

## Why Are You Crying?

*Luke Bushman. April 9th 2023. John 20:1-18. New Interpreter's Commentary Volume VIII*

Why are you crying? Who are you looking for? At first glance, these questions seem to have extremely obvious answers. If someone is standing in front of their friend's empty grave, they are probably crying because the body is missing, and they are probably looking for that body. This was the position Mary Magdalene found herself in, during a very dramatic Sunday morning, that we commemorate today.

The morning started simple enough. Mary woke up before the sun had risen, to go and pay respects at the tomb of Jesus. Other gospel narratives declare that Mary was there to pour oils and incense on Jesus' body, to give her fallen teacher some dignity, after a humiliating death on the cross. She woke up early, went to pay respects to someone she loved, and was greeted by an extremely horrific sight. An empty grave. We know the ending to this story, so I think we can easily gloss over how horrifying the sight would be to someone. Despite Jesus' miraculous life, it would be very reasonable to assume after his contentious teaching and death, that someone decided to pour salt in the wound for Jesus' followers by desecrating his grave. So Mary did what any rational person would do if they saw an empty grave. She ran and told someone. Peter, the beloved disciple, and Mary all run back to the empty tomb. Peter and the beloved disciple enter the empty tomb and find the relieving evidence that the body was not in fact stolen. The linen clothes are left behind. The wrappings Jesus was buried in are still there.

Peter and the beloved disciple seem to connect the dots, that Jesus has in fact defeated death. There are still pieces missing in their understanding of what has taken place. Their time at the tomb concludes with the author writing **“They did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes”.** John 20:9-10

The two disciples leave... and leave Mary behind crying. I would be crying too. What an overwhelming start to the day. As Mary sobs she works up the courage to peek into the tomb, which sounds like the scariest thing in the world a person can do. She sees two angels, who ask her why she is crying. Mary is still under the impression that a grave robber has visited her dear friend's tomb, and she says someone took him away, I don't know where. She hears a voice behind her asking, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" If I was Mary I would snap at this point. Obviously she is crying because something beyond all comprehension is happening. She is crying because she is having one of the most overwhelming mornings a person can have.

You can almost hear the desperation in her voice as she says to the gardener “If you took him away tell me where, and I will go get him”. The gardener says her name, and it is then she realizes that she is face to face with her dear friend who she thought was not only dead, but desecrated.

Jesus then declares the piece that Peter and the Beloved Disciple did not know yet. That Jesus is going to be ascending to heaven. This completes the good news. Other people like Lazarus have risen from the dead, but this is more than a miracle. Jesus having conquered death will be returning to heaven as one with authority and rule.

In his time on earth, Jesus taught many about the kingdom of God, but in his resurrection and ascension everything is made complete. A quote from a commentary says “Because Jesus has promised to “prepare a place for you” (14:2), his ascension ensures the ultimate fulfillment of his promises to those he loves. In returning to the Father, Jesus makes it possible for his disciples to share fully in his relationship with God”<sup>(New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII)</sup>. After hearing this ultimate good news, that Jesus is alive, and will ascend to heaven, Mary goes and becomes a messenger of the Good News.

So I know I essentially just repeated the scripture reading, with a few background details, but I wanted us to have a chance to get into what this morning was like. We celebrate Easter but what an overwhelming morning for Mary. She wakes up early, finds an empty tomb, runs to tell people, runs back to the tomb, starts crying, looks in the tomb and sees angels, and then realizes she is talking to her friend who was just raised from the dead. After all of that, she goes and starts spreading the good news.

During this emotional rollercoaster of a morning, a fundamental and powerful question is asked. **Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?**

You might remember way back in January, we talked about Jesus calling the first disciples. He asked them the question, what do you want? The author of John intentionally uses a similar question here, because this is what discipleship or following Jesus is all about. It is about trying to find something. Every person is searching for meaning, belonging and comfort. And every person exists in a world that makes us cry all too often. We exist in a world full of death, sickness, anxiety, violence, inequality. A world with cancer, infertility, depression, war, famine and hatred. This horrible list goes on. When Jesus asks a question, I often try to picture how I

would answer it, and if Jesus asked me why are you crying, I might just say “Why would I not be crying?”.

But there is something truly powerful about this image, of Jesus asking a weeping Mary why she is crying. Mary is crying because life is overwhelming, and she has lost her friend. Her friend however has overcome the very thing that is making her cry. Jesus is standing there as both the comforter in the pain, and the bringer of new life. Jesus doesn't just empathize with pain from a distance in heaven. Jesus steps down into pain, comforts us in pain, and promises to conquer pain. Jesus promises to one day bring about a new world without the horrible things that are often around us.

This moment is the moment we move away from the mourning connected to Lent, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, and move towards the celebration of Easter morning. Jesus is risen, and it is time to start spreading the good news. The good news is that through Jesus new life is possible. Anything broken can be repaired. Any estrangement can be reconciled. Sadness can be made into joy. Death can be made into life. Hate can be made into love. Apathy can be made into passion.

Jesus is given many different identities throughout the gospels. Jesus the teacher. Jesus the king. Jesus the prophet. Jesus the healer. Jesus the revolutionary. Jesus the peacemaker. In our text this morning, as Jesus steps down into the pain of the world, and asks “Why are you crying?” we see another identity of Jesus. Jesus the friend. Maybe it's because I haven't grown up around many revolutionaries, prophets, or kings, but Jesus the friend has always been the identity of Jesus I connect the most with. In difficult situations the thing I crave the most is a friend. Someone to ask me why I am crying, and walk with me towards healing. Someone to walk with me and guide me to experience new life. When I feel angry, someone who not only hears my anger, but also helps me move beyond it. What Jesus accomplished on Easter Sunday often feels vast and cosmic and surreal. Defeating death is a big and difficult thing to understand. Jesus also accomplishes something I find much easier to comprehend. Jesus accomplishes being a true friend. Stepping into the suffering of the world, and promising to end that suffering. Hearing our pain and helping us heal. This happens in the smallest and largest ways. From helping us conquer our anger and resentment, to conquering death itself Jesus is all about bringing new life into the world.

Why are you crying? Who are you looking for? These questions summarize our lives in a lot of ways. The world is full of a lot of sad things, and we are looking for someone to help us through life. We are looking for Jesus.

As we end our Sermon this morning, I want to read a bit of scripture from the end of the book of John, that I think paints a very peaceful picture of what new life with Jesus might look like.

**1-3 After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, “I’m going fishing.”**

**3-4 The rest of them replied, “We’re going with you.” They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn’t recognize him.**

**5 Jesus spoke to them: “Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?”**

**They answered, “No.”**

**6 He said, “Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens.”**

**They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren’t strong enough to pull it in.**

**7-9 Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Master!”**

**When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren’t far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.**

**10-11 Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.” Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn’t rip.**

**12 Jesus said, “Breakfast is ready.” Not one of the disciples dared ask, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Master.**

**13-14 Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.**

I love the image of Jesus sitting and eating some fish for breakfast with his disciples. This image always gives me a sense of peace, and anticipation for what is to come. May Jesus bring new life into all of us, as we walk in a broken world. And may the hope of new life, spent in communion with Jesus and one another inspire us, and give us hope. Amen