

“WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU CRYING”  
I Corinthians 15:1-11, John 20:1-18  
EASTER, April 4, 2021

“During morning worship on Palm Sunday, 1994, a tornado struck the Goshen United Methodist Church in Piedmont Alabama. It happened during a dramatic presentation. The electricity failed, and the congregation was trying to get along without its sound system. A window broke, people screamed, and the building exploded, injuring scores of members and killing twenty. Among the fatalities was Hannah Clem, four-year-old daughter of Pastor Kelly Clem.

“The night after the tragedy, Pastor Kelly was trying to sleep, tossing and turning through the pain of her own injuries. An unusual dream came to her. She saw herself trying to lift bricks and toss them aside, clearing away rubble, trying to rescue the victims. She kept doing the same thing over and over. Everything was gray and dull. But as her dream progressed, she stepped back from the scene and saw right in the spot where Hannah had been buried [by the rubble], children, dressed in beautiful, bright colors. They seemed oblivious to the onlookers, and were playing and laughing with each other. They were standing on grass of the greenest green. When Kelly awoke, a peace settled over her and strengthened her for the funerals ahead.

“The next day, a reporter asked Pastor Kelly if the disaster had shattered her faith. ‘It hasn’t shattered my faith,’ she replied. ‘I’m holding on to my faith. It’s holding me. All of the people of Goshen are holding on to each other, along with the hope they will be able to rebuild. Easter is coming.’”<sup>1</sup>

The death of a loved one is traumatic in the lives of those who loved them. The realization that we will never see that person again smacks us up side of the head with full-force reality. The soul straining nature of death touches our hearts way deep inside of us, and there is tremendous sadness, and grief and anguish that erupts. The suddenness of death sometimes affects us even more, because we have unfinished work with that person – forgiveness for the last words that were spoken to each other

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] 247

out of anger; guilt for things we had been left undone or unsaid to each other; remorse for the days and events that would never occur; sadness for the things that would not be able to happen. Death hurts! And the days and weeks and months afterward, give slow recovery --- maybe. Death is gut wrenching, faith challenging, and for many, there is great desperation. That death in their life changes the way that they are, the reason for their life, and the vision for the future. But there is hope for those who hold onto their faith.

This morning we see how the death of Jesus affected His followers, particularly Mary. Why would Jesus' death have hit Mary so hard?

Well, fairly early in Jesus' public ministry, He had healed some women of evil spirits and diseases (Luke 8:1-3). In fact, He had cast out seven demons from Mary's life, giving her a brand new sparkle of freedom and rest and peace. We are not told what condition Mary was in while she suffered under the influence of these demons, but you remember what they did to the man living among the tombs of Gerasa? He was driven mad by the demons within him, and when Jesus cast them out, a whole herd of pigs committed suicide by rushing into the Sea of Galilee. Who knows the depths of depravity and despair Mary was in with those seven demons influencing her life? What desperation would have been hers? How trapped she must have felt? How ugly and unruly her character may have been? There was little hope for her to have anything but a tortured life. She would have cried out in anguish daily because of her infirmity. There was no hope for her future. There was no life in her spirit. There was nothing positive for her to look forward to. She was dead on the inside, though existing on the outside. She was just going through the motions of living, but consumed and controlled by evil, wickedness, and coldness.

Yet, Jesus had seen her condition and released her from the demonic possession. He freed her from all of her pain and struggle. The darkness within her was replaced with the Light of Christ. The hopelessness she felt would have been replaced with joy. The desperation she felt was replaced by laughter. The anguish and sorrow she was surrounded by was turned into calm and peace. The

difference was 180 degrees from what she was to what she had become as Jesus gave her new life. In a way, she had been resurrected from the dead. She now had hope for her future, and she gave her life in service to Jesus along with the other women that Jesus had healed. They had been changed by the power of Jesus' great love for them. He had released them from their living hell and had brought hope back into their lives. The years traveling with Jesus and ministering to Him and His disciples brought great delight and fulfillment to them.

But that all changed just before Passover. Jesus had been unjustly arrested, tried, and condemned by the Jewish leaders. They had Jesus taken to the Roman governor who had Him beaten and whipped to shreds, and then they finished the job by executing Him on the cross. He experienced such pain, He had gone through such agony, and there was so much injustice. His death had been so horrible. It was all so wrong!

Mary couldn't figure it out. Wasn't Jesus supposed to have changed everything? Wasn't He the Messiah? Wasn't He the One who came to free Israel from the bondage of slavery to the Romans? Hadn't the people just proclaimed Him the new King of Israel only a week ago as He had entered Jerusalem with such humility and grandeur? But now He was dead!

But Mary remembered that Jesus had brought others back to life after they had died. There was the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, one of the leaders of the Synagogue (Luke 8:40-56). There was the son of the widow of Nain that Jesus had raised from the dead as they were taking him to the cemetery (Luke 7:11-16). And there was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, who had been dead four days and was already buried in the tomb when Jesus raised him (John 11). Jesus had the power to raise these people up from death. Couldn't He have had the power to defend Himself from death, too?

Mary couldn't understand what had gone wrong. There was nothing Jesus had done to deserve death. With all the good He had done for all the people, why had they killed Him? And what was she going to do now? Where would she go? What would she do? What would be her reason for getting up in the morning each day? Her whole reason for life had been stripped away from her, and it was almost

like the demonic darkness was knocking at her heart's door again. All she had left was to go to the borrowed tomb that they had laid Jesus in and finish the burial. It had been so late when they had buried Him that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had had to rush in order to get Jesus quickly into the tomb before the Sabbath began.

So when Mary and the other women went to the tomb early in the morning the day after Sabbath, they were still grieving Jesus' death. They were still raw by what had happened, and their sorrow was very deep upon their hearts. But they are shocked abruptly into a new reality when they discover the stone that had covered the tomb was already rolled away! And to add insult to injury, Jesus' body wasn't there! **The tomb was empty!** It was more than what Mary could handle on her own. In the excitement of the moment, she had run with the others to the disciples to report the atrocity. Certainly they would know what to do. Surely they could explain what was going on. They should be able to help.

But the disciples were just as surprised as the women were. So Mary had followed Peter and John back to the tomb, wanting to know where Jesus' body was. But they didn't have any ideas, either. No one knew what to do. Peter and John left the tomb hopeful, but uncertain. They were just as lost as Mary was. It was now overwhelming to Mary. Her whole world had suddenly collapsed completely around her, and all the emotion flooded back into her. She couldn't move. She couldn't think. She could hardly breathe. And with her tears she could hardly see. "Why? Why? WHY!" was the question in her mind.

However, everything changed suddenly and Mary's world was turned upside-down once more. This time in a good way. Listen to how it happens. (READ John 20:11-18)

In light of all that had taken place, only one question was asked of Mary there at the tomb. "*Woman, why are you crying*" (John 20:13)? At the very point when she thought she was at the lowest moment in her life, hope came through that simple question, "Why are you crying?"

You see, Mary had not yet comprehended the full measure of what Jesus had to do to complete

His mission here on the earth. He HAD to suffer, He HAD to die on the cross, because it was the only way for us to find new life. Jesus had to take on all of the suffering and hurt and trials of the world, take them to the cross and pay the price for them so that we won't have to. Jesus freely took them upon Himself to free us from the anguish, the guilt, the sorrow, the pain and the confusion that are natural parts of this world. Jesus died so that we could trust in Him to guide us.

Then, in His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has given us a new hope that is beyond the grave, beyond the grief of losing a loved one, beyond the sorrow of the loss of our dreams, and beyond the hardships that face us each day.

So the same question is asked of us today. Why are our hearts so heavy? Why has our hope vanished? Why are we still afraid, grieving, lost and alone? What is it in our lives that has caused us to stand right there at the tomb of Jesus so desperate and discouraged? Why are we crying today?

Could it be the loss of that loved one who was the most important thing in your life? Maybe a daughter killed in a Palm Sunday tornado? Maybe the death of a husband of 52 years? Maybe the notice of the death of your courageous son fighting valiantly for the security of our country? Maybe a mother taken from you by the horrors of cancer? Who is it that we are grieving for today?

Or could it be the loss of a relationship? Your best friend moves away finding a life-long career in a city on the other side of the country. Your spouse of 25 years leaves because he's found another woman who makes him happy. Your trusted co-owner in the office takes everything you've got and leaves your company desolate and bankrupt. Maybe your pastor has said or done something that was offensive or way too challenging. What is the hurt in your life right now?

Or could it be the end of a life-long dream job that was suddenly halted because of Covid19? You put all your education into training for it but you always come up short in getting hired. You gave it your all and it was just starting to take off before everything collapsed. The bills have climbed higher than you could afford to keep it open and now it's gone. You keep looking for a great place in a good company, but there never seems to be an opening for you and you're getting discouraged.

Or could it be that you've lost your health? That spot under your arm turned into cancer. That persistent stomach ache turns out to be a major bowel obstruction. Your dizziness and blurry vision is diagnosed as a brain tumor. Or those seemingly isolated troubles you're having turns out to be a systemic auto-immune disease. Or maybe it's not you, but a spouse, or a child who is sick and there's nothing that you can do but watch them slowly fade away. What is it that has you worried?

Why Are You Crying Today? What is it that is causing you so much pain, or grief, or confusion, or heartache? We stand here this morning with so much happening to us, and we are all carrying so much in our lives that Jesus questions US the same way, "Why are you crying?"

But He also comes quickly to the answer, "I have endured all that pain, I have born all your grief, I have encountered all that depression, and I have felt all that anger. I have taken it upon Myself, and I died for you to take it all away. Let Me have your pain, your fear, your hurt, your disappointment, your loss, your anger, your depression, your worry, your confusion. It's all been paid for and I am ready to bring you peace. Will you not open your eyes and see Me? Will you not come to know that I am alive again and live forever more so that you might find rest from your burdens?"

You see folks, even in our world today, there is no reason to cry, because Jesus has overcome the world! All those things that the world gives out to us in order to crush us, He took upon Himself and as they nailed Him on the cross, He put all those things under His feet. He claimed them as His own and has brought an end to them so that we can be freed from them.

Jesus has put death to death. He became victorious over the grave so that we have nothing to fear when we put our trust and faith in Him. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, even though we die, yet shall we live (John 11:25). So we have no more reason to fear the grave. Though others look at the dark gray places where loved ones have been buried, children in brightly colored clothes will be seen playing on the brightest green grass that has never been seen before. Peace comes to us as we put our confidence and trust in the Lord Jesus.

And since this world is not our home when we are believers in Jesus Christ, we know we have a

much better place waiting for us, our own place in the Father's House. He promised us, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that 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"* (John 14:1-3). Jesus carries us beyond the grave to give us eternal life when we trust in Him.

Jesus has promised life to those who trust Him so that no matter what they face, we can take our burdens to Him and find relief from them. Jesus told His disciples, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30). When the things of this world strive to devastate our faith, as we hold onto Jesus, as we trust in His resurrection, as we keep our confidence in Him, He carries us through the darkness and turmoil and storm, in order to bring peace to us.

Jesus has brought to us victory, even in this life, as we trust in Him. The greatest disappointment cannot defeat us; the most powerful dictator cannot destroy us; the most horrible catastrophe cannot overwhelm us; the most devastating plague cannot crush us. Jesus' resurrection from the grave has proved His power over all things so that all we need to do is to trust Him, keep our faith in Him, and everything will turn out alright. Oh, it may be quite different than what we expected, but when we are at our very lowest, when we think we cannot take life's garbage any more, Jesus wraps His arms around us and asks, "Why are you crying?" And He tells us that He is right there with us, even in the middle of that trial, or struggle, or heartache, or death. Jesus has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), saying that He will be with us to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

So why are We crying? In Jesus there is life! Death could not hold Him in the grave, and He has given eternal life to all who follow Him and keep His commandments. Even in the face of death, there is life, for Jesus grants us access to God's heavenly kingdom, and when we put our faith in Him, we will go to be with Him when this life is over (Luke 23:43).

In Jesus there is hope! Hope that we are not left desolate and alone, but that Jesus Himself will be with us and comfort us in the face of death. Hope that all of our life's studies and preparations are not for naught, but can be used for His glory at just the right time. Hope that we will find someone who will love us for who we are so that we might be able to spend our whole life in love with them, and them with us. Hope that despite these terrible health conditions that there is new life with Jesus. Hope that no matter what we are forced to endure that freedom will come at last.

In Jesus there is peace! Peace that goes beyond our understanding at the face of torment and worry. Peace that casts out all of our fears. Peace that brings calm to the storms within our lives. Peace that heals relationships, that rebuilds marriages, that restores friendships, and that renews families. Peace that assures us that the very bottom that has dropped out from under us, has now put us into a new situation that will bring us security and confidence and stability. Peace that provides us the understanding that no matter what happens, Jesus will be standing right there next to us, protecting us and providing for us.

In Jesus there is resurrection! Resurrection from all the old things in our life that has taken us to depression, and hardship, and sorrow, and pain. Resurrection from all of the sins we have clung to that has brought us brokenness and strife. Resurrection from the lifestyles we have lived that are in opposition to God's will and God's way. Resurrection from the disappointment and loss of failed dreams and opportunities. Resurrection that brings new life as we accept Jesus as our Savior, and cling to Him as the Only Begotten Son of God.

Friends, on this Resurrection Day, let Jesus guide you away from the tomb of sorrow, grief and pain to bring you joy and laughter and refreshment and rest and peace. Let's pray: Father, thank You for Jesus' resurrection! Thank you for the New Life that only He can provide as we turn to Him and call out, "Master, Savior, Lord!" Renew our hearts today so that we are no longer confined to the darkness of the tombs of life, but filled with the light of Jesus Christ. Renew us and redeem us into new people, ready to take the Good News of Jesus to the world. In Jesus' Name we pray. AMEN!