

The Easter Question: Why Are You Weeping? Whom Do You Seek

John 20:1-9

Have you ever stopped to think how many important things in scripture take place in a garden? It all began in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve rebelled and through self-will they alienated themselves from the love of God.

It was in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus fought the greatest battle of his life, the struggle was so intense that he sweat drops of blood. He knew what was before him, and undoubtedly, He was talking about the Cross when he anguished, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." There in Gethsemane, our Lord surrendered his will to the will of God: "Nevertheless, not my will but your will be done."

And, in our scripture lesson, we are again in a garden. The resurrected Christ appears to offer new life and eternal fellowship which is of the Gospel.

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

To intensify all those feelings of pain and despair, insult was added to injury. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, and the body of Jesus had been taken away. The disciples who were with Mary at the tomb that early morning went back into the city, back to their own homes to nurse their pain and depression, because scripture says, "They did not know that Jesus must rise again from the dead."

Was it a woman's intuition or the fact that a woman was willing to show her grief and enter into that grief in a deeper way, perhaps in a more open way than men. Is that the reason Mary didn't return to her home immediately as did the men? 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?"

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

And 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 we consider on this Easter Sunday as we conclude our series of sermons on Questions Jesus Asks.

Let's look at what we can learn from Mary. She teaches us two lessons we need to learn to get the Easter message.

She didn't recognize Jesus for a very simple reason her tears.

She was crying so much that she was blinded. Our tears often blind us to what's going on around us. We 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 so intense and we weep for ourselves, not for the loved one who has gone to be in the eternal presence of God. We can be blinded by our tears.

Mary didn't recognize Jesus because of her 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.

Another reason why Mary did not recognize Jesus: She was facing in the wrong direction. Not just her eyes, but her mind was on the tomb.

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

A friend who corresponds with prisoners shared with me a letter he received from a lady in prison. Somehow something He had written got into the hands of this woman in prison. She wrote and he responded. Here is a portion of one of her letters. "I am very grateful for the literature you sent. Thank you also for your prayers. I had to write again and share my testimony with you.

I am a mother of six. I got into trouble writing bad checks. When I heard they had a warrant out for me, I gave myself up. My husband of 17 years left me and divorced me. I didn't fight him over the divorce or over the

custody of the children. I tried two times in the next three and a half months I spent in jail to take my own life..."

Do you see it? She was focusing on the tomb. She was looking in the wrong direction. Listen as she continues: "...but God had other plans for me. Both times I failed in my suicide efforts. So, with no one around, I got down on my knees and prayed. "Lord, I've always believed in you, and I can go no deeper in sorrow than I am. Please put your loving arms around me and give me your understanding and love and forgive me for all I have done." Christ came into that cell and gave me a new heart. I am now serving three and a half years in this women's correctional institution. I serve our Lord daily. I wake up and talk to him, read The Upper Room, and then go through the day seeking to share Christ with others. Then at night I go to sleep after reading my Bible and talking with him."

Do you get it. We will miss Christ 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 possibilities.

So, those are the reasons Mary did not recognize Jesus because her tears blinded her eyes, and she was facing in the wrong direction.

But it does not end there, "Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because 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.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her."

With those words Mary's life was forever changed. Her tears were dried, and her eyes were opened, and she beheld the risen Christ. No longer were her eyes blinded by the tears of sorrow, no longer was she facing in the wrong direction, looking into the darkness of the tomb. The risen Christ spoke her name and her eyes were opened to the glory and presence of the resurrected Christ.

Like Mary our lives are forever changed when we encounter the resurrected Christ. We are no longer looking into the tomb of darkness that has made up our life. We are no longer blinded by the tears of sorrow that have plagued us. When we encounter the Resurrected Christ, like Mary, we are transformed, "The old has passed away, behold the new has come."

As an Easter people it is time for us to stop staring into the tomb for proof of the resurrection. It is time for us to turn our eyes to the risen Christ who offers us new life and new possibilities.

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 Christ.