

I love Easter. I love being gathered together as the family of God to worship and praise him for what he has done. God raised Jesus from the dead, showing his power over suffering and death. Humanity had done the absolute worst it could do to another human being, and God triumphed over it. Our Lord did not avoid suffering and death; he endured it for our sakes. Endured it, succumbed to it; and triumphed over it.

When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb that first Easter morn, she was blinded by her tears and loss. Seeing the empty tomb, she was bewildered and dismayed. She rushed to Peter and the other disciple, at a loss at what to do. The two men rushed to the empty tomb, but they had no more idea of what to make of it than Mary did. So they went home.

But Mary stayed in the garden. When she looked into the tomb again, she saw angels. "Why are you weeping?" The angels know this is a joyous occasion, but Mary still doesn't understand. And then she turns and sees another figure. Thinking him the gardener, she asks where he has taken Jesus' body. I can't quite decide what Jesus is feeling here. My first thought is amusement. Boy, is she going to be surprised. But then I wonder if that makes Jesus seem like kind of a jerk. I mean, here she is crying her eyes out. So probably something more like sadness that she couldn't understand that death could not hold him. If only she had understood, she wouldn't be so upset now.

"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" I'm thinking he knows. But sometimes we need to voice our desires. Not for God's sake, but for ours. If we don't know what we are looking for, how will we know when we find it? Of course, Mary is unambiguous in what she wants. She wants to know where Jesus' body is. She wants to make sure that no one has stolen it for who knows what kind of unholy purpose. But Jesus is able to offer more than just information. He gives her hope. He calls her name. "Mary." And through her tears, she sees and she believes.

Our Lord still calls to us. Not only through our tears but also through our laughter, Whatever is going on in our lives, our Lord calls to us. Our Lord seeks us out, wants to be a part of our lives. Not just at Easter, not just on Sundays, but every step of the way. Our Lord seeks communion with us. Our Lord shares our joys and our sorrows, because he has experienced them as well. Our Lord knows what it is like to lose friends or to be betrayed; he knows what it is like to be laughed at and scorned, mock and humiliated. Our Lord knows the joys of the wedding feast and the sorrow of the funeral. Our Lord knows.

Our Lord knows the struggles we face that no one else knows about. Our Lord knows the fears we have, the anxieties, the worries. And he invites us to place them all on him. "Come to me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." He doesn't promise to solve all of our problems. Far from it. Our Lord constantly reminded those who would follow him that they must count the cost. But the rewards are eternal, the hope is certain. Our Lord will never forsake us. Even death could not keep him from us. And now he dwells in our hearts forever.

The empty tomb points us to the reality of death and to the reality of life. Christ has died, but Christ is risen. And because the tomb was empty, because God

raised him from the dead, we, too, share in that resurrection. At the last day, we shall join with him in that place where there is no crying, where God himself shall wipe away every tear, and where we long to hear, "Well, done, thy good and faithful servant."

So we rejoice in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the grave. We shout "alleluia" that we have been raised with him. We celebrate Christ's victory over death, for it is our victory, too. And we exult in the sure and certain hope and knowledge that we are sealed as Christ's own forever, and that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*