

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026

Tears of Joy

John 20:1-18, Acts 10:42-43

There are so many reasons we cry. Last week I told you that I cry at parades – all the emotion and community and excitement. We cry when we are filled with sadness, with fear, with exhaustion, with excitement, with joy.

We cry when our children are born and when they graduate. We cry when we hear that a loved one has cancer. We cry when we hear that their scans are clear and now they are in remission. Tears are our emotions spilling out of our eyes.

As Jesus hung on the cross, dying, five of His followers stood nearby watching, helpless. Among them were John, His beloved disciple; His mother, Mary, and her sister, Salome; Mary, the wife of Cleopas; and Mary Magdalene. Many of Jesus' other followers watched from hiding places nearby. Yet only these five were close enough to offer any words of comfort to their dying friend and Savior.

“Last at the cross, first at the tomb.” A wonderful honor, and it was Mary Magdalene – a woman – who was first to see Jesus alive, the first to hear His voice!

While it was still dark, on the first day of the week, Mary went to the tomb and found the stone removed. She bent over and peered into the tomb and could not find the body of Jesus. Had His body been stolen?

She ran to get Simon Peter and John, to tell them what had happened and they returned with her to the tomb. Both men went in and saw only the cloth Jesus had been wrapped in. They saw; scripture says they believed, but what exactly did they believe – it says they did not yet understand, and they returned home.

But Mary stayed. She stood outside, crying.

Mary had loved Jesus in life and she continued to love Him in death. She served Him in life, and she had intended to serve in His death.

She had come to prepare His body because there had been no time when He was hurriedly taken down from the cross, and now there was nothing there but the wrappings which had covered Him. She was there at the tomb, because death could not destroy her love and she felt called to continue in service.

Inside the tomb Mary sees two angels who ask her, “Why are you weeping?”

Mary wept because she saw Jesus unjustly accused, cruelly beaten, nailed to the cross, dying, as His closest followers looked up at Him, not able to give Him true comfort, to hold Him as He died.

Mary wept because the stone has been rolled away and Jesus' body is gone.

Mary wept because she was not ready to let Jesus go.

Mary wept because she is tired, and she is confused, and she is angry; she is feeling hopeless, alone and powerless.

Mary wept because death and violence and hatred and fear seem to have won out over love and hope and truth and compassion.

So why is she still there? All who have lost someone who meant more to you than life itself can understand why she remained.

How many of us have grieved the loss of loved ones? How many of us can feel the sharp pain of emptiness when we look at a favorite chair, a special mug, an often-worn shirt – and we remember our loved one is gone, seemingly snatched from us before we were ready?

But we don't want to leave our memories. We want to be present with those we've lost for as long as we can be – so Mary stayed at the tomb, wondering what to do next, weeping.

Some of you awoke this morning, remembering friends and family that are no longer with you, aren't sitting beside you in church, won't gather around the dinner table, won't laugh with you or hold your hand. Some of you might visit the cemetery after service, standing alone by a gravestone. You might talk to that person and tell them how much they are missed.

Your tears and Mary's tears show our humanity. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that if we do all the right things in life, that if we believe in Jesus, then there will be no pain, no tears, no fear. If Mary, one of Jesus' most faithful disciples, wept, then there is a place for our tears, too.

You know why Mary was at the tomb and you understand her tears. The tomb was empty and what should have been good news, has broken her heart.

Today, we know that the empty tomb is the greatest proof of Jesus' resurrection, but Mary weeps. Mary, who followed Jesus, who supported His ministry, who believed in His message – Mary does not yet understand the empty tomb.

Have you been weeping lately? Are you filled with sadness, pain, hurt or worry? Disappointment, anger, betrayal or frustration? Are you overwhelmed? Are you pulled away from God, toward sin? Are things just not quite right in your life? Are you weeping because you want to have faith, but the world just seems to keep kicking you down?

Hear and believe the rest of the story!!

But then a man, whom Mary believed must be the gardener, arrived and He also asks Mary why she is weeping. *She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."*

And then this man spoke Mary's name! And Mary sees Jesus! She is overjoyed! He is alive! All is not lost! There is hope! Death thought it had won, but it hadn't!

Jesus told Mary not to cling to Him, not to hold Him back, as He had not yet ascended to His Father; but she was to go to the others and tell them what she had witnessed!

So, Mary went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that He had spoken these things to her.

Jesus speaks your name, too. When you turn to Him, when you hear the compassion in His voice, when the comfort of His voice washes over you, you know that you are not alone.

All of the sorrow in your life seems a little bit more bearable. You feel the confusion begin to lift. Light and love shine onto you and tears well up in your eyes. You can feel the same joy and hope and excitement that Mary felt.

Jesus spoke Mary's name and she turned to Him and recognized Him. Hear Jesus speak your name, too!

Remember these three Easter truths:

First, even though death might seem powerful – there is hope beyond the grave! There is new life – a life that is filled with eternal joy. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope that this life is not the end. A future of peace awaits us. We will see our loved ones who have died in Christ.

Second, when we are feeling our lowest and darkest, know that God promises to be always present in our lives. God promises to walk with us and lift us. We are never alone.

Third, we are to be Easter people! After recognizing Jesus, Mary ran to tell everyone what she had witnessed. When she understood the truth, Mary became the very first evangelist in Christian history and we are called to do the same.

Paul in Acts 10:42-43 writes: *"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the One ordained by God as Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name."*

We are to let everyone know that God can and does live within us, giving us hope and courage, strength and faith!

When Mary recognized Jesus, she could cry out the words: "I know my Redeemer lives!"

And if there were tears remaining in Mary's eyes, they were tears of the utmost joy!