

“Why Are You Crying?” – John 20:10-18

How many of you have had kids or grandkids? How many of you have read story books to your kids or grandkids? Of course you have. How many of you had to read the same story over and over again night after night? The kid has 400 books and every night, *“No Grannie. Read ‘The Little Engine That Could’ (or whatever) again for the millionth time.”* And so you read it again. And if you try to skip a part or a page they know it instantly and let you know, right? They never seem to get tired of that one story! Kids are so stupid. I can’t stand them. No, I’m kidding. I really am because I have to admit to being that same way sometimes. There are certain stories I love to read over and over again.

When I was a kid I had some dog books that I remember just wearing smooth out. I “read” them even before I could read, just looking at the pictures. Finally, a few years ago I was able to read them. And then I remember reading about Jonathan and his armor bearer in **1 Samuel 14**. I read that again just this week. I love that story. Another favorite is David and Goliath. How can you not love that story? I could read that over and over again. It has everything; action, suspense, faith, humor, big headless guy! I wish I had time to read it right now just for grins.

And so it is with the Easter story. I have a favorite. Now, let me tell you that the resurrection of Jesus is prophesied way back in the Old Testament hundreds of years before it ever happened. And it is talked about by Paul and Peter and John and others all through the New Testament even years after it happened. But I like to read the story of how it all went down. I like the first-hand account of it. But...I’m going to let you in on a little secret. The Easter story is a problem for preachers. We have a similar problem around Christmas. How do you keep the story fresh and new if you read the same thing every time? I have seen dozens of different ways to approach this. I’ve gotten emails from other pastors saying they are using such and such Old Testament passage that references the resurrection or they are using some verse from Paul like **1 Thess. 4:14** that says, *“For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”*

That’s good stuff! That’ll preach! I can get excited about that. But for me there is no better way to fully understand what happened on that Easter Sunday 2000-something years ago than to read it from one of the Gospels. Like I say, there are innumerable other passages from Old Testament to New Testament that speak of the resurrection of the Messiah. And there should be. Let me put it this way. If it were not for the event that we are here celebrating today then all the rest of this book is a waste of paper. If Jesus didn’t die on the cross and rise again after 3 days, then this book is kindling.

Of course there are many other passages that talk about this event because just as the biggest door swings on a small hinge, everything about our faith hinges on the fact that Jesus defeated death in that tomb and lives today! The Apostle Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:19** that, *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* If Jesus didn’t die and then rise in 3 days then we are wasting our time here this morning and every Sunday morning but because He did do that we have the hope of the world! And there is no better passage to see this than in the Gospel of John, the 20th chapter and verses 10-18. As you find John chapter 20 let me remind you of a time years ago that our church went through a 5 week video series on the “Journey Through Grief” so that we would be able to help others as they grieve and also help ourselves when the time inevitably comes.

And while I learned some invaluable information about the grief process, 5 weeks is enough. It was a great series but you get tired of grief. It does, though, help me to understand what is going on in this passage. This passage in John focuses, obviously, on Jesus but also on Mary Magdalene. And it helps to understand the passage if you understand something about the kind of grief Mary is going through here. This is rock bottom for Mary. Her dear Friend and Lord had died. I’m sure that she and the other Mary and some of the disciples have been together consoling themselves but at this point Mary Magdalene is by herself. She has come to the tomb of Jesus and the Gospel of Mark tells us that she and some of the other ladies had purchased spices and were headed to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and they were talking on the way there about how they were going to roll the huge stone away from the grave.

They didn't know. They weren't thinking straight in their grief and that is common for someone who has suffered a recent loss. They get to the tomb, though, and the stone is already rolled away but the body is gone. They don't realize what has happened and now this just makes it worse. They think someone has stolen the body. What else could it be? And so everybody else goes back to tell the disciples and Mary Magdalene is left alone at the tomb. Can you imagine what must be going through her clouded mind? First, Jesus is tried and beaten and hung on the cross. Then she sees Him die the cruelest death ever invented. Her hopes are gone. Her dreams for herself and her nation have died on that cross. And now even His body is gone. This is the time that every emotion starts to come out. Insurmountable grief, anger, shame, coupled with the weariness from a lack of sleep and poor Mary is a mess standing there all alone. Let's pick up the story in **John 20:10-18**.

Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. 11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

I only want us to see 2 basic things in this passage. They are, in fact, the 2 things that Jesus says to Mary. The first thing He says I find curious. It's the same thing that the angels say and it is curious as to why they would say it as well. What do the angels and Jesus both say? *"Why are you crying?"* Now you might find that to be a dumb question. Anybody could understand why she is crying and especially Jesus should know, so why did He ask that question? She is in the graveyard obviously looking for someone or something that she sees is not there. Why, it's almost mean to ask her why, isn't it?

We learned in this video series on grief that depending on how a person grieves (and everybody is different) that sometimes it is good to let the person grieving go through the process of finding things out on their own. And what Jesus and the angels are doing here by asking this question is not so much asking for their own knowledge but to let her know that there may well be a reason not to cry. Jesus doesn't say, *"Hey goofball! It's me, Jesus!"* But instead, His question is meant to gently reveal to Mary the possibility that there is a reason to stop crying. **Proverbs 8:17** says, *"I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."* Doesn't that fit Mary in this situation so well? Mary sought Jesus very early in the morning and even though she doesn't yet realize that she has found Him, Jesus loves her so much that He gently reveals Himself to her and gently eases her sorrow.

Don't raise your hand but how many of you have ever questioned God in the middle of your grief? I would dare say that everybody who has ever experienced grief has in some way questioned God about it. And we have talked before about the right and wrong ways of doing that. There is a respectful way of asking God questions and He has no problem with that. He doesn't always answer as we would hope He would and I'm afraid if He did we wouldn't be able to handle His answer and so He slowly reveals His good and perfect plan as we are obedient to Him with our lives. Most of you who have been following Jesus for any length of time can vouch for the fact that it is so often in the depths of our greatest grief and sorrow that Jesus reveals Himself and His plan to us.

He reveals Himself to us when we have hit rock bottom. When we feel like we can't take any more that is when Jesus comes to us as a friend and gives us hope by asking why we are crying; wanting us to look up and recognize it is Him. He knows that if we could see the big picture that it would overwhelm us but that as we learn we come to trust Him because He has proven Himself faithful. Again, you can vouch for that in your own life and we can in the life of this church. Isn't that right?

The next thing Jesus says to her is just simply her name. *“Mary.”* In her grief and in her confusion and through the tears in her eyes as she stood there in low light, she couldn’t know it was Him. But when Jesus called her name she knew immediately who it was just like a sheep knows the voice of the shepherd. Jesus had a way of speaking that immediately brought things into focus. Just a few days prior to this in the garden where Judas led the soldiers to arrest Jesus, the soldiers walked up to Jesus and Jesus asked them who they were looking for. They said, *“Jesus of Nazareth ”* and then Jesus simply said *“I am He.”* But when He said “I am he” the men all drew back and fell to the ground. That’s the power of the word of the God-Man Jesus. A simple answer can knock a person down or in the case of Mary, it has the power to clear the fog of grief and misunderstanding and reveal Himself to her.

Mary was in a bad way here. She didn’t understand what was happening and she even tells Jesus who she thinks is the gardener, *“Tell me where He is and I will go get Him.”* How could she do that? She couldn’t lift Him. Where would she take Him? She didn’t know. She couldn’t understand. All she knew was she was in pain and that’s when Jesus just simply spoke her name. Can’t you just hear how tenderly and lovingly and yet with power He spoke that name? When Jesus called Paul on the road to Damascus He didn’t scream his name. He simply said, *“Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute me?”* And Paul was blind and disabled for days. There was no running from it. When Jesus called Peter’s name, Peter had the power to walk on water. When Jesus called the name of Lazarus, Lazarus came out of his grave a well man. And when Jesus said Mary’s name...well, everything changed.

Everything looked different even through a veil of tears. She still didn’t understand everything but she saw Jesus and knew everything was going to be ok. Today could be the day that Jesus is calling your name. And you know it is. You can’t run from it. When Jesus chooses you to do something He doesn’t scream. He simply calls your name. Maybe He is calling your name to lift you up out of your grief this morning. He knows that you don’t understand and you have been hurt and people have disappointed you. But Jesus isn’t calling you to follow a person. He is calling you to follow Him! He knows that you have grief and He grieves with you because He loves you so much. That’s amazing to me. Maybe He is calling you because He wants you to do something or to stop doing something but you think you would never be able to do that. Let me tell you that the same voice that called Lazarus from the dead is calling you and the same power that was available to Lazarus is available to you today. That’s amazing to me.

Or maybe Jesus is calling your name today for the first time and He is calling you to have a relationship with Him. He is calling you to be friends with the Creator of the universe and the Redeemer of all creation and He redeemed you by rising up out of that grave on the 3rd day, a satisfying sacrifice to the Father for all of your sins. **Romans 6:23** says that the wages of sin is death and Jesus paid those wages so you wouldn’t have to. That’s amazing to me.

So, on this Easter Sunday, Jesus comes to you personally, calling your name and asking you why you are crying when everything you need is found in Him. He promises a full life here on earth (John 10:10) and the hope of eternal life with Him in Heaven if you just believe (John 3:16). And that ought to be amazing to you.

The last thing Jesus says in this passage is meant for those who are His followers. *“Don’t hold on to Me. Go tell my brothers.”* As believers, our job is to show Jesus to the world and we don’t do that by arguing online about every cause that concerns us. I’m not saying we ease up on our convictions one bit. We follow what the powerful word of God says about that but we will never convince anybody that we are right by arguing. We show the love of the risen Christ and let Him call their name and change their heart.

So, today I am going to invite you to let Jesus come into your life and change you. I’m not inviting you to join our religion or give money to the church. I’m not saying that as soon as you get your life right, Jesus will save you. I’m saying – right now – ask God to forgive you of all your sins. Yes, even all that nasty stuff nobody knows about. God knows and wants to forgive you. But you have to repent of those sins. Turn away from that old life and let Jesus come in and start to make you more like Him. Do it right now as the music plays.