

Why Are You Weeping?

March 31, 2024

Isaiah 25:6-9

John 20:1-18

“Why are you weeping?”

This is a question that may be welcome, and it may not be welcome. “Why are you weeping?” It depends so much on the tone in which the question is asked? How many times have you heard it asked with an accusing tone: “Why are you crying?” and the follow-up statement, “You haven’t got anything to cry about,” not to mention the follow-up threat, “If you don’t stop I’ll give you something to cry about.”

Anybody here ever heard something like that from your parents or a babysitter or a teacher? Anybody here ever said something like that to your child or your relative or your student or your young one in an activity you were leading?

Tell me, did “Why are you crying?” “You haven’t got anything to cry about,” “I’ll give you something to cry about” – did that ever work?

It never worked for me.

They usually cried harder, honestly.

“Why are you weeping?”

There’s another way to ask the question. Actually, there are several, but I like this one. It’s to ask like you’re interested. Like you care. Like you want to comfort. Like you want to help. Even if you don’t know how to help, you’re there to try.

“Why are you weeping?”

Mary Magdalene had good reason to be weeping on that Sunday morning. Her teacher and leader, her trusted guide through wisdom and religion, the person she admired most in the world, had been arrested, tried for crimes he clearly hadn’t committed, and executed in less than a day. The rules of the Sabbath had kept her from visiting his grave for yet another day. Imagine the pent-up grief. You’ve felt something like it. Depending on how comfortable you are with showing emotion, you might have cried, or breathed deeply in and out, or wailed, or sat in complete silence.

Karoline Lewis writes at Working Preacher, “When a friend dies, we cry. Mary’s weeping is mentioned no less than four times in four verses. The repetition has the function of emphasizing this important expression of what it means to be human and also validates her response. Of course Mary should cry. The scene would suffer a strange and awkward void if her emotions were not given voice.”

And yet people kept asking.

Her friends, I’m afraid, didn’t ask. Alicia D. Meyers writes at Working Preacher, “Mary’s desire for comfort from these two disciples, however, will leave her empty. Both men eventually look into the tomb and see that Jesus’ body is gone. Even the Beloved Disciple, who is said to ‘believe’ in verse 8, offers no words of hope to Mary. Instead, all three disciples are scattered (see also 16:32). The men ‘returned to their homes,’ while Mary remains outside the tomb, weeping.”

Seriously, folks. Simon Peter and this other disciple – who isn’t definitely identified by John the Gospel writer, so I’m going to have to go with “other disciple” – ran all the way to the cemetery, looked at things, shrugged their shoulders, and left Mary there alone in tears. It wasn’t the best hour for Jesus’ male disciples.

In fairness, I would guess that they didn’t need to ask why Mary was crying. It was the same reason they were crying, though John failed to mention it. St. Augustine wrote, “‘And I know not,’ she added, ‘where they have laid Him.’ This was the greater cause of sorrow, because she knew not where to go to mitigate her grief. But the hour had now come when the joy, in some measure announced by the angels, who forbade her tears, was to succeed the weeping.”

How did the angels ask, “Why are you weeping?”

John didn’t describe their voices, but Mary didn’t fly out in anger or collapse in tears. She answered the question. She was mourning someone whose life ended all too soon and now even his body had been robbed away. That grief was so overwhelming that she didn’t even think to ask, “Who are you, and how and when did you two enter the tomb while neither my friends nor I saw you?”

Finally, along came Jesus. I’m pretty sure I know why Mary Magdalene didn’t recognize him. I don’t think she looked at him. When I’m sunk in the depths of emotion, I don’t look at people. My attention is on me and how I feel. It takes a lot to call me out of that. Something more than, “Why are you weeping?” even if asked with the most caring, loving, empathizing tone ever used on God’s green earth.

It took a lot for Mary. Jesus had to say her name.

“Why are you weeping?” Well, now it’s a different answer, isn’t it? Nobody has taken away the body of Jesus; instead, someOne has returned the life of Jesus, some Heavenly One. I’m

definitely an old softy, but if the one I'd seen crucified three days before turned up alive and well, I'd be crying. They'd be tears of joy, but I'd be crying.

Mary took those new tears back to find the male disciples, including the two who hadn't been much help earlier (Mary was a remarkably generous person, wasn't she?), to tell them the good news.

Why are you weeping?

Life is sometimes called "this vale of tears," and for good reason. We're subject to a remarkable number of physical ailments, some trivial, some severe, and for no good reason. I hurt my shoulder a few years ago when I rolled over in bed. Why am I weeping? Because my body does weird things and I don't like it.

Why are you weeping?

Because the emotional losses of Earth are more frequent than the physical. Lost jobs. Lost relationships. Loved ones who've moved away – loved ones who've moved on. Our emotions are subject to such things as changes in diet as well as to changes in the world around us that just plain make us sad. Then there's mental illnesses that leave us with feelings we struggle to cope with and live with.

Why are you weeping?

The condition of this planet warrants tears, tears enough to compound sea level rise from climate change. Nation has gone to war against nation, democratic institutions are threatened, natural and human-made disasters take lives and homes, disrupt our economy, and raise a crop of self-appointed experts to tell us, inaccurately, what went wrong.

Why are you weeping?

You've got good cause to weep.

My friends, you have better cause to weep, to weep the tears of joy.

Mary Magdalene was not the last to see Jesus that day. Not-so-empathetic Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved despite his inability to comfort his friends, you know, those guys? They saw Jesus that evening along with the other guys that Mary didn't hunt up that morning. Admittedly, one of Jesus' friends missed that party. There's always one who misses something – but that's next week's sermon. Spoiler alert: Eventually even he saw Jesus.

I know it's not the same for us as for Mary. Her tears of grief were for the lost Jesus. Seeing him transformed them to tears of joy. Your hurts and griefs, your ails and concerns, they're not the

same. The resurrection of Jesus doesn't change how much they hurt. The resurrection of Jesus doesn't mean that those tears stop flowing.

The resurrection of Jesus does mean that even those tears will someday flow as tears of joy. The resurrection of Jesus means that even while those tears of sorrow flow, they can be mixed with the tears that praise Christ's life. The resurrection of Jesus means that those who haven't been weeping can begin to weep, and begin with the tears that celebrate new life.

The resurrection of Jesus means that tears of loss can begin their transformation to tears of joy. The resurrection of Jesus means that someday every tear will be one of celebration.

Are you weeping? Go ahead and weep. Life is hard. Loss is real.

Are you weeping? Go ahead and weep. Let some other tears join them, though: the tears that rejoice in Jesus' life.

Are you weeping? Go ahead and weep. Jesus lives and reigns. Weep those tears of joy.

And whether you're weeping or not, let your soul take flight and your voice raise its Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Amen.

by Eric Anderson