

Questions for Lent
7 Why Are You Weeping? Whom Do You Seek?

John 20: 1-9
 Easter Day 8:30 & 11:00

A pastor went to a nursing home to offer communion to the residents. This was not one of those upscale places called a retirement center. This facility was for the poor and its residents were mostly in various stages of dementia. When the pastor arrived a volunteer, who was wheeling patients into the room, told him that since it was late afternoon, everyone's medication seemed to be wearing off. Some would sleep through the service as usual, but for the most part, his little congregation would be on the wild side today. Sure enough, all through the beginning of the service, a woman sang, "**Row, row, row your boat,**" bouncing up and down in her wheel chair. It got so chaotic that the pastor clapped his hands to get their attention, and said, "**What shall I read from the Bible today? What part would you like to hear?**"

Above all the movement and noise still in the room, one answer could be heard in an old woman's voice: "**Tell us a resurrection story**". The room changed. Those who'd been moving grew still. Sleepers opened their eyes. "**Yes,**" said another. And from yet another: "**Yes. Tell us a resurrection story.**"

I suspect that is why you are here this day--to hear the story of the resurrection. That's good. Because that's the story I want to tell.

In our Gospel lesson today we are in a garden. The resurrected Lord appears to offer eternal life which is the unique and ultimate message of the Christian Gospel.

Try to put yourself in Mary's place there in that garden. She was broken-hearted by her Lord's death. She had come to that place, anxious, distracted by her grief. The dreams of that small group of followers of Jesus, in fact, the dreams of Israel for a Messiah were shattered to pieces.

Was it a woman's intuition -- or the fact that as a woman she was willing to show her grief and enter into that grief in a deeper way, perhaps in a more open way than men? Was that the reason Mary didn't return to her home immediately upon finding the open tomb? Rather, she stood outside

the tomb weeping. She just couldn't believe it, so she took another look into the tomb. This time she saw two angels sitting on the stone where the body of Jesus had been laying, and they asked her, ***"Woman, why are you weeping?"***

What pathos and pain is in her response. ***"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."***

Then it happened. She turned around and saw Jesus standing there -- but she didn't know it was Jesus. He said to her, ***"Woman, why are you weeping; whom are you seeking?"***

This is the Easter Question as we conclude our series of sermons on Questions Jesus Asks.

I. Let's focus first on Mary. She teaches us two lessons we need to learn in order to assimilate the Easter message.

First, she didn't recognize Jesus for a very simple reason -- her tears.

She was crying so much that she was blinded. It happens to us, doesn't it? Our tears often blind us to what's going on around us. We sometimes miss the lessons life is trying to teach us because we are so preoccupied with our own pain and grief, our disappointment and defeat.

Sometimes our tears are selfish. We center on our loss. We don't put our situation in perspective. How often do we do this at the death of a loved one. Our loneliness and loss is intense. We weep for ourselves, not for the loved one who has gone to be the eternal guest of God.

We can be blinded by our tears. May God give us the grace not to be blinded by our tears, but to see Christ and life more clearly through our tears.

II. But there's another reason why Mary did not recognize Jesus: She was facing in the wrong direction.

Not just her eyes, but also her thoughts. They were focused on the tomb.

Don't we fall into that same snare? We focus on our defeat -- our loss. As long as we are preoccupied with our failure, we will not know victory.

Do you understand it? We will miss Jesus this Easter if we keep our eyes on the tomb -- if we concentrate on our past, or our loss. Easter calls us to look in the direction of new life, and new possibility.

III. Those are the reasons Mary did not recognize Jesus -- her tears blinded her eyes, and she was facing in the wrong direction.

Let's turn to consider another Easter question in John's Gospel that we should not ignore. It's back at the beginning of Chapter 14 -- one of Jesus' most familiar words. Listen to the first three verses of that 14th Chapter:

***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*”**

Two of the disciples -- Thomas and Philip -- don't understand all of that. So Philip said to him, ***“Lord, show us the father, and it is sufficient for us.”*** It was then that Jesus said to Him: ***“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip?”***

That's the question we need to ask ourselves today -- do we not yet know Jesus? What Jesus has been and done on earth, he will continue to do for and with us as our Resurrected Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit. The added point is that He is preparing for us an ongoing life with Him for eternity.

A number of years ago there appeared in The Los Angeles Times a poignant story of a four and one-half year old girl named Katie Sleeman, a patient at Children's Hospital, who was dying of cancer. She had originally been diagnosed as a seven-week-old baby with retinoblastoma -- a cancerous tumor in the eye. She lost both eyes, and despite the best that medical science could do for her, a tumor appeared near her brain and it could not be removed. So Katie suffered more hardship in her brief life than most of us do in all our years. But despite her hospitalization, all of the treatments and pain she suffered, she radiated love and joy for all. She was like a light on the 4th Floor West of Children's Hospital, for she had the time of her life, even though she was fully aware

that she might die anytime. As she neared the end of her life, Katie talked a lot about going to Heaven. Because she could not see, touch became one of her means of communication. One of her favorite things was to snuggle close to her mother and rub her mother's ear. Not long before she died, Katie said to her mother with a smile, **"When I am in Heaven, and you feel a tickle on your ear, it will be me telling you 'I love you, Mommy.'"**

Does that make you smile, or feel teary? Want to cry? Or laugh? Either is appropriate. Because Jesus IS preparing a place for us in his eternal kingdom, Katie could believe what she said. And if those who have gone before us can't **"tickle our ear"** as Katie suggested she would do with her mother, it is enough to know that our loved ones who have died in Christ, believing in him and trusting him for salvation -- those who have died in Christ are waiting with Christ to welcome us when our time comes to go home.

Do you believe it? Yes! Then why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

III. The proof of the Resurrection of Christ is not an empty tomb, but an Easter people -- people whose lives have been transformed and who love and follow Jesus.

Let's celebrate that in a litany: Regardless of what I say – your respond HALLELUJAH! OK?

CHRIST IS ALIVE IN THE WORLD

Hallelujah!

CHRIST IS ALIVE IN ME!

Hallelujah!

THROUGH MY TEARS I WILL SEE HIS FACE

Hallelujah!

IN CONFUSION I WILL SEEK HIS GUIDANCE

Hallelujah!

IN MY SIN I WILL REPENT AND BE FORGIVEN

Hallelujah!

IN MY DEATH I WILL CLAIM ETERNAL LIFE WITH HIM

Hallelujah!

THE LORD IS RISEN, INDEED!

Hallelujah!

Pastor Larry Smith, 3/23/08