

## **“Why Are You Weeping?”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

April 9, 2023 - Easter Sunday

[Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18](#)

It was a great pleasure to watch our children racing around before this morning's service during the Easter egg hunt. They excitedly ran to and fro across our front and side yards looking for candy-filled eggs, and they ran with joy after finding one of the colorful prizes, picking it up, and securing it in their baskets. There was a whole lot of running going on here on this Easter morning.

As we heard in our gospel lesson from John, there was also a lot of running going on in Jerusalem on the first Easter morning. It was still before dawn when one of Jesus' followers, Mary Magdalene, made her way from where she was staying to the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid to rest just a couple of days before. But arriving at the tomb, though it was still dark, she could see that the great stone that sealed the tomb had been rolled away, leaving the tomb open, and she could see that Jesus' body was gone. And so she ran. She ran to where Simon Peter and another disciple were staying in Jerusalem, and then reported to them that Jesus' body had been taken out of the tomb and laid elsewhere. Upon hearing the report, these two disciples also began running frantically, with Mary, after catching her breath, likely also running back towards the tomb. We are told that Peter was not as fast a runner as the other disciple, who goes unnamed but is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and has traditionally been identified as John, who perhaps wrote or inspired the writing of the fourth, originally unnamed gospel, and so the beloved disciple arrives at the tomb first and looks into the tomb to find it empty of all but the linen cloths that Jesus' body was wrapped in when he was buried. When running Peter finally arrived at the scene, he went into the tomb to find not only the cloths that were wrapped around Jesus' body lying there, but the cloth that was wrapped around his head neatly rolled up and set aside. The gospel tells us that the beloved disciple followed Peter into the tomb and then believed. But believed what? Mary's report that Jesus' body was taken? Or that Jesus had risen? We are not told, but we are told that the disciples, went back to where they were staying.

Mary, however, after running back to the tomb, stayed there and wept. And while still weeping, she looked into the tomb to find not only Jesus' burial cloths and the cloth that was wrapped around his head, but two angels in white, sitting where Jesus body had been. The angels said to her, "Why are you weeping?" She gave to them the same report she gave to the disciples earlier, that Jesus' body had been taken away. We are left wondering if she knew these were heavenly messengers? Or if she thought that these two characters were somehow involved in the removal of the body? We don't know, but we are told that, still weeping, she turned around to find someone she assumed to be the cemetery gardener asking her, "Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?"

It was not the gardener, but the resurrected Jesus, who spoke to her, and though facing him, she did not recognize him. So she asked if he knew where the body of Jesus was so that she could take it away. It was only when Jesus said her name, "Mary!", that she turned again, this time turning in her understanding and turning from her sorrow, as she recognized that Jesus' body had not been stolen or moved by a gardener or angels, but that Christ had risen. He had risen indeed!

Jesus told Mary to go back to the other disciples to tell them the good news that he had risen. Being the first to see the resurrected Christ and the first sent by him to proclaim the good news to others, formerly lowly Mary, having turned from her weeping and her frantic running, returned to the disciples, perhaps running again and leaping with unbridled joy and faith, as the first commissioned Apostle.

Yes, there was a lot of running going on back on that first Easter Sunday. And on this Easter Sunday, there is still a lot of running going on, and not just by our happy kids as they seek and find eggs. Many of us are running around, in the frantic way of Mary, Peter, and the beloved disciple before Mary had her life-transforming encounter with the risen Christ. We are often running to and fro looking something meaningful, something hopeful, something healing in the midst of our own brokenness.

We run, and, like Mary, we weep. We weep for ourselves and we weep for others as they experience pain or loss. We weep for the world in all its brokenness. But in the midst of our running and our weeping, we are asked by the risen Christ, "Why? Why are you weeping? Why are you running?"

Christ is unbound by the tomb and unbound by his grave clothes. He has conquered sin and death and seeks to set us all free from all that wraps us up and keeps us bound. The unbinding way of Christ, the way he taught and lived of selfless love, the way that gives peace for the restless runners and hope to the sorrowful weepers, was resurrected along with Christ on Easter morning and is the way that Christ calls us to be on this morning.

But will we, like Mary, turn to face Christ, recognize Christ as we care called, and go unbound with joy on this good path of God's choosing? If we will, we will find ourselves transformed, becoming made more like our risen and unbound savior. And as we are doing God's work of love, the world around us will be transformed, remade as a world with more of God's peace. This is good news for us and for a weeping, frantically running world.

So let us go and proclaim the good news that Christ is risen, and let our love show that the way of Christ is risen, for Christ *is* risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.