

Reflection on the Scripture:

[[The video](#) of the reflection.]

On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene was on a mission. She was trying to do right by Jesus, to honor him for everything he had done during his life. She wanted to show how much his life meant to her, all the work and laughter and sitting down to meals with just anybody. She wanted to show her love for him as someone who had taught her something important about living a good life, in right relationship with God and with her neighbors.

But she had one overwhelming and frustrating problem. She couldn't find him. Where was he? She goes and recruits a couple of the band of twelve, Peter and the unnamed disciple. The Gospel of John is a founding document of a group that revered the unnamed disciple, so it was kind of a code word for them. Regardless of their names, it appears that after running to the tomb, the most those two disciples have for Mary is that they agree with her, Jesus is definitely missing. They go home and Mary is left weeping.

She's weeping out of grief, and frustration and fear and probably plain old emotional overload and exhaustion. We get that. We've all been there. The angels ask her why she's weeping. Jesus asks her why she's weeping. And she's perfectly clear. She's weeping because she doesn't know where Jesus is.

In the coming weeks and months, we're going to be weeping. From grief, frustration and fear. From emotional overload and exhaustion. We're going to want to do right by people we've lost. We're going to weep because some wonderful people who taught us a lot about living a life that is right with God and right with our neighbors died too soon.

And we're going to want to do right by people who have done so much during this pandemic, who have gotten us groceries or stocked the shelves or emptied the sharps bins in the hospitals or driven the ambulances or cleaned out the sewers. Six months from now, we're going to hear a story about the teams that cleaned every ambulance between calls, so they would be safe for the next person who needed them. We're going to hear stories like that and we're going to weep because there were so many people who were doing heroic things that we never knew about and we want to do right by them. But we don't know where they are.

In the coming weeks, we're going to find out more of what happened and what could have happened and what should have happened. We're going to get more data and we're going to process that data and there's going to be an awful lot of people who want to explain how they had seen it all from the beginning. And that will make us want to weep too. Because some of it will be true and much of it will just be people's egos desperate for stroking.

And somewhere in the coming weeks and months, we're going to ask Mary's question: "Where is Jesus?" When we are in the wilderness of grief, frustration and fear, emotional overload and exhaustion, we are going to ask, "Where is God?". Because what is the point of being a Christian, of being a believer, if we are going to stand weeping, feeling that God has left us when a virus was loose in the world and humans were doing what humans are especially good at – being rotten to one another.

Five centuries before that first Easter morning, Jeremiah reminded his people who had been defeated in war, lost everything including loved ones, and sent into exile in a foreign land, that *the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness* (Jeremiah 31:1). Jeremiah reminded a weeping people of God's promise that *Again I will build you, and you shall be built* (Jeremiah 31:4) and *the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit* (Jeremiah 31:5). Indeed, Israel is only a nation, only a people, because that is an outward expression of God's love. Israel does not and cannot exist in and of itself.¹ God said *I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you* (Jeremiah 31:3). That love does not and cannot cease, so the people of God's future remains assured.²

Easter isn't some kind of magic act, where a body comes popping out of God's top hat like the finale of a stage show.³ Easter is about the God we worship, who has been proving over and over again, that God's love is everlasting and never ending. Easter isn't about the resuscitation of a corpse; it's about the God who has loved us with an everlasting love all our days.⁴ Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, to celebrate that God's love freed us from slavery in Egypt, brought us safely to freedom and offered us grace during our time in the wilderness.

We sing our hallelujahs despite a world that is hardly inclined to sing and finds very little to sing about. We sing because we know that there is another way to run a world, a world where death is not the final word, where despair is not the winner, where human power and hierarchies are not thought to be inevitable and unchangeable. Like Jeremiah, we need to look squarely in the face of the world's ugliness and horror and hopelessness and shout, "Christ is risen!" because the God who raised Jesus from the dead loves us with an everlasting love and will always, always continue in divine faithfulness to us.⁵

¹ R. E. Clements, Jeremiah, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 185.

² Clements, 185.

³ John C. Holbert, "Easter Day, Homiletical Perspective, Jeremiah 31:1-6" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 355.

⁴ Holbert, 355.

⁵ Holbert, 357.

Like Mary, we weep in this world and we wonder where Jesus is. And then Jesus turns up. Calling our name. Speaking to us personally. Because that too is the kind of God we follow. Not a theoretical God. Not one who shows up on average most commonly in the following range of circumstances. Our God takes individuals lives and individual bodies seriously. So Jesus shows up in our lives and we don't recognize him because we think he came in the landscaping truck across the street. And maybe he did.

But once we recognize him, we want to grab onto him, even though we're not supposed to be touching anybody these days. We want to grab onto to him and keep him with us.⁶ That Easter morning, Mary was not the first person to ask where Jesus was. But always, always, when that question gets answered, Jesus says where he is going.⁷ So instead of trying to keep Jesus here with us, perhaps we should let him grab ahold of us and take us where he is going. We should let him take us with him so we can move mountains and banish fear, love our enemies and change the world.⁸ We should let him take us to that everlasting love, to the white-hot presence, to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God (John 20:17).

⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Unnatural Truth." *The Christian Century* 113, no. 10 (1996): 325.

⁷ Paul Sevier Minear, "'We Don't Know Where ...', John 20:2." *Interpretation* 30, no. 2 (1976): 133.

⁸ Taylor, 325.