believe.” He said, “Oh. Okay.” I said, “That isn’t your real question, is it?” He said, “I don’t know what my question is anymore.” I said, “Your real question is ‘So what?’ That’s really what you’re looking for whether you know it or not. That’s an important question: “So what?” People celebrate Easter. People come to church on Easter, but at the end of the day: “Big deal. So what?”

During Holy Week we’ve talked about how Holy Week is like a play: it’s a drama that has three acts to it. Act one is on Maundy Thursday when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper and consider the betrayal, consider Jesus washing His disciples feet, and consider the last mandate (from which we get the word “Maundy”) from Jesus, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Then on Good Friday we consider the passion of Jesus, His crucifixion and death. If you stop at Act two, you will feel your whole life like you felt and feel every time you watch the movie, “Old Yeller.” If you’ve not seen the old movie, it’s been out for about 40 years now (you’re way behind the curve). It comes on discs now, even. Remember, “Old Yeller” is about this old yellow dog who turns out to be the family’s best friend and protector. At the end of “Old Yeller” there’s a conflict where little Arlis is about to be attacked by a wolf and Old Yeller saves him from the wolf. Travis puts him in the barn and they hope that the wolf was okay, but we know that the wolf had rabies. So when Travis goes out the next morning and opens the door to the barn, instead of Old Yeller bounding up to him joyfully and licking his face, he’s growling and snarling and has to be put down. If you have a heart at all, that has to move you. You watch that and say, “This is not right! That’s not the way things are supposed to be. The story that my heart knows it that I go out to the barn and Old Yeller has come back. Old Yeller is not just like he was. He’s new and he’s still my friend.” When Old Yeller dies your heart is left empty. If you stop the passion story on Friday night your heart will be empty, I promise you. The problem is that most people, whether they’re Christians or not, stop there. We talk about Jesus dying for our sins, but we really don’t have any idea what’s going on with the resurrection. Hopefully after this morning you will.

We’re really just going to look at two things this morning. I’m going to look at Mary’s grief. The second thing we will look at is the urgency of joy. Let’s look first at Mary’s grief.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” . . . (ESV)

Good question: why is she weeping? Depending on what angle you look at this from, there could be a lot of answers to that question, “Why are you weeping?” First, it helps to have a little bit of context. In my own opinion, on one hand, it’s a mild rebuke. On the other hand, I wonder if the angels thought she already knew? If you look at the Gospel of Mark and how the story plays out there, and also look at the Gospel of John, it seems to be the case that Mary and several women went to the tomb. She says, “We went to the tomb and the stone was rolled away.” But in John’s account the women go to the tomb and see this stone rolled away; it’s almost like they’re CSI detectives. They see the stone rolled away, but they don’t touch anything, they don’t want to touch the crime scene. Mary immediately bolts back and tells Peter and John. I’m piecing this

together, but from Mark's Gospel, it seems that the other women were still there. That's when the angel came to them and said, "Why are you looking for Jesus who was crucified? He is risen just as He said. Go tell my disciples." At that point those women take off to go tell people and Peter and John now are sprinting to the tomb. They get to the tomb and look inside. The grave clothes are there, and everything is folded up neatly so we know the angels were Presbyterians—it's all neatly in order and in place. So everything's cool in the tomb. They go in and the Bible says that they believed. They looked in and they believed, but they didn't understand that Jesus was really to rise from the dead. I think when it says they believed, what they're talking about is Mary's story. In other words, they believed when Mary said that somebody took the body. That's where it leaves us. Mary either accompanied them or came back later, but where the story picks up now, Mary is all alone by the tomb and she is weeping. In fact, the word there in Greek is more than weeping. It's more like lamentation and mourning. She's crying out. She's completely and utterly distraught. As she's standing there weeping, she stoops and looks in the tomb and sees two angels there. The most surprising thing to me about this text is that she's not surprised at the angels. She looks, and there are two angels there and they ask her a simple question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Maybe they thought she already knew. Maybe they thought, "We sent the other women out and the women would have told her, so don't you get it? He's risen." Or, even if she didn't know it still carries a slight tone of a rebuke. Why? Because Jesus had promised her that He would rise from the dead. Jesus said over and over, "The Son of Man will be beaten, crucified, and on the third day He will rise again from the dead." The angels could have been sitting there and saying, "Why are you weeping? Think about it. Friday, Saturday, Sunday – nothing here!" What Mary's failure here is the worst case scenario, unbelief. She really didn't believe it when Jesus said that. To be gracious to her, I think she has the same problem that we have most of the time. Mary failed to remind herself of the promises of God. She failed to remember the promises of God. She failed to preach to herself of the promises of God. Jesus had said over and over again, "I'm going to rise again on the third day. I promise you. I'll never leave you or forsake you. I will not leave you as orphans." Mary had a choice in that moment to either preach to herself, "He's not here, but he promised that he would not leave me. He promised that he would never forsake me." Instead she chose to weep. That's how most Christians are. Bad things happen. Let me give you some really surprising news. If you're a human being, bad things are going to happen to you. The question is, "When they happen, does that mean that God is not at work in your life or does that mean He is at work in your life?" We tend to look at suffering and think, "Gosh, when something bad happens, when suffering happens, when I lose someone, then God is punishing me for something." When, in fact, most of the things, if you read the Bible, when God allows these kinds of things He's not doing them to discipline us, but in fact He's doing them for our own good. Here's Mary in the midst of what is the greatest event in human history and she's crying. She has no idea that this tragedy is actually for her good. So the angels ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Right in the midst of that she must have heard something behind her because it says she turned around. Let me read that to you.

¹³ *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."* ¹⁴ *Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.* ¹⁵ *Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" 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."* (ESV)

She hears something apparently behind her. She turns around and she sees Jesus but she didn't recognize him. Why didn't she recognize him? I actually think she did recognize him, she just didn't understand. Why wouldn't she recognize him, though? I tend to read a lot of commentaries when I study. The more naturalistic side says, "Obviously she couldn't recognize who He was because her eyes were full of tears. She was so distraught that she could see through the tears that she couldn't recognize Jesus." That's one side. The other end of the continuum says, "It's purely supernatural. It's just complete, supernatural blindness. Jesus did it to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He didn't reveal himself until he wanted to, and bam, there it was."

I think it's a lot easier than that. I want you to think for a second with me what it would have been like to be Mary or one of the women back then. First of all, the guy she's talking to, he looks like an ordinary gardener. The last thing she remembered about Jesus was quite different than that. It was the women who stayed with Jesus through thick and through thin. As soon as things got tough, as soon as things really got hard, most of the men except for John fled. It was the women who were there, so Mary would have seen His arrest. Mary would have seen Him being betrayed. Mary would have seen the Romans flay Him. They would have taken a cat of nine tails and they would have beaten Him until His body would have been unrecognizable as a human. She would have seen that. She would have seen them punch and beat Him about the head so you would no longer recognize His face. She would have seen the crown of thorns. She would have seen Him crucified, the nails pounded in His hands. She would have heard the thud as His cross was dropped into the ground. But even more than that, now that he's completely unrecognizable as a human, she hears Him from the cross utter seven different words. He looks at his mother and He says, "Woman, behold your son." To John, "Son behold your mother." He says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He tells the thief, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." With all of these things, we in the 21st century looking backward and to us they make total sense. Imagine that you had been with Jesus. You had just seen Him crucified and brutalized and hung on a cross. Now think about how these things might sound to you. Would it be a

hopeful thing to you or a discouraging thing to you to have the one who promised He would never fail you or forsake you, hanging bloody on a cross and shouting out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” If God has forsaken Him, He’s not going to do you a lot of good, is He? We look back when Jesus cries out, “It is finished.” We look backward and say, “Of course what that means is that He was finished with His work on the cross and dying for our sins.” I believe that’s true. But if you were standing at the foot of the cross and witness all of that stuff and heard the one that said he was the savior say, “It is finished.” You might have heard something that sounded more like, “The jig is up. It’s over. I thought I was the Savior, I thought I was the Messiah, but it’s over.” And then the last thing he says, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Whoosh. Would those things sound very hopeful to you? They wouldn’t, I don’t think. So here is Jesus who’s completely brutalized and mangled, and who is completely has been a little discouraging from the cross. Mary turns around and here’s a guy. Not only is He not brutalized and mangled, but He doesn’t look like He’s glorious either. You would think if Jesus is going to come back, He’s going to come back in glory and there’s going to be halo around Him. Everything’s going to be big and shiny. She looks around and assumes she sees a gardener. The thing is, she’s actually on to something because it’s not an ordinary gardener.

I think that Word says that. That one little phrase where John says, “Supposing He was the gardener” is the key to this whole text. Why is that? Let me engage in a little theological husbandry, if you will. Remember when God created the heavens and the earth? He created the heavens and the earth then He created Adam and Eve and He placed them where? In a garden. But more than that, He placed them in a garden and He gave them a job. He placed them in the garden and said to them, “Adam, you are to work it and to keep it.” You know what Adam’s job was? Adam was the gardener. God said, “Adam, your only job in this garden is just to keep it like it is. It’s paradise now. You just need to work and to cultivate it, Adam. That’s what you are to do. You represent everyone who will come after you. If you do the right thing all of your progeny, all of your children are going to enjoy this paradise that I’ve created for you. The only thing is that tree right there—the tree of knowledge of good and evil—don’t eat of that one. For in the day you eat of that one, you will surely die. Other than that, the world is yours.”

We know the story, don’t we? Adam ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, disobeying God and in that moment he violated what the Hebrews call “Shalom”. Shalom means “the way things are supposed to be.” Paradise, a perfect relationship between God and man. When Adam ate of that fruit, Shalom was violated. Not only did Adam fall under curse but the whole earth fell under curse. When God disciplines Adam he said, “Adam, cursed is the ground because of you.” Because of Adam, the original gardener, sin comes into the world. If you’ve ever read, “Paradise Lost” that was when weeds enter the picture. That’s when the rose begins to grow thorns on it. Because of the original gardener’s disobedience, the world and the earth were cursed and you and I fell under this curse of sin as well. So how do you fix that? Immediately in that same passage God promised, “I will fix this. The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.” Then you fast-forward and what you see is Jesus coming as what? Remember what the New Testament calls Jesus? The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 5 calls Jesus “the second Adam” or “the last Adam.” The first Adam came as our representative and he was placed in a perfect garden and he screwed the whole thing up. He sinned and all of that came upon us. The second Adam comes and He’s placed in a desolate waste-place full of weeds. The first thing Jesus has to do is to get rid of the curse. In other words if He’s going to be a good gardener He has to get rid of the weeds. The way Jesus gets rid of the curse and the weeds is He takes them onto himself. That’s the point of the cross. On the cross Jesus takes all of our sin, and not just all of our sin, but all of our guilt and all of Adam’s guilt, everything of the things the original gardener blew. Jesus comes, and is obedient and He fixes it. What’s the importance of the resurrection? It’s just this: what the cross did as far as the curse, is it got rid of the weeds, if you will. But what the resurrection does: Jesus, called the first born of all creation, the first fruits, Jesus, being raised from the dead is God’s assurance to us that the whole world will again be made a paradise. The gardener is here, He has gotten rid of the weeds, and now He is making all things new. The place where that starts primarily is with your heart. Jesus has come. He died for our sin and He came to make all things new. The question is, “Do you believe that? Do you?” Because if you don’t, you’re stuck in Old Yeller land and you will be for the rest of your life.

On the other question, “How do you believe it?” How does that come to you? The answer is that Jesus has to reveal that to you. Let me transition into Mary’s joy.

She looked at Jesus, supposed he was the gardener and she was right. She just didn’t realize just how big a gardener He was. Then Jesus does something for Mary. He calls her. Did you notice how Jesus does that? I’m moving into the urgency of joy. Jesus looks at her. Notice what he doesn’t say to her. He doesn’t say, “Mary, you idiot. It’s me. Look.” He didn’t say, “Mary, it’s like you forgot all my promises.” He doesn’t say anything. What does he say? He only says, “Mary. Mary.” She hears him and she responds by saying “Rabboni” which doesn’t just mean “teacher.” It means my teacher. There’s a lesson there. When Jesus calls you, He calls you by name. A lot of us who have been in church for a long time, you could talk a blue streak when you’re talking about the Bible, and you could talk about the Gospel, and you could talk about Jesus, it just never has anything to do with you. You can’t know Jesus unless you hear Him calling your name.

I grew up in south Florida. I don't think they have heat lightning out here. I'm beginning to wonder if we ever have heat here. In south Florida you have heat lightning which means you look up in the sky and it will be cloudy and there won't be any lightning bolts, but there will be lightning in the clouds, and it lights up the clouds. It's cool looking. It's not very effective. Then you also have lightning bolts. That's what golfers are afraid of, right? A single lightning bolt strikes in a single place. That's the same way the call of the Gospel works. I call everyone to please put your faith in Jesus. But you will not and cannot trust Him unless you hear Him saying your name, unless you look at the cross and you see yourself there. It's not just "all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God." It's Tommy Allen. "Tommy, you have sinned. Tommy, you need to trust me. Tommy, you need to believe in me." The question is, "Do you believe in Him?" I'm asking that question to both Christians and non-Christians. Do you really believe in Him? Have you really heard Him call and tell you that you need Him? Mary heard it. She shouts, and apparently she fell at His feet and grabbed Him because what does Jesus say to her? "Stopped clinging to me." Let me read that to you.

¹⁷ *Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* (ESV)

Why does Jesus say, "Don't cling to me"? This is one of those things that wears you out when you have to study because so many people say so many different things. On one hand people say, "Well, it's almost like magic because Jesus is risen from the dead and He's glorified and He doesn't want Mary (you know she's still a sinner) to touch Him." All of that stuff is hogwash. In more than one place, Jesus has eleven resurrection appearances and several times He tells people, "Touch me." So it can't be magic. In fact a few verses later the disciples tell Thomas, "He's risen from the dead." Thomas said, "I wouldn't believe that unless I can put my fingers in His side." Then Jesus shows up. "All right. Right there baby. Put 'em in." If you remember the story Thomas doesn't. He just sort of falls down sheepishly and worships. I think there's something else here, and I think the issue is just simple, and that's the urgency of joy. In other words, "Mary, don't cling to me now because we have stuff to do. Things are not the way they were." She has to be happy, but she probably thought, "My teacher is back and everything is going to be Shalom, the way it was. Jesus is saying to her, "Don't cling to me because I have not yet ascended to my Father. The job isn't finished yet. Between the time that I am talking you now and the time I return to my Father, we have a lot to do. What I need from you is to go tell my brothers that I'm returning to my God and your God, my Father and your Father. Now, that's big because that's the first time, at least in John's Gospel, that Jesus refers to these men and women as anything but disciples. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we go from just being creatures who are sinners to being forgiven (it get's better than that), to be as righteous as Christ (it get's better than that), to being adopted into the very family of God. Jesus says, "Now, go tell my brothers that I'm returning." Once you are a Christian it's not that you just trust Jesus and then you spend the rest of your life being good and gutting it out. What it means now is that you are in the Father's household as one of His beloved sons or daughters, and Jesus says, "Go tell My brothers that."

I love the last part here because you can tell John's grappling. John's grappling with how to capture the moment. Jesus has given her very specific instructions as to what to say to the disciples. It reminded me, and I know this is going to sound sexist, but forgive me up front. I was raised by my grandmother, my mom and three sisters, and I got married (of course) and I have three daughters, so I'm completely surrounded by women all the time. As I was reading this story and trying to get a grip on it, I can imagine one of my daughters, me telling her something and her responding like Mary did. Did you notice how John tries to capture it? Jesus gives her specific instructions and she's either running or walking, but she's going back to the disciples going, "Go tell my brothers – God is my God, God is your God – your Father, my Father." She's repeating to herself – A, B, C, D, E. She comes into the room and people say, "Mary, what's going on?" Instead of repeating the instructions what does she say? "I'VE SEEN THE LORD." That's it. "I've seen the Lord!" She doesn't give the instructions, and then John adds, "and she told them the rest of the stuff." What defines Mary is not that she's just doing the right thing (although she does). What defines Mary is the urgency of her joy. She cannot help having seen Jesus, having experienced Jesus she cannot help but tell other people of that same experience.

The question I have for you, especially if you are a Christian, "Is that how you are?" Do people look at you and say, "Man, that guy's just so excited about what this guy Jesus did for him. He can't but talk about it. She can't help but talk about it." You know what? If you are not that way to some extent, you have to ask yourself, "Do I really believe it? Do I really understand how deep my sin is and how great the debt that Jesus has paid, and how He is renewing me personally. He is renewing all of creation because since I believe that I cannot help but tell that to people. I can't help but go out and tell them in the real story, the Gospel story, Old Yeller doesn't die. The reason your heart is upset when Old Yeller dies is because you know that is not how the story is going to end. The great news is that the real story, the Gospel story, is that it does not end that way. In the Gospel story, the hero comes back from the dead and He promises and that He will never fail you or forsake you. Do you really believe that? Think about that.

