

¹¹ But Mary [Magdalene] stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³ Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." ¹⁴ Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.

Text: John 20:11-18 A Easter 4-17-22 Job 19:23-27 1 Cor. 15:51-58 Ps. 96 Resp. Ps. 118
Hymns: 200 (1-4), 200 (5-8), 188, 199

TEARS ON EASTER?

Dear fellow believers in Christ, our risen and living Savior,

Jesus' enemies had Him put to death. As if that weren't bad enough, now it seemed that they had stolen His body. With such thoughts, "*Mary [Magdalene] stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'*" The angels knew something Mary didn't know, that Jesus had risen from the dead. But Mary should have known it, too. God had prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah would die, and that He would rise again. Job said, "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth*" (Job 19:25, my emphasis). For the Son of God to "*stand at last on the earth*" He would have to be alive "*at last*" – on Judgment Day. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah prophesied of Jesus' death: "*He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.*" Isaiah also prophesied of Jesus' resurrection: "*The LORD ... shall prolong His days*" (vv. 8, 10, my emphasis). Mary should have known from God's Word that Jesus would rise from the dead. Had she known it, she wouldn't have been crying and wondering where His body was.

The disciples had the same problem that Mary had. They all thought that Jesus was dead. After Jesus appeared to Mary and she told them that He had risen, Mark says that they didn't believe it (Mk. 16:10-11). Like Mary, the disciples should have known that Jesus would rise again. They had the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus' resurrection, too. On top of that, Jesus had told them Himself, "*All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again*" (Lk. 18:31-33, my emphasis). Mark says that like Mary, the disciples "*mourned and wept,*" thinking that Jesus

was dead (Mk. 16:10). Jesus' followers were very sad and confused and scared because of His death. They had truly believed that He is the promised Messiah. The eleven had left their former lives behind to be Jesus' disciples. All of them had centered their lives on Jesus and serving Him. Now that Jesus was dead, and they thought, gone, they didn't know what to think or what to do. And they were scared about what Jesus' enemies might do to them.

After Mary expressed her sorrow to the angels "*she turned around and saw Jesus standing there.*" At first, she didn't recognize Jesus. Before our text we learn that it was "*early, while it was still dark*" (Jn. 20:1). Mary was crying, and her tears blurred her vision. She thought Jesus was dead. She was looking for a dead Jesus, not an alive Jesus. Supposing Jesus to be the gardener Mary said to Him, "*Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.*" Then Jesus said to her, "*Mary.*" Mary had thought that this Man was a stranger. But when Jesus called her by her name, she knew His voice. "*She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which [means], Teacher).*" It was Jesus, alive again! Mary's tears stopped. Her profound sorrow was instantly turned into overwhelming joy.

Jesus told Mary, "*Do not cling to Me*" (from the original, "*Stop clinging to Me*"), "*for I have not yet ascended to My Father.*" Until He died, Jesus had been in His humble state in which He didn't always use all of His power as God. (That's how He could be captured and put to death.) As Scripture says, "*Being found in appearance as a man, [Christ] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*" (Philip 2:8). Now Jesus was in His exalted state. Scripture says that because Jesus humbled Himself to the point of dying for us on the cross, "*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name*" (Philip. 2:9). The former familiar relationship Jesus had had with Mary and His other followers could not continue. Mary couldn't hold onto Jesus and try to keep Him with her and the others on earth. The exalted Jesus had to ascend back into heaven with His Father.

Jesus was preparing His followers for His ascension, which would take place very soon. He told Mary, "*Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'*" God was their God and Father as His adopted children by faith. God is Jesus' God and Father in a different sense. Jesus is God's only begotten Son, two separate Persons, but one in essence, equal in power and glory as God. Now in His exalted state, Jesus would ascend back into heaven to rule over all people and things together with His Father.

Jesus let Mary and His disciples know that He would soon no longer be with them in His visible presence, walking and talking with them. Just before Jesus ascended He told them, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Mt. 20:28). Soon they would no longer be able to see Jesus and touch Him and hear His voice. But Jesus would always be "*with [them]*" in all of His power as God, watching over them and ruling over them and helping them. Jesus would strengthen their faith and cause them to grow in the peace He gives and in the joy of His salvation. We see in the New Testament epistles that that's just what Jesus did!

After Jesus rose from the dead He appeared to Mary, to other women, to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13ff.), to the eleven disciples, and, the Bible tells us, to “*over five hundred brethren at once*” (1 Cor. 15:6). Before Jesus’ ascension He made sure that His followers knew He had risen from the dead.

We have the whole Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, so we know that after Jesus died He rose again. Still, like Mary and the disciples, there are times when we don’t pay attention to what God’s Word says and end up causing ourselves much grief. But just as Jesus was there for Mary and His disciples and His other followers, Jesus is here for us. Jesus’ promise, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age,*” is also for us. As we hear, study, and think about His Word, Jesus is with us. We see Jesus in His Word with the eyes of faith. As we keep hearing and studying and thinking about His Word Jesus makes us grow in our understanding and faith, in the peace He gives, and in the joy of His salvation.

Jesus told Mary, “*Go to My brethren.*” When Jesus let His enemies take Him away, His disciples all deserted Him. Peter denied Jesus. Peter cried bitter tears over what he had done. Certainly he and the other disciples felt terrible over deserting Jesus. Now Jesus called them, “*My brethren,*” letting them know, “You are still My brothers. I am not angry with you. I have not rejected you. I have forgiven you.”

For the times we fail to stand up for our Savior and His Word, for the times we fail to listen to God’s Word and trust in Him and His Word, and for all of our other sins, Jesus died on the cross for us. When we confess our sins and guilt to Jesus, He forgives us. Jesus assures us, His “*brethren,*” “*Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven*” (Mt. 9:2).

Seeing their beloved “*Teacher*” and Lord alive again turned the deep sorrow of Mary and the disciples and all of Jesus’ followers into great joy. By the faith Jesus has given us, even though we can’t see Him, we know that He rose from the dead, and lives. And we know that with all believers we will see Jesus one day! Jesus says, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die*” (Jn. 11:25-26). “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (Jn. 14:1-3). So we say, “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*” (Job 19:25-27).

We’re told, “*Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.*” Mary had seen Jesus alive again! She had talked with Him. Jesus had told her to tell “[*His*] brethren” about it, which she joyfully did.

Tell people about Jesus and what He has done for you and for them by dying for our sins on the cross and rising again. Tell people, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*” (Ac. 16:31). Tell people that all of us who believe in Jesus will see Him one day in heaven, and live with Him there forever!

Jesus lives! Why weepest thou?
Why that sad and frequent sigh?
Christ who died our Brother here
Lives our Brother still on high,
Lives forever to bestow
Blessings on His Church below.

Jesus lives! And thus, my soul,
Life eternal waits for thee;
Joined to Him, thy living Head,
Where He is, thou, too, shalt be;
With Himself, at His right hand,
Victor over death shalt stand. Amen. (TLH #188:3-4)