

Easter Son-rise service – April 4, 2010 John 20:11-18

Why do you cry? Oh, there are the occasional tears of joy, but usually we shed tears when we're sad, tears of grief. What is more natural than tears in a cemetery? Mary wept tears of sorrow and despair at Jesus' graveside that early Sunday morning. But it was Easter. Her tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy. For us too **"Easter Turns our Tears of Sorrow to Tears of Joy."**

Mary's hopes and longings for divine love and eternal life through Jesus were dashed when they placed Jesus' lifeless body in the grave the previous Friday. On Sunday morning at daybreak she went with the other women at early dawn to do one final act of kindness for Jesus by further anointing his body for its final resting place. But the grave was open! Jesus' body was gone! Mary rushed back to the city to tell Peter and John. They hurried to the tomb, but not seeing Jesus, they returned to the city.

Confused, saddened, Mary returned to the grave. Now she broke down and cried. The Greek word we translate "wept" means loud, unrestrained weeping. Her helpless love breaks out in sobs. Because the grave was empty, her whole world was empty. Her grief was so deep that when she looked in she saw the two angels, but through her tears she really didn't see they were angels. They ask, **"Why are you weeping?"** She answers, **"They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him."** (v. 13) I suppose only those who have a loved one "Missing in Action" at a time of war can remotely understand what Mary felt. She had a hard enough time accepting Jesus was dead, and now she didn't even have his body in the grave by which to remember Him.

We too weep at gravesides. They remind us everything in life ends in death. That awful hole mocks all the hopes, dreams, joy and laughter we have in life and calls it all pointless. You aren't pretending that you will somehow avoid death, are you? Does the quest for the things of this world so filled you that you've lost sight of the grave yawning before you, maybe in several decades, several years, or several days? Are you trying to have so much fun in life that you are in denial that you too will one day die? No matter how brilliant our success, no matter how great our failure, we'll all end up the same. "Dust you are, and to dust you will return." Like the advancing tide sweeping away a castle of sand – time will one day wash away our life, no matter how big or beautifully we designed it. It's just a castle of sand.

Of course, life was not meant to be swallowed up in death! You and I were not made for decay. God made angels in the spirit world and humans in this physical world to know His love and live in His joy forever. One angel, however, didn't stay in God's life. He left it deliberately and led a host of angels in His rebellion against God. He slithered into the perfect world God made, tempting Eve to disobey her Creator. Eve, Adam, and thus the whole human race, participated in that rebellion, striving to find life apart from God's will.

Now some people get all bent out of shape because they don't want to admit they are sinners. Don't be foolish. Admit it. "I am a sinner!" You see sin isn't just what those wicked types do that makes the headlines. Sin is thinking, believing, acting apart from God's perfect will. Try just for a day to go without thinking a single thought that is hateful, lustful, greedy, or selfish. Try just for one day to have every thought centered on God's love, gratitude, kindness, and concern for others. And if you claim you can do that for even just one day, you've proven you're a sinner because you are liar, and lying is a sin. So admit it. We are sinners. Sin brings separation from God - spiritual death; separation of spirit from body - physical death; eternal separation in the fires of hell - eternal death. Death is life's final enemy. Unless someone greater than Satan, sin, and death appeared in this world, we, like Mary would go on weeping forever.

And He, the One more powerful, the One who died and rose to conquer sin, death, and hell, came to Mary that morning. **“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** In her grief she thought He was the gardener. **“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”** In a word, a word by which He created all things, a word by which He calmed the wind and the waves, a word by which He had raised the dead to life, a word by which He creates new life and a living faith in even the deadest heart, yes in a word He turned her tears of grief to tears of joy. **“Mary!”** She leaned forward. **Rabboni! (which means Teacher).** She clutched his garments never wanting to lose Jesus again. Jesus said, **“Do not hold onto me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

Mary believed in death. Now she believed in the resurrection and the life! Jesus would appear to the others too and by His Word restore their faith in Him. They would know that when He hung on the cross, He was not death’s helpless victim. He was offering his sinless life as punishment for our sins so that all who believe in Jesus know God is their heavenly Father. By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has unlocked the door of His Father’s home. He has secured His Father’s approval and permission to bring His brothers and sisters with Him to share His glory in the Father’s house!

Sin and death still may bring tears to our eyes. Sometimes we sit in the world’s graveyard fearing death will rob us of what is precious in life. We tremble, fearing the grave will swallow up our life forever. But Jesus comes to us again today and asks, “Why are you crying?” Then He calls us each by name. He reminds us God put His name on us in our baptism, and we were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life!

Easter turns our tears of sorrow into tears of joy. Because Christ Himself has risen from the dead and proved Himself the Victor over sin, death, and hell, He has unlocked the door of His Father’s home to you. His victory over the grave is our pledge God has accepted His sacrifice for us, forgiven our sins, and given us eternal life as His gift of grace. By His resurrection Christ proved He is the Son of God with power to keep all His promises. His empty tomb proclaims to us that someday our grave too shall be empty. He assures every one of His believers, **“I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”** (John 11:25-26).

Because of Christ’s resurrection we can exclaim with the apostle, **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”** (1 Cor. 15:55-57). And the apostle says in another verse, **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep”** (1 Cor. 15:20). Just as the first fruits are the pledge of greater general harvest to come, so Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection to life immortal on the last day. And now, because Jesus lives, we too shall live! Easter turns our tears of sorrow to tears of joy, so please stand and with the joy and victory of faith we’ll sing Hymn 152 v. 1, 7 & 8! “I know that my Redeemer lives!”