

April 12, 2020

Easter, 2020

Why Are You Crying?

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**John 20: 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?” 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.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). 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.’”**

**Dear Christian Friends,**

*Why are you crying?* This is the question Jesus asked Mary Magdalene first thing on that first Easter. And it’s a question I ask of all of you this morning. Why are you crying? Some of us, especially the German Lutherans in our midst, tend to keep our tears safe on the inside of our hearts and few others even know they are there. Others of us wear our emotions on our sleeves, for all to see. All of us are crying this morning in view of a virus that is wreaking havoc on our world physically, emotionally, and financially. Some of us are crying out of fear, some of us out of anger, some of us out of confusion, many of us all of the above. Some of us are crying as we realize that one of our worst nightmares has come true - by state order our church doors are locked this week, but the abortion clinics remain open.

On the one hand we see that the forces of darkness seem to be winning the day, but on the other hand we believe that the gates of hell will never prevail, so long as Christ is risen and alive and ascended into heaven. On the one hand, it seems as though we are a nation and society hopelessly divided, but on the other hand our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. On the one hand it seems as though good old-fashioned values and morality are dead and dying, but on the other hand we believe with all of our hearts that Christ is risen. Even more than that, He is ascended and he is seated at the right hand of God and in his own time He’s working everything out for the good of those who love him.

*Why are you crying?* That was my question to my wife Debi, twenty years ago in our parsonage kitchen. We were having a little spat, and it seemed as though we were speaking two different languages. It was logic vs. emotion, and if my memory is correct, she was over reacting and I was right! At a certain point, she began to cry, and when I asked why, she shook her head and quietly replied, “It’s just sad.” When I asked her to explain her sadness, she responded, “It’s just really sad.” It turned out that the reason for her sadness had little to do with the argument itself, it was that I didn’t know enough to draw near to her, to call her by name, and to embrace her with my love. And so, the end of that story is that we

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embraced and we confessed and we forgave, as we have been forgiven. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

**Why are you crying?** That was a question one of my neighbors in Lewiston asked me 35 years ago or so. You see Ida was dying of cancer in those days, and her husband had given me a call and said if I wanted to see her before she passed away, I should come on over. She was a jolly and a kind and a fun sort of a person, strong as she could be in her Christian faith, and when we had done some chit chatting and it was time for me to have a devotion, I started to bawl. Couldn't get any words out at all. She asked me why I was crying and I choked out because she was dying. She looked me in the eyes, reminded me that she was going to heaven to be with Jesus and she was going to be better than ever. Told me that I should quit my crying, eat some cookies, and drink some coffee. You see Ida believed what we all want to believe today that not only is Christ risen, He is ascended and he is seated at the right hand of God and in his own time He's working everything out for the good of those who love him.

**Why are you crying?** That was my dear mom's question to me about a week before she passed away. I was visiting and praying with her, she listened and then she dozed off, and I just kept holding her hand, started thinking through so many good memories, and you know what I started to do, I began to weep. She opened her eyes and said, "Larry, you're crying." I nodded my head as the lump formed in my throat. "Why are you crying?" I choked out something to the effect that I loved her and she was dying, that's why. To which she reminded me that she was going to be with Jesus, she was going to be ok, to which I replied, well that doesn't mean I can't cry about it. You see she already had her mind set on things that were above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and is ultimately in charge even when and especially when it doesn't feel that way.

**Why are you crying?** That was the question of the two angels to Mary early on that first day of resurrection. And it was one of two questions Jesus asked, "why are you crying?" This is Mary Magdalene, one of at least 5 Marys in the New Testament. We know that she came from the village of Magdala on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We know that before she met Jesus, she had been possessed by seven demons. We can only imagine how she loved him and how important he was to her, which explains why she was standing nearby with Mary his mother while he was hanging on the cross. It explains why when they took his body down from the cross, she was watching the whole bloody mess. It explains why when Joseph of Arimathea was wrapping this body in linen and laying him in the tomb and rolling the heavy stone in place, Mary was watching, it explains why she had purchased all kinds of spices hoping to anoint this body on Sunday morning before the sun came up.

Why was Mary crying? Keep in mind, that by the time the women arrived at the tomb, Jesus had already risen. Already there had been an earthquake, the seal had been broken, and the angels had rolled away the stone. Already the soldiers had been knocked unconscious, woke

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up, and ran away in fear. Already the women had found the tomb empty, the angels had announced that Christ was risen, already they had told the disciples the good news, the women had been dismissed as talking nonsense, already Peter and John had investigated and were believing that the impossible had in fact happened, and Mary Magdalene had returned.

Why was she crying? Multiple reasons, it was a mixed bag, no doubt. Perhaps fond memories were racing through her mind, right next to the image of her beloved Master being tortured and taunted and crucified, first she thought the enemies of Jesus had stolen his body, then maybe it was the gardener who put it somewhere, and no doubt it all caught up with her and the only thing she could do was sit down and bawl. Much as Jesus had bawled at the grave of Lazarus, even though in a few minutes he would be raising his friend up from the grave. Much as Jesus sat down on a hill overlooking Jerusalem one day, he so wanted to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks, but they would not be gathered.

Easter is traditionally more about laughing and celebrating than it is about crying and being sad. Which is as it is meant to be. Two Easter truths, I would offer today, in response to whatever is making you sad, whatever is causing those lumps to form in your throats, whatever is keeping you from singing alleluias, whatever is making you cry.

**Easter truth #1 is that Jesus is nearby, and He knows us by name.** In our text for today, Mary was looking for the Lord, whom she had lost. She was beside herself with tears. Jesus looked deeply into her heart, and He cannot look any longer, He quickly reveals himself to her. Listen carefully, dear friends. Jesus always comes close to those who are crying. To those who are crying tears of regret, he draws near with a word of forgiveness. To those crying tears of loneliness, He says I am with you always. To those crying tears of frustration, he says be still and know I am God. To those not even sure why you're crying, he says I know you by name just keep listening to my voice. To those of you overwhelmed by the darkness all around, the Psalmist points out, For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Paul talked about that joy which comes with the morning to the Philippians, Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

The kingdom of God is like hundreds and even thousands and even millions of Christians this week who go looking for those who are crying, they go looking for those who need a calm presence, they go looking for opportunities to be reasonable. In response to God being ever so kind and patient with them, they go looking for situations where their kindness and patience could be helpful. In response to God not keeping a record of their wrongs, they go looking for folks weighed down with regrets and good intentions that have gone awry. In the name of Jesus, even though they stay 6 feet away, they draw near, they call people by name, and they encourage.

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**Easter truth #2 is that Jesus is sitting at the right of His Father, and He has news for us to deliver.** Few of us have experienced an Easter quite like this. I won't speak for those of you who have experienced the Gulf War or the Vietnam War or the Korean War or World War II or the great depression, but I can speak for all kinds of folks who are wondering why God would be permitting a virus to be doing such damage. Some are wondering out loud if there even is a good and a gracious God, others are pointing the finger at one political party or the other, still others are hunkering down into survival mode.

But on the other hand, this Easter is the same old same old. Still we are rejoicing that Jesus Christ is alive, he is well, and he is who he said he was. Still we are believing that on the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, he is sitting at the right hand of the Father. Still we are convinced that as surely as spring follows winter, the day is coming when there will be a resurrection of the body, and life will be everlasting.

The kingdom of God is like hundreds and even thousands and even millions of Christians this very week who have all kinds of reasons to cry, but they know exactly where to go with all of those tears. Their emotions are all over the map, but as often as they hear the Easter bells ringing, as often as the resurrection Good News is delivered into their soul and hearts and minds through the preaching of the Word and celebration of the Supper, that often they find themselves looking forward to that place where all their tears will be wiped away. And until that day comes, they know, along with Mary, that they have a message to deliver. Namely that Jesus Christ is alive, he is well, and he is sitting at the right hand of His Father. Which is another way of saying that even when the nations are in uproar, even when it seems like the gates of hell are prevailing, even when we have to stay at home and are tempted to be huddling in fear and to be crying out in frustration, Jesus Christ would come close to us in the preaching and the teaching and the remembering of His Word, He would hold us close, He would wipe away our tears, and He would invite us to set our minds on things that are above. Amen