

John 20:10-18

Happy Easter! Surely, you would be surprised if I wished you anything other than a Happy or Blessed Easter. Or, if in wishing you a Happy or Blessed Easter, I appeared to be sad and gloomy

And that's why happy is the right word for Easter and that's why tears are not appropriate for the Easter Season. And that's why our Easter Theme asks, "Tears at Easter?" I. Only if we think our loss is permanent. II Only if we don't know our gain is eternal.

After Jesus died it's noteworthy to observe who provided Jesus with a decent burial. You surely know, it was not the disciples. Apparently, except for John who stood beneath the cross, alongside of Jesus' mother, the disciples had all run away, not sure if they were next on the hit list.

And so, much to the surprise of nearly everyone, two distinguished members of the Jewish High Court, Joseph and Nicodemus, requested permission from Pilate to bury Jesus. And, in Joseph's own, new tomb, they gave Jesus a proper burial. Watching all of this, also, were a number of women who had already decided to add some finishing touches of their own to Jesus burial once the Sabbath had ended.

Also, somewhat anxiously waiting for the Sabbath to end were some very nervous Jewish officials, the same ones who had asked Pilate to have Jesus crucified. For some time on Saturday, probably after 6 PM when the Sabbath ended, they had gone to Pilate, requesting permission to seal the tomb and station a guard before it. For, they said, "that deceiver said before he died, he would rise on the third day." And, while they did not believe he would rise, they wanted to prevent his timid disciples from stealing his body from the grave and giving others the impression he was alive from the dead. And so, with Pilate's permission, they made the tomb as secure as they could.

Isn't it interesting and instructive that Jesus enemies remembered his words about the resurrection on the third day whereas his friends did not remember them? For if they believed Jesus they would not have needed to further honor his dead body. They could have waited until the third day and then properly honored him alive from the dead. And yet, as God would have it, for the further strengthening of their faith, they would come to the tomb expecting to find him dead.

The women, early Easter morn, in their haste to get to the tomb, were just like we often are. They were half way there before they realized they had forgotten something important. "Who was going to roll away the stone?" Rather, however, than letting that small detail stop them, they simply went on, hoping, somehow, the stone could or would be rolled away.

Well, as you very well know, it was. For when they got within sight of the tomb, they saw the stone had been rolled away. It appears likely, seeing the stone had been rolled away, one of the women, Mary Magdalene, rather than rejoicing that rolling away the stone was going to be no problem, thought the worst. For, without going any further, she ran back to Jerusalem and informed Peter and John. “They have taken away the Lord and we don’t know where they put him.”

You know what happened next. Excitedly, Peter and John raced for the cemetery. John, perhaps because he was younger or in better shape, beat Peter to the tomb. However, John did not go in until Peter, arriving last, was the first one to enter the tomb. They saw the evidence: the grave clothes neatly folded, Jesus’ body missing from the tomb. Not knowing what to make of it all, Peter and John returned home.

Meanwhile, Mary who had returned, was left outside the tomb, weeping. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

Mary, it appears, was all alone in her grief. However, anyone who would have come upon her at the moment would surely have known about her sorrow. For Mary was not quietly weeping; her sorrow made a noise.

As if to convince herself all over again that she had reason to shed tears, through her tear-stained eyes, Mary looked again at where Jesus’ dead body should have been. And, when she did, she caught sight of two angels, shining bright, sitting at either end of where Jesus’ body had been.

Seemingly though it made little impression on her, even when they asked her why she was crying. Her reason seemed to make sense to her. “They have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have laid him,” Mary lamented.

In the blindness produced by her tears, she did not bother to ask them for help. They certainly could have told her what she needed to know, where the Lord’s body was, that He was in fact alive from the dead. But she turned away from them and as she turned around, she was aware of someone else standing behind her. His words to her, “Woman, why are you crying?”, were not enough. Thinking he was the gardener, politely, she asked him to tell her, if he had moved Jesus’ body to tell her where he had put it that she might go and get it.

There were certainly tears that first Easter, tears for Mary because she thought her loss was permanent. She had earlier been deprived of the living Jesus at his death. And now she fully

thought she had lost the dead Jesus as well. No wonder she wept, thinking her sad loss was permanent!

Remember how we cried, as children, when that last bit of candy was gone, not yet knowing where more could easily be gotten, thinking our loss was permanent? Remember the loss we felt as teenagers when we had lost a friend, thinking our loss was permanent and we would never again have such a good friend? Or remember our tears at the loss of a loved one? We may almost have been in total despair, thinking, again, that our loss was permanent. For in all these situations, and many more like them, when we have lost something earthly, if we think the loss is permanent, then not even Easter will dry those tears. However, if we know our real gain is eternal, if we know and trust the real message of Easter, how can there be tears at Easter, unless they are tears of joy and thankfulness?

A moment ago we heard Jesus speak to Mary without her recognizing who He was. That may surprise us after how often Mary must have heard Jesus speaking and surely would ordinarily recognize his voice. And yet it just indicates again how certain Mary was, expecting to find Jesus dead body and so she could respond to the risen Jesus as she did, treating him as if he were still dead. But not for long!

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

The one speaking to her was no unfamiliar or unfriendly gardener! This was her Lord. And she knew it; he caused her to know it when he, in familiar tones, simply pronounces her name, Mary.

Startled and soothed all at the same time, in her surprise, Mary lapsed into her mother tongue, Aramaic, everyday Hebrew, to call him, familiarly, Rabboni, teacher. Though her tears may still have been in place, running down her face, through her tears, she did not even have to see him clearly now to know it was he. She had the object of her desire; she had Jesus alive in front of her. Grasping him, she would never let him go again, never leave him out of her sight.

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

At times we may not have as clear a picture of Jesus as those early believers had though they sometimes forgot who he really was. Though he was fully and completely the Son of God, he dwelt among them as the true son of man he also was. He was by no means distant from them, but a real, warm, caring human being who treated them as his friends, his brothers and sisters.

And so it surely should not be thought to be inappropriate for Mary to try to hang on to Jesus. For, after all, Mary felt especially close to Jesus. For St Mark tells us, in his resurrection account, Jesus appeared first to Mary out of whom he had cast seven devils. Surely, someone so clearly

aware of Satan's bondage and the freedom Jesus had brought her could only feel close to Jesus, wanting to hold on to him and never let him go.

But, no, Jesus would not permit her, would not permit anyone, for now, to physically hold on to him, to detain him, keeping his physical presence among us on earth. His heavenly mission upon the earth was not quite finished yet. It would not be until he left the earth visibly, ascending to his father in heaven.

But though he was about to leave them, withdrawing his visible presence from them once again, this did not mean their gain had only been temporary, only for as long as their eyes could see him. Look at his words to Mary again and note them clearly so that with Mary we can dry our tears as Jesus shows us the gain he had made for us eternally.

Notice what Jesus told Mary, what she was to report to his followers, his brothers, he called them. I am returning to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

They say nothing is as thick as blood; brothers, when the chips are down, will stick together. And yet you remember hearing on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday what these brothers did when they saw the first drops of Jesus blood beginning to fall. They denied, disowned and departed from him. And yet, here, we hear Jesus calling these same men his brothers!

Because of the ways his brothers, his disciples had acted, if the heavenly father was to be their father, their God, someone would have to be a mediator between sinful men and a holy, offended God.

Jesus was that perfect mediator. When Jesus cried My God, My God, why have you forsaken me, he was feeling the full weight of bearing the sin of all the world. But when he also said, Father into your hands I commit my Spirit, he was announcing the victory he had won for all of us. And that victory, sin forgiven, death defeated, was announced for all the world to see when Christ was alive on Easter morning. Because of Jesus God is our father, God is our God.

Mary believed Jesus and because she did, Jesus dried her Easter tears. Because she knew the gain she had received from him was permanent, she could physically let go of him for now.

For us to know, with Mary that all our losses are only temporary, all our gains are eternal, we need to get rid of our tears. For with tears in our eyes we cannot see clearly what is right before our eyes. And surely, with tears in our eyes, we cannot see clearly into what is certain about the distant future.

For Mary, when tears filled her eyes, she did not recognize Jesus when he was standing right behind her. And so what was it which finally removed the tears from her eyes? Was it the presence of Jesus? No it was the sound of his voice, his words to her.

It is to be the same, still, for us today. No for us, even more than for Mary, to remove the tears from our eyes it is not going to be anything physical, no visible presence of Jesus. That's reserved for a far more glorious day. But, even now, for us to know that our gain is eternal, the Lord uses his Word, the Holy Scriptures.

That's why we need to hear the Word of God often, more than just on Easter Sunday. In fact, we might say, we need it even less today than at other times in our life. Whoever ran out of gas when their tank was full? It's when our tank is empty that we run out of gas.

And so this Easter Sunday it would be pretty hard for Christians not to be happy. But it's those other days, when the difficulties of life seem to overwhelm us, when the tears so easily flow, when we are inclined to think our losses are permanent, it's then that we need to see Easter gives us a gain that is eternal.

Tears for Easter, surely not! But may the news of Christ's victory over the grave make us see how any earthly loss is never permanent. May it bring us to trust our heavenly gain, thanks to Jesus Easter Victory, is eternal. May that, truly, dry our tears at Easter!