

4-20-25 Sermon: “Showing Up and Weeping” – John 20:1-18

Each of the gospels tells the Easter story a little differently. But I like John’s version the best. Because at the center of John’s Easter story is Mary Magdalene, who shows up at the Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning for the sole purpose of having a good, hard, ugly cry.

I like this version of the story best because I, too, am an expert at showing up and weeping.

I have always been an excellent crier – not trying to brag, we all have our gifts. But for the last year and a half, I’ve been on different combinations of hormones that have turned me into a crying *superstar*! New Mexico may be in a major drought, but at the Casa de Ginna, the waters are *always* flowing! In fact, here is an instructive – but non-comprehensive! – list of things that have made me cry in the last week alone:

I dropped my salad.

I lost my phone.

I saw a dog.

I *found* my phone.

The Quickbooks Online bank feed started working again.

A friend texted me, “Happy Easter.”

In fact, in recent months, I’ve been reminding myself of that Tumblr that went viral about 10 years ago, “Reasons My Son is Crying” – do y’all remember that? Basically, it’s a dad who started posting pictures of his 3-year-old son having epic toddler meltdowns, along with the utterly inane *reason* that his son is crying in that particular picture.

I looked it up – the guy’s name is Greg Pembroke, and he’s actually turned the concept into a book – a collaborative effort of parents from around the world explaining why their children is crying.

Here are a few of the best ones:

I made him stop biting the cat.

He ate his peach; then he got mad that his peach was gone.

Her popsicle was cold.

(And, my absolute favorite:)

We were talking about something other than robots.

Truly, friends, the next time I see someone crying, I’m going to have to really fight the urge to go up to them and ask, “Excuse me, sir/ma’am, is this because we are talking about something other than robots?”

Mary Magdalene, of course, has good reason to cry. Just a week ago, her friend and teacher Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem in a parade of protest against the Roman Empire. But in the days since, he has been betrayed by one of his closest friends, carried off and detained under the cover of night, and publicly executed as a prisoner of the state.

And when she goes to his tomb early Sunday morning, to grieve and to come to terms with the reality of his death, she sees that the stone is rolled away, and Jesus’ body is gone. Talk about adding insult to injury. It’s not enough that Jesus has been crucified, but now someone has stolen his body, quite possibly to deface it. Layer upon layer of grief and indignity – by the time the angels ask Mary, “Woman, why are you weeping?” their question sounds tone deaf at best. Read the room, angels! Mary has plenty of reason to weep.

Maybe you know, on a personal level, how Mary is feeling. Many of us do. Recently, I’ve found myself struggling to answer that most common and innocuous of questions: How are you?

What comes out is usually something along the lines of, “I’m good, I’m fine...I mean, I’m ok...considering.”

Considering. Considering that the systems that hold our country together are being systematically dismantled. Considering that this week we witnessed *another* senseless mass shooting, this time at Florida State University, and yet no one with any power seems willing to address the gun violence issue. Considering that we are – all of us – walking on pins and needles, uncertain how to talk to our friends, family, and neighbors who disagree with us, unsure how to work together anymore for the common good of all people.

Both the angels and Jesus ask Mary the same question: “Woman, why are you weeping?” And it makes me want to turn around and say, “Seriously, guys? *Why* are we *weeping*? A better question might be, ‘Why *aren’t* you?!’”

I don’t know about you, friends, but I’m not really in the mood for Easter this year. I’m not yet ready for resurrection. The times we’re living through feel more like Good Friday than Easter Sunday; they’re more conducive to weeping than laughter and joy. We’re here – we’ve arranged our lilies, changed our paraments, we’re singing our Easter songs – but something in our Hallelujahs feels a bit more hollow this year, doesn’t it?

Which is why I’m grateful for Mary. Because Mary just shows up and weeps.

That really is her only purpose in coming to the tomb on Easter morning. In the other three gospels – in Matthew, Mark, and Luke – Mary comes with other women to anoint Jesus’ body with perfume and oil. But in John’s Gospel, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have already done the anointing. In John’s version, Mary has no task to accomplish, no reason for showing up except...that she is grieving. Maybe she couldn’t sleep, needed something to do to pass the hours. So she goes to Jesus’ grave and weeps.

When Mary discovers that Jesus’ body is gone, she goes back and tells the other disciples. Peter and the Beloved Disciple come running, and they find that it is just as Mary said. They go into the tomb to investigate; they try to understand what they are seeing. But they cannot make sense of it, so they go back home. Mary, however, stays to weep.

And because she stays, Mary witnesses resurrection. She meets the risen Jesus in the garden. She recognizes him when he calls her by name. This is it: the moment we’ve been waiting for, the event toward which all of salvation history has been leading, but it only happens because someone was brave enough – *vulnerable* enough – to show up and weep.

Friends, what if that really is all that it takes to witness resurrection? We show up to the places of grief and sorrow in this world. We stay awhile; we let our hearts break over all that is so broken. And then, we simply weep.

Recently, I’ve been introduced to the work of poet Ross Gay, who considers himself a student of joy. You can hear it in the titles of his books: *The Book of Delights*, *Inciting Joy*, *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*.

Gay says that often people challenge him, ask him why, with the world as it is, he spends his time writing about something as frivolous, irrelevant, and ostensibly rare as the feeling of joy.

Gay responds that it is dangerous to imagine that joy can only exist without sorrow or pain. Joy, he argues is “what emerges from how we care for each other *through* those things. What if joy,” he asks, “instead of refuge or relief from heartbreaks, is what [flows] from us as we help each other *carry* [those] heartbreaks?”¹

That is a kind of joy that I can get behind this Easter. That is a joy that starts by showing up at the tomb and weeping.

So friends, this Easter – this day of resurrection – look around for the tombs. Look around for those places of sorrow and brokenness, the griefs and injustice that make your heart break. Go there. Let us show up for the suffering. Let us show up for one another. Let us go to the tomb and be willing to weep.

For when we do, we can be sure that the resurrected Christ will meet us there. Amen.

¹ https://pres-outlook.org/2025/04/bearers-of-delight-lents-subversive-call-to-joy/?utm_source=Presbyterian+Outlook+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=61eae90b64-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_10_13_07_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b2a9be72d0-61eae90b64-514474439&mc_cid=61eae90b64&mc_eid=01a531f8d4