

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

Series: The Questions of Easter

John 20:11-18; Mark 16:1-6

March 27, 2016

Let me again welcome you and thank you for being part of our Easter celebration here at Germantown UMC. This is a wonderful day to be together, whether this is your 1st time or 10th time or 100th time, Easter Sunday is a wonderful day, and this is a great place to be today.

Last week, a group of four year olds were gathered in a Sunday school class in Chattanooga. The teacher looked at the class and asked this question: "Does anyone know what today is?" A little four-year-old girl held up her hand and said, "Today is Palm Sunday."

The teacher exclaimed, "That's fantastic, that's wonderful. Now does anyone know what next Sunday is?" The same little girl held up her hand and said, "Yes, next Sunday is Easter Sunday."

Once again the teacher said, "That's fantastic. "Now, does anyone know what makes next Sunday Easter?"

The same little girl responded and said, "Yes, next Sunday is Easter because Jesus rose from the grave" and before the teacher could congratulate her, she kept on talking and said, "but if he sees his shadow, he has to go back in for 7 weeks."

We tend to be a little confused about all this Holy Week stuff. There are so many different things that happen. We move from the high emotion of a day called "Palm Sunday," to the lowest point of the week called "Good Friday," that really doesn't sound good at all, then back to celebration today, "Easter Sunday." It is all quite confusing, or maybe it's just that we gave up chocolate for Lent and today we are a bit of a sugar buzz.

For the last few weeks, we have been looking through the Gospel of John at the questions Jesus asked people as He was making His way on the road towards Calvary and the cross. First, we tackled the Life question: What Are You Looking For? Some seek Jesus for power; some seek Him material blessings; some seek Jesus so He can punch their eternal life ticket; and some seek Jesus because they love Him.

Then we looked at the Grace question, discovering that each and every one of us need to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God.¹

We looked at the Discipleship question and whether His followers would leave Him when the call to discipleship seemed too hard.

We dealt with the Wholeness question and whether we prefer to remain in our dysfunction or do we really want to find a new life.

Finally, we talked about the Control Question, whether we would be willing to do whatever Jesus wants us to do. If you missed any of these messages, you can go to our website germantownchurch.com and read or listen messages from the last year and a half.

Ok, let's look at today's Scripture passage taken from John 20:1-18.

READ JOHN 20:1-18

¹ John 3:3

Now, let me recap here. Jesus was crucified and died about 3 PM Friday. He was placed in a borrowed tomb in a garden. Mary Magdalene was among those who watched the execution and who knew where the tomb was. But that Friday was the beginning of Passover, plus the Sabbath started at sundown. So the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb, the stone was rolled in front of the entrance, and everyone went home.

If you read Mark's Gospel, it reports that Mary, along with some other women, returned on Sunday morning with the proper spices to anoint the body, only to find an empty tomb. In John's Gospel, Mary runs and finds Peter and John and frantically tells them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."² What follows is a mad dash as these two guys race to the tomb, leaving Mary in their dust. And somehow, their paths fail to cross as Mary returns to the tomb.

You see, she could not stay away. She kept searching, here and there, not knowing where to search, yet unable to stop looking. It isn't long before she looks back in the tomb. Maybe she felt, "This is impossible. It's just a bad dream. Surely He is in there." But instead of a body, she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."³

Then, sensing that someone was behind her (you know that feeling), she turns around, is startled and presumes that this person is the gardener. The person asks today's Question of Easter: "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"⁴

Of course, this is Jesus, but what fascinates me are His questions, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" It seems just a little silly to ask them. I mean, duh, it's obvious. As soon as she heard about His arrest, she had followed Him through the trial, the carrying of the cross through the streets of Jerusalem, His crucifixion, death, and burial. These should be a "no brainers." There is supposed to be a dead man there.

But Jesus has to help her see that the resurrection has changed everything, so He asks her two questions. First, "Why are you weeping?"

It might seem like a strange question, especially realizing it is the resurrected Jesus asking the question. "How can you be crying Mary? I'm right here." You see, it was because Mary was looking for a dead Christ that she could not find Him. She was looking for death, but He was alive. She was looking for a shroud covered corpse, but He was raised from the dead. She was looking for a lifeless body, but He was alive forevermore.

Many people today are the same as Mary. They are looking for a person, one who was a great teacher, yes, but just a person. Probably a real, historical person, but either way, a normal person, a dead person. The Christ they know lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago. The record of what He did and taught moves and impresses them. The story of Calvary and the Cross is noble, but He was just a man, a normal person, and because they look for a normal person, they miss the resurrected Lord. Because Jesus is just someone to think about, but not really someone to give your life to, then

² John 20:2 (New Revised Standard Version)

³ John 20:12-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴ John 20:15 (New Revised Standard Version)

their lives lack the resurrection power. They live day to day, worried about the market, worried about their kids, worried about their health, worried about the news, worried about how they are going to make it through the day, through the week, through the year.

Or they have visions of a perfect life, with a perfect spouse and perfect kids, and their lives are all planned out. They are going to move up the corporate ladder, sort of speak, they advance in the eyes of their peers, they go to church, but when live comes crashing down, just like it did for Mary and the disciples at Calvary, the house of cards crumbles, and they look at what they called “faith” and see it for the shallowness it is. It cannot and does not hold them up, and they come to the tomb weeping and frantically looking for a dead Christ.

But Jesus is alive. Let that sink in. Jesus is alive. Say that with me: Jesus is alive!

A man was going down a street when in a store window he saw a very beautiful picture of the crucifixion. As he gazed spellbound at the vividly pictured story, he suddenly became conscious that at his side stood a young boy. The boy, too, was gazing at the picture, and his tense expression made the man know that “The Crucifixion” had really gripped the eager little soul. Touching the boy on the shoulder, the man said, “Sonny, what does it mean?” “Doncha know?” he answered, his face full of the marvel of the man’s ignorance. “That there man is Jesus, an’ them others is Roman soldiers, an’ the woman what’s cryin’ is His mother, an’” he added, “they killed ‘im!” The man did not want to move from in front of that impressive piece of artwork but he had other things he had to do, so he turned and walked away. In a few moments he heard footsteps on the street behind him, and there came rushing up the boy. “Say, mister,” he exclaimed breathlessly, “I forgot to tell you, but He rose again!”

Jesus is alive. Our greatest defeat, death, has been defeated. And when you know that, then you will not cry.

- When the struggles and obstacles interrupt your life, when it seems all hope is gone, Jesus says, “Why are you weeping? I am alive, and I have overcome.”
- When you find yourself dealing with addiction, either your own or a family member, when it seems that the drugs are winning, Jesus says, “Why are you weeping? I am alive, and I have overcome.”
- When the love of your life is gone forever, when their empty spot is a constant reminder of what you have lost, Jesus says, “Why are you weeping? I am alive, and I have overcome.”
- When you are lost and confused, without direction or purpose, and you feel you are just spinning your wheels, taking up space, Jesus says, “Why are you weeping? I am alive, and I have overcome.”
- For “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”⁵

The second question Jesus asks is, “Whom do you seek?” Mary has one of the first to arrive at the Empty Tomb. She saw that Jesus’ body was gone. In its place was “a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.’”⁶ As a result, Mary runs and finds Peter and John, tells them that Jesus’ body is

⁵ 1 John 4:4 (King James Version)

⁶ Mark 16:5-6 (New Revised Standard Version)

gone. Notice she doesn't say anything about any supposed resurrection. She then follows the disciples back to the tomb. But for all her frantic searching, looking in and around the tomb, it was not Mary Magdalene who came upon Jesus, but Jesus who found her. She was looking here and there until she felt someone behind her. Jesus had found her.

That's the way it always is. Jesus finds us. In the darkest of night, Jesus finds us. When it seems as if there is no hope, Jesus finds us. When we discover that on our own, our lives are meaningless, Jesus finds us. When we have reached the end, Jesus finds us. When trouble comes, we run around and around, desperately searching, until we realize that the "Footprints" poem is true.

*"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you'd walk with me all the way.*

*But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life,
there is only one set of footprints.*

*I don't understand why when
I needed you most you would leave me."*

The LORD replied:

*"My son, my precious child,
I love you and I would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."*

Let me ask you today: are you seeking? Have you taken a look at your life and realized that for all of your posturing, for all your achievements, for all your self-denials or self-indulgences, for all you are deep within you, if Jesus is missing, everything is missing. If you have lost Jesus, if your spiritual life has dimmed and become thin and drab and meager, you can be sure that He is searching for you – for He does not want you to be lost, but has missed you, and He wants you back.

It is at the cross we must face the weight of our sin. But you need to come to the tomb, the empty tomb. Through the empty tomb, we realize that the cross was not in vain, the scourging and beating, the humiliation, the agony, was not in vain.

Mary did not meet the risen Christ until she had discovered the empty tomb. We cannot meet Christ until we discover that he is indeed alive, that his tomb is empty.⁷

⁷ Life Application Bible Notes, John 20:18