

Abiding Resurrection Peace

“*Why are you crying?*” Even if you had no idea what Mary had been through over the past 72 hours, would you *ever* such a question... ***especially while standing at the foot of a grave?*** The question just seems rather foolish, perhaps even insensitive or downright cold/callous, especially given the setting. Would you ever ask anyone why they were crying at a funeral or at the cemetery? How would you feel if someone asked you this question while you were grieving and trying to bury your loved one? In Mary’s case, it was even worse. All that’s happened over the past 72 hours is bad enough, but on top of that ***the grave is empty! As if it couldn’t get any worse!*** Given all she had just gone through, she probably hadn’t stopped crying for the past three days, and now with the grave empty and the body missing, she had the final little “push” she needed to break down right there in place.

Of course... knowing what we know, ***it’s not the question that’s foolish***, is it? Rather, the question is being asked, not just by the angels, but by the risen Lord Himself, ***because Mary is being foolish***. I know that sounds incredibly harsh, but hear me out. How many times did our Lord, over the course of three years, make clear that He would be betrayed, suffer, die, ***AND RISE AGAIN*** three days later? More than a few, right? That question—“*why are you crying*”—isn’t meant to belittle or condemn, but it is most certainly meant to serve as a repentant wake-up call. “*Why are you crying? Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not dead. He is risen... just as He told you.*”

You can picture Jesus Himself standing right in front of Mary, and yet her grief (and unbelief) has blinded her to reality. I say “unbelief” because she had not believed what her Lord had said about rising three days later. If she had truly believed those words, she wouldn’t have been going out that morning crushed in grief to anoint a corpse, right? If she had believed, especially that part about rising again three days later, she wouldn’t be crying buckets of tears in grief that the grave was empty, ***but weeping for joy that the grave was empty***... empty because the grave couldn’t hold the Lord of life.

And that leads us to a question that Christians have been asking/debating for centuries: ***Why did Jesus tell Mary to not cling to Him?*** Some point to the fact that Jesus says, “*because I haven’t yet ascended to the Father,*” and then immediately assume that the command to not cling to Him is because He still has unfinished business to tend to, and Mary would be holding Him back from accomplishing what He still needed to do. ***Really?! The grave couldn’t hold the Lord of life back, but Mary could?***

Folks: The answer is actually quite simple, and it all goes back to Mary’s tears of grief being changed to tears of joy upon finding out that her Lord was risen

from the dead. You see, the original Greek lets us know that it's not that Mary was *physically* hugging and clinging to Jesus that was the problem. The problem was that *she was spiritually clinging to the "old Jesus,"* to the way things were *before* the resurrection. She was clinging to the past, expecting/wanting things to go back to how they were before. With this command to not cling to Him, Jesus is letting her know that things are *very different* on this side of the tomb, not just for Him, but for all who hold fast in faith to Him.

He then tells her to go and tell His disciples the joyous Good News. *And she does.* I don't know if we realize how profound this simple act of faith—of physically letting go of Jesus and leaving Him—really is. Think about it. If your dearly-departed loved one stood resurrected before your eyes, would you let go? Would you leave their side? *No! You'd hold on to them as tight as you could for as long as you could!* And yet... Mary releases her hug on Jesus and goes. She is able to do this because things really are different now. Now she's going forth in a joy/peace that truly surpasses understanding. Because of the resurrection, she knows in/through faith, that she will *always* have Jesus with her. She will never be without her Lord of life again! She knows, in/through faith, that she will be able to hold fast to Jesus, henceforth and forevermore, in a far more "intimate" way than she ever knew before—*a truly blessed assurance and peace.*

And that's where I want to focus your attention in these last couple of minutes—on the blessed assurance and peace that is yours because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. By virtue of your baptism into Jesus' all-atoning death and victorious resurrection, *Mary's reality is your reality.*

Now, I know we could, at this point, go into the many and various ways that we do still doubt and don't always hold fast to what our Lord tells us, especially when suffering arises in our lives, and we reach a breaking point. *Fear, grief, anger, anxiety... they all have a way of making the faithful behave rather foolishly at times.* It happens, and it happens to all of us. There's not a person here who hasn't, when suffering has reared its ugly head in our lives, clung to the past and longed for how things used to be. Not one of us can say we've never shed tears of grief and anger over what we've lost, or how we wanted things to go back to how they were there before.

But this is where a more truncated version of that question comes back into play. *Why?* I don't ask that to condemn or belittle. What are we seeking? *Whom are we seeking?* What has our risen and victorious Lord already told us? *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* This is most certainly true, is it not? I mean... that's what we're celebrating today!

What else has He already told us? Answer: He's told us that He is always working all things for the good of those who love Him. He's told us that, like a

master metallurgist, He *refines* us in our faith, not out of anger, *but out of love*. He refines us to trust in Him above all things. I mean... who here has a *perfect* faith? Whose faith needs *no* improving/refining? We pray “*Thy will be done,*” and yet when His good and gracious will includes a bit of suffering or hardship (refining), we lament, longing for better/easier times, never taking into account that it is our loving Father’s will to not see us remain as we were in our sin and doubt, *but to refine us so that we would grow in our faith and love toward Him, putting our trust and hope in Him, not just sometimes, but all the time.*

He’s also told us about the reality of the resurrection, hasn’t He? He is the firstfruits of all who’ve fallen asleep in the faith. Christ lives, and so shall we! Death has no dominion over Him, and because we belong to Him through baptismal faith, death has no dominion over us. **Death does not and will not have the final say!** “*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*” ***Christ is risen... and so shall we.*** Alleluia! And as for the here-and-now, He’s told us—*promised us and assured us*—that He is with us always, even to the end of the age. “*I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace.*”

Dear Christians: Here is that peace! Here is the Prince of Peace and Lord of life Himself, right where He promises to be, now and to the end of the age. Here our risen and victorious Lord *calls us by name*; calls us to Himself to hold fast to Him, in the good times, the bad times, richer, poorer, in sickness, in health... *always*. Here is where our Lord reaches out to us and lovingly embraces us in the peace that is known only in His Word and Sacraments. “*I am with you always.*” Even as we make our way through this shadowy valley of death we call “life,” ***our Lord is with us.*** And through the working of the Holy Spirit in these means of grace, faith is able to understand that... and have a certain joyous peace, ***and live that joyous, Christ-centered peace, no matter the time, the place, or the circumstance.***

May this peace; the peace that we, with all the faithful, celebrate today; the peace that God has with us because of the death and resurrection of Jesus; ***be with you always.*** Guard it. Keep it. Hold fast to it—hold fast to Him—now and into all eternity, ***and be at peace every step of the way.*** Christ lives, the victory’s won!

AMEN