April 5, 2026
Easter SonRise
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
John 20:11-18
Jesus Lives To Wipe Away Your Tears

Whether being at the graveside of a loved one for the first time or visiting that site for many times after, such visits have one thing in common: tears. We're human after all. Yet, amid the tears comes a sense of connection and closure. Although our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus can't hear us any longer, visiting a graveside allows us, in a sense, to "talk" to them. That can bring about a sense of connection and continued closure this side of heaven.

So, imagine you are visiting the gravesite of a loved one. As you are drawing near, you notice something isn't right. The earth is disturbed. The tombstone is in shambles. You fear the worst. While grave robbing is very rare these days, you can imagine the turmoil you'd be in if that were to happen to a loved one's body or remains. Closure might be gone. The connection you sort of felt emotionally is perhaps severed. How horrible a situation. How increased the tears would be.

That's what it was like for Mary Magdalene as she approached the tomb for the first time. **"Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot."** She saw those angels, although as emotional and distraught as she was, it didn't even register to her that they were God's messengers for this special moment. Nor, did Mary really care that these individuals were there. All she noticed and held onto was the empty spot where Jesus' body should be. She wept, bawling because of a bad situation that just grew worse.

She didn't have any closure yet. She was there when the large stone was rolled across the tomb's opening. But, there wasn't time to properly anoint Jesus body. That would come following the Sabbath. Mary must have shed many tears into the Sabbath and all the way to tomb. But, those tears wouldn't compare to the tears that would plummet to the ground when she noticed Jesus' body gone on Sunday morning.

The only conclusion in Mary Magdalene's heart was that Jesus' body was gone. And, that was worst-case scenario to her. It was awful enough that Jesus died on the cross. It became worse when she couldn't help anoint the body right away. But, now that his body is gone, would she ever get closure? It was worst case scenario: never be able to say goodbye to Jesus again. The angels asked her, "**Woman, why are you crying?"** And Mary replied, **"They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him."** Tears and more tears because she truly believed she lost Jesus forever, losing even the chance to set eyes on his dead body.

But, was that really worst-case scenario? She didn't understand it, but had Mary Magdalene laid her eyes on Jesus' dead body and had she anointed his dead body, that would've been worst-case scenario. Why? Because that would mean the Son of God was still dead. Salvation would have been lost. No resurrection of the dead for those who had believed. Tears would never truly be wiped away.

Praise God that wasn't the reality of that morning. Hence, the angels' question. **"Woman, why are you crying?"** They weren't requesting information with that question. Instead, they were directing her to the reality that there was no need to cry any longer in that situation. Jesus was alive! Mary just didn't know it yet.

Her weeping continued as the gospel records for us, "**At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you**

are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'" Same question from Jesus that the angels asked. Same response from Mary Magdalene, hoping this gentleman could be of more help than the two individuals inside the tomb. Whether it was her emotional state that clouded her judgment and sight to recognize Jesus, or the fact she never saw Jesus in his glorified, exalted state yet, or if Jesus kept her from recognizing him, all that matters is she didn't know this was Jesus. Her only concern remained: where was Jesus' body? To Mary, that was the only thing that could dry her tears right now. Ongoing closure and ongoing connection in this way.

That's the only thing this world can offer. And, how ultimately sad that would be if that's all we had: never to have an actual conversation with a loved one again; never to lay eyes on a loved one again. How sad it would be if our only real connection and closure was graveside.

Tears would remain forever. Heartbreak would never go away. Never thinking clearly again because we'd always be consumed by the "what ifs." What if they were still with me? What if they didn't die so young? What if my last words were different? Such questions don't wipe away tears. And, they can distract from the beautiful truth which the angels and Jesus tried to turn Mary toward with their own question, "Why are you crying?"

God asks us the same question when we're tempted to despair because of death. "Why are you crying?" It's not an insulting question. It's not a question void of love, concern, or compassion. Rather, it's a question to remind us that crying can cease. I think it's powerful that in this question based upon the original Greek, the literal sense is, "Why do you *keep on* crying?" Tears will still come as you think of a loved one who has died. But, the truth of Jesus' resurrection will always wipe those tears away until they are ultimately removed forever in heaven.

We are certain of this wonderful truth because of the power of Jesus' word. "**Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').**" Mary lived out the truth Jesus had preached. **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."** (John 10:27) May we continue to live out that truth, too! When the worldly sight of death should distract us from the ultimate truth, may we keep doing what we're doing right now: listening to the voice of the living Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep only to take it up again. His voice tells us he is alive. His resurrection then wipes away our tears each time we listen to his voice.

Listen to your risen Savoir, dear family of God! Listen to his living voice found in the pages of Scripture as you read it yourself. Listen to his living voice as it is proclaimed by others just as Mary proclaimed it to the disciples at the end of our lesson. When tears well up in your eyes, listen to Jesus. Then, ask yourself, "Why do I keep on crying?" Don't ask it in a guilt-ridden way, but in a joyful sense. "Why should I keep on crying? My loved one has fallen asleep in Jesus. My loved one is safe with him. I will see my loved one again with my own eyes. How my heart yearns within me amid these tears which will be wiped away!"

Yes, dear sheep of the living Shepherd, Jesus' resurrection wipes away your tears because there is a greater, lasting connection coming. Your talks at the graveside will turn to conversations forever in heaven. Your closure is so much more than just knowing where a body or remains are. Your closure is knowing you get to see fellow believers again. That closure is an opening to a forever reunion at the feet of Jesus. We know our Redeemer lives. What comfort this sweet sentence gives. Amen.