

April 8, 2007 – Easter Sunday

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

John 20:1-19 NLT

Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. 2 She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and I don't know where they have put him!"

3 Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb to see. 4 The other disciple outran Peter and got there first. 5 He stooped and looked in and saw the linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in. 6 Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, 7 while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying to the side. 8 Then the other disciple also went in, and he saw and believed-- 9 for until then they hadn't realized that the Scriptures said he would rise from the dead. 10 Then they went home.

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. 12 She saw two white-robed angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 "Why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 She glanced over her shoulder and saw someone standing behind her. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. 15 "Why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16 "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned toward him and exclaimed, "Teacher!"

17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God."

18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

19 That evening, on the first day of the week, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said.

We think of Easter as a joyful holiday, and it is. Bright colored Spring flowers, joyful music, new colorful clothes, chocolate! And my favorite, “Peeps” left out for a few days to get hard. Sometimes we forget. We focus so much on the joy and celebration of this day that sometimes we forget; the first sound heard on that first Easter Sunday was the sound of weeping. It was Mary Magdalene weeping tears of hopelessness.

She was referred to as Mary the Magdalene because she was from Magdala, a small town on the west shore of the sea of Galilee. Every other woman was named Mary in those days, or so it seems, so she was referred to as Mary Magdalene (or Mag – da – LEE- nih) to distinguish her from the other Marys. We still have that habit today, if there are a few people in your group that have the same name you may give them a nickname. In Brooklyn we had “Junior”, “Squeaky”, or we would could have a “78th Street Johnny”(not to be confused with a Johnny from another neighborhood). Growing up in Valley Stream as a teenager my friends and I were known as the Sobro boys, because we hung out on Sobro Ave.

Mary was very dedicated to Jesus and His ministry. Understandably since Jesus had done so much for Mary Magdalene. Mark writes in his gospel (Mark 16:9-10 NLT), “It was early on Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead, and the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons.” Jesus had delivered Mary of demon possession. In gratitude for her great deliverance she became a follower of Jesus her Great Deliver. Mary stood near the cross during the crucifixion of Jesus, and stayed until it was all over. She watched them take the body down from the cross and place it in the tomb. She must have cried for days. She couldn’t wait for the Sabbath to pass so she could get to the tomb to embalm the body. In the Jewish religion anyone who touched a dead body would be considered unclean for seven days, but that was not going to stop Mary.

Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, as soon as the Sabbath ended, as soon as she could get there, she went to the tomb. When she got there she found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She assumed that the body of her Lord was taken out of the tomb and she didn't know where they put Him. Today when there is a death we have a viewing, a last opportunity for friends and family to see the body of their loved one. Well, to add to her grief Mary thought she had lost that opportunity to have a last viewing.

She ran and found Peter and John, they ran ahead of her went to the empty tomb, but unlike Mary, they got it, for until then they hadn't realized that the Scriptures said he would rise from the dead, now they remembered what Jesus said and what the Scriptures said and they believed. Then they went home without seeing or talking to Mary.

Mary gets back and was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Why are you crying?" the angels asked her. For God has caused His angels to care for us. Mary answers their question, "I'm crying because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him."

As she is saying that she glanced over her shoulder and saw someone standing behind her. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. Perhaps because her eyes are so swollen from all the crying she has been doing in her grief and hopelessness. Jesus asks her the same question the angels asked, "Why are you crying?" But Jesus also adds, "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." It is then that Jesus says her name, "Mary" and she realizes it is Jesus.

Jesus asked her the Easter question: "Why Are You Weeping? Whom Do You Seek?" Perhaps this is somewhat of a rebuke. Didn't she realize He would rise as He said He would. She heard Him speak enough times and mention He would be killed, but would rise again from the dead. When she saw the empty tomb why didn't she believe as Peter and John had? Ironical, isn't it, that she was weeping over the very thing she should have been rejoicing about, an empty tomb.

Christians ought to be a more joyful people than they are at times. If they would only remember the empty tomb.

Martin Luther once spent three days in a black depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. (you know, grieving clothes like old Italian women would always dress in black, even for weddings. Once there was a death they always had to be dressed for grieving. Well, Luther's wife was dressed in grieving clothes). "Who's dead?" he asked her. "God," she replied. Luther rebuked her, saying, "What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die." "Well," she replied, "the way you've been acting I was sure He had!"

Many of us have been caught in that trap. This is also what had happened to Mary. (Ray C. Stedman, *The Incredible Hope*)

James Moore in his book, *Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True* writes: Several years ago, *The Saturday Evening Post* ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long time ship-wrecked on a tiny deserted island. The sailor in charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers.

"Compliments of the Captain," the sailor said. "He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you'd still like to be rescued!"

Sometimes the headlines do scare us. Sometimes we feel that evil is winning, but then along comes Easter, to remind us that there is no grave deep enough, no seal imposing enough, no stone heavy enough, no evil strong enough to keep Christ in the grave. (James W. Moore, *Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, Dimensions, 1994, p. 80.)

Jesus asks you the Easter Question today: "Why Are You Weeping? Whom Do You Seek?" Ever find yourself weeping or feel like weeping? What do you want? What are you longing for? As I thought about that I began to realize that I want what I can't have. I weep or feel like weeping because I want a world with no problems. I don't want things to go wrong. I don't want sickness. I don't want hate, I don't want evil. I want perfect love. I want perfect peace. In other words I want everything to be right, I want everything to be perfect. I want perfection. That's when I realized that what I desire is heaven. Don't you? You may not call it that, but you do want perfection, don't you? Why do you weep? Because you want things to go right, you want perfection. That's heaven.

But wait, the question was not, "What do you want?" Jesus asked, "Whom do you seek?" Well sure, that makes sense, for what Easter teaches us is that Jesus is the way to heaven. Because He arose from the dead and lives, so can we. That's the message Jesus gave to Mary (v17) "...go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father *and your Father*, my God *and your God*."

Here's how Paul put it in Rom 8:11 (TLB) : "And if the Spirit of God, who raised up Jesus from the dead, lives in you, he will make your dying bodies live again after you die, by means of this same Holy Spirit living within you."

Mary had hope when she was able to say, "I have seen the Lord!"

That evening Jesus was among them! "Peace be with you," He said.

As you weep, seek Jesus. Today He calls your name and promises you life. When you can say, "I have seen and I believe in the Lord Jesus," He will be with you and in you. He will give you peace. When you receive Jesus His Father becomes our Father in Heaven, and the God who raised Jesus will also raise you.