

# Why Are You Crying?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Good morning.

My name is Denise Yan. I'm a member of the San Francisco Community Group and the Women Reading Women Book Group. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel According to John, chapter 18, verses 1 to 18 and 30 to 31 as printed in your liturgy.

Early on that first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him.

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in.

[ 1 : 19 ] Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.

The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed.

They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

[ 2 : 17 ] He asked her, Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, I have seen the Lord.

And she told them that he had said these things to her. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Well, happy Easter Christ Church. This is a really a day that I personally am giving thanks to God for because Easter 2020, I was like the only one here in the sanctuary.

[ 3 : 36 ] And that was unfortunately the year I became a televangelist, which I never ever wanted to be, but somehow became that. And then 2021 at Easter, we were able to gather, but we had a limited gathering to maybe 75 or 80 folks.

So here we are, Easter 2022, and we have a full house. And praise God, we have a choir today. How awesome is that? So some of you, you're new here, and you may not be aware that I am

about to go on a four-month sabbatical after next Sunday.

So if it's okay with you, I would like to take a picture of you all just to remember what you all look like.

Now, that was your Presbyterian face. I'd love for you to give me, now I give me your Pentecostal face. You can kind of wave your hands in the air like you just don't care.

Okay, that's awesome. Okay, thank you. So Andrew mentioned earlier the ancient Paschal greeting, the ancient Easter greeting in Greek goes *Christos Anesti, Elithos Anesti*, or in English, Christ is risen, he's risen indeed.

[ 4 : 51 ] Now, many churches follow that Easter greeting with what they call the great noise. And they get pots and pans and horns and tambourines.

And in our case today, we don't have those things, but we do have keys, and I want to encourage you to take out your keys. You can clap with your hands. You can bang on the pews in front of you. Some of you have been given cowbells, and that was probably the worst mistake I've made today in giving out cowbells. But we are going to practice the great noise of the ancient church.

So I'm going to say Christ is risen. You're going to say he's risen indeed. And then we're going to make some noise, okay? Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Christ is risen indeed. Woo!

There you go. I love it. I love it. Now, don't get too excited. Some of you I know are guests here today, and you're like, okay, Christians are weird.

[ 6 : 05 ] I knew they were weird, but now I really know they're weird. And what's up with all this excitement? And some of us are here maybe exploring Christianity, and we come with questions. You know, what happened on that first Easter Sunday morning?

And I hope to, over the next few minutes, just give a historical account as best I can for what it is that energizes the irrepressible enthusiasm of the church, and what it is that is energizing this unshakable joy that Christians have.

And we're going to do that through the Gospel of John this morning. We've been looking at this as a church since Christmas, and we come now to the climax. And what I want to help you see today through John chapter 20 is that Easter is nonsense.

Easter is nonsense without the evidence and the encounters and the effects. That Easter really is a nonsensical message. It's something we shouldn't be preaching without the evidence, the encounters, and the effects.

So let's begin with Easter is nonsense without the evidence. Starting in verse 1, we read, This is a brave woman.

[ 7 : 29 ] She's come early in the morning to this tomb where they had laid the body of Jesus on Friday. And she's here because she loves Jesus. But she's surprised. She's surprised to find this large, heavy stone that the Romans had placed at the entrance of the tomb rolled away.

And then we read in verse 2 that she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, which is John, the writer of this Gospel. The one that Jesus loved. I love that self-description.

And she said, Now, what is Mary's first thought? Does she come and say, I've seen a resurrection. Christ has won a victory. He's defeated death and meaninglessness. He's conquered over sin and evil. No, she's not looking for a resurrection. No one in the story is looking for a resurrection.

She says, They, the Romans or the grave robbers, they've taken the body of Jesus. They've put his corpse somewhere else. And we, the women, the three or four other women we know about from the other Gospels, we don't know where he is.

[ 8 : 34 ] No one is looking for a resurrection. First century Jews believed that the resurrection would come at the end of time for all the people of God. But absolutely no one thought that this would happen to one person in the middle of history.

That's just an odd, outlandish, unimagined, unheard of event. Well, hearing the news of Mary Magdalene, Peter and John start running toward the tomb.

And what do they find when they get there? What do they find when they step inside? What's the evidence that they see with their eyes? Well, interestingly, John points us to three verses.

He describes these grave clothes of Jesus. In verse 5, he says, John saw the linen cloths. And in verse 6, Peter saw the linen cloths.

And then in verse 7, he says that they saw the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head, and the cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Why is there such a focus on Jesus' burial wrappings?

[ 9 : 38 ] Well, the reason is that the shape and the position of these grave clothes led them to conclude that this body had not been stolen, but that something else had emptied that tomb.

And I want to help you imagine this morning the evidence that Peter and John saw with their eyes. And if you go back to John 19, verse 39, it says that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, they came and they brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds worth, and they took Jesus' body, and the two of them wrapped it with the spices in strips of linen.

Now, that's a vast amount of precious ointments and spices, far more than is normal or necessary. And these liquid spices would soon harden, and they would cause the cloth wrappings to become encrusted, like a cocoon around the body of Jesus, this tight, solid covering, this armor sort of encasing his corpse.

Now, if you've ever broken a bone and had that bone set in a cast, you know that you have to have that cast cut in order to remove your arm or to remove your leg.

And Peter and John, when they came in, it says they saw the linen cloths lying there, undisturbed, uncut, in the shape of Jesus' body, and yet they were empty.

[ 11 : 10 ] And they saw this twisted, turban-like head wrapper as if Jesus' head had somehow just slipped out of it. Now, I've put a few slides here.

I don't know if we can pull those slides up, but no one had ever really shown me these pictures. But this gives you a little bit of a sense of what convinced them that this body was not stolen, but that mysteriously the body of Jesus had passed right through these grave clothes.

You can show the next slide as well. Something like this is what they saw, that these linen clothes just lay like an empty cocoon from which a butterfly had emerged.

And they saw with their eyes this powerful evidence that no human hands had touched the body.

And John, the writer of the gospel, he says in verse 8 that he saw this and he believed.

He believed what? What exactly did he believe? He believed that the process of death and decay and dissolution had in some extraordinary way been reversed.

[ 12 : 20 ] He came to believe that there was a power present in this particular tomb that brought about a revolution in human life.

And that instead of the normal life-to-death process that all of us too painfully know, now there was a process that got reversed from, not from life to death, but from death to life.

And that God had said yes to Jesus, that he had said yes to Jesus and all that he had been and all that he had done. And in God saying yes, Jesus' body had somehow transformed, had somehow emerged from this tomb in living form.

And that what Jesus had said at the tomb of his friend Lazarus was true. Now people in the 21st century often ignore evidence that comes to us from the people who were actually there in the 1st century.

And we judge the witness of Peter and John. We dismiss what they had to say. We don't really want to hear from them. We want to hear from other people and what they think happened because they must be nearer to the truth than the people who were actually present.

[ 13 : 51 ] That doesn't sit well with me. I want to know what the people saw with their own eyes.

And I find that this detailed evidence is extraordinarily compelling.

Maybe you're here today and you're exploring Christianity. And I want to ask you sincerely, have you open-mindedly? And have you thoroughly examined all the evidence?

Beginning with Exhibit A and all the other evidence there is for us that Christ is risen from the dead.

And are you willing to consider that the most plausible historical explanation for these Easter accounts, the most plausible explanation for the dramatically changed lives of these disciples who would die for this message of the resurrection, the most plausible explanation for the Christian church exploding over the next three centuries under the dominance of the Roman Empire, that the most plausible explanation for these events is that this actually happened the way that the Gospels and the New Testament report that it happened.

If Jesus' body passed through those strips of linen that were just lying there undisturbed, and if he is somehow alive today, is it possible that you are not so much searching for Jesus, but that he is in fact searching for you?

I want us to think together about that today, to seriously consider that Easter is nonsense without the evidence. And also that Easter is nonsense not only without the evidence, but also Easter is nonsense without the encounters.

[15:46] Easter is nonsense without these encounters that are given to us. And the end of the Gospel of John records four distinct reappearances of Jesus. We get this encounter with Mary on Easter morning that we're going to talk about.

We get this encounter later in the evening with the ten disciples, and then later the next week with Thomas, who missed that first meeting. We're going to talk about that next Sunday.

We get this reappearance of Jesus with a whole group of fishermen at the Sea of Galilee, which you can read about in John 21. And all the other Gospels give us six other reappearances of Jesus, and all told in the New Testament we have 13 total post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

We're told in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to a large crowd of about 500 people all at the same time. We're told in Acts chapter 1 that Jesus appeared to the apostles over the next 40 days where, he gave many convincing proofs that he was alive, and he spoke to them about the kingdom of God.

He spoke to them about the scriptures and all that had just happened in his life, death, and resurrection. But what's interesting to me is that in the providence of God, the first person to whom the Lord revealed himself was a woman.

[17:07] That the first person that Jesus commissioned to proclaim the Gospel of the Resurrection to other people was this woman. We call Mary Magdalene, who was the apostle to the apostles.

And this was a deliberate, implicit affirmation of womanhood, because you may be aware that women in the first century were not trusted as reliable witnesses.

But, friends, Jesus gets the credit for changing all that. Amen? So, starting here with Mary Magdalene, we actually can go back in Luke chapter 8, we learn about the circle of women who Jesus cured.

He cured them of their diseases and their demons, it says. And this circle of women became part of the larger circle of Jesus' disciples, going around on his ministry tours. And this little band of women, they were actually bankrolling Jesus, it says.

They were giving him money and they were giving him practical support. And Mary is part of that group. And Mary had, it says, no fewer than seven evil spirits before she met Jesus.

[18:11] But Jesus powerfully liberated her from whatever her past happened to be. He liberated her and set her free. And we know that Jesus has nicknames for his disciples, right?

He calls Peter Rocky. You know this? He calls James and John the Sons of Thunder. Well, you can think about Mary as Mary from Magdala, which is her hometown.

Or you can think about her as Mary the Magdalene, which is a word that means the tower. So you got Rocky, the Sons of Thunder, and the tower, right? Here is this strong, powerful, towering figure who's known for her devotion to King Jesus.

Mary Magdalene. But on this Sunday morning, she is not feeling like a tower. She is, in fact, crushed in spirit and brokenhearted.

It says in verse 11 that now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. In fact, it says in the Greek that she was weeping and wailing. We have quite a contrast here between this lamenting, despairing disciple and this resurrected, triumphant Lord of life who happened to be here in the garden together.

[19:28] We have here this risen, victorious Lord who's able to dry her tears, and yet she does not know who he is. And maybe that describes a few of us today.

I think that this weeping Mary Magdalene is a picture of the hopeless sorrow of our world. I think she's a picture of the disillusionment and the nihilism that defines this decade.

Think about it. Mary saw the violence and the brutality of the empire that just destroyed Jesus. And she's experienced the cold, cruel finality of burial.

And now she's come, she's been denied the opportunity to pay her last respects to Jesus, and she fears that his body is gone forever. And two times in the story, she's asked, Why are you weeping? Why are you weeping? But isn't the answer obvious why she's weeping? We live in a sad world. We live in a world that's full of pain and misery.

[20:41] And Mary weeps because she is in fact alone. Mary weeps because she's abandoned in her despair. She weeps because she's separated from the only one who's ever truly understood her and loved her.

And she weeps because she no longer has a savior who can deliver her from her bondage and who can give her a new life. She's weeping because she's thinking, How can I face the future without

him?

She's in deep darkness and deep anguish. But you know the reality here, and the good news here, is that Jesus has not left her.

That Jesus is in fact risen. That Jesus is right there in that cemetery. If only she knew. This past Wednesday, Catherine and I were having breakfast with Brian and Seung-yeon Lee, who, as many of you know, are dear friends over these last 16 years at Christ Church and beloved members of our church family here.

And they tragically, suddenly, unexpectedly, inexplicably lost their teenage son Isaac in November. And we're talking with them about the pain of this event in their life and the grief that will indelibly mark their days for the rest of their lives.

[ 22 : 16 ] And as we were talking about this, they made the comment. They said, You know, we don't know how you get through this without the mercies of God and without the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

And they talked about how meaningful it was to them to know that Isaac is with the Lord and that one day they're going to see Isaac again because of the hope of the resurrection.

Now, my question is, how did they get there? And how does Mary move from being in a place of despair to being in a place of hope?

How does she move from heartbreaking sorrow to soul-stirring joy? We're told in verse 14 that she turned around and she saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

And he asked her, Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? And thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.

[ 23 : 21 ] And again, it's revealed to us here that it's possible to be in the presence of the living Lord and yet to not realize that he's with you and to not realize that you are in fact with him and that he's speaking to you.

But Jesus helps Mary out and Jesus helps us out as well. And that's why Jesus says to her in verse 16, he says, Mary. He just speaks her name and he says, Mary.

Mary, the one who created her, the one who redeemed her, the one who had given her a new identity, now speaks her name in a fresh way.

And Jesus had already told us in John 10 that I am the good shepherd and I call my sheep by name and they know my voice. And when this good shepherd speaks Mary's name and she hears his voice, Mary, Mary, she turns around and she has the privilege of being the first person to see, to really see and to really hear and to really speak with the risen Lord.

Mary Magdalene is the first person to encounter the reality, the someone, the person who is more powerful and more final than death.

[ 24 : 45 ] Can you imagine what this did for her? It filled her with love and joy and peace. It must have taken all of her doubts and removed them, all of her fears and allayed them.

It must have given her a confident assurance that Jesus is risen from the dead. She must have had now in this moment a deep, unshakable serenity in knowing this conquering Lord.

Now, Mary Magdalene's encounter is unique because here she stands at the center point and the turning point of human history. But her experience, I think, is analogous for us because a Christian person is someone who has encountered the resurrected and living Jesus.

You've heard him speak your name by the Holy Spirit in your heart saying, Jonathan.

And you've turned to him. You've turned to the one who died for you. You've turned to the one who won a victory over death and sin for you. And in that turning, you've been filled with hope. Filled with hope that one day you too will have a body like Jesus' body.

[ 26 : 04 ] Filled with hope that one day he will make the world new. Filled with hope that one day he will set what's wrong to right. And he will make all that's sad come untrue.

And he will wipe all the tears away from our eyes. Amen? Amen? Have you heard Jesus speaking your name?

Because like Mary Magdalene, who had this direct personal relationship of love and trust with her living Lord, we too can have all of our darkness and all of our death and all of our despair filled with the light and the life and the love of this conquering Christ who speaks our names.

And Easter really is nonsense without that. Easter's nonsense without the evidence. It's nonsense without these encounters. And finally, Easter is nonsense without the effects.

And we'll just spend our last few minutes talking about the effects. Because here we have the cause, which is the resurrection. But then we also have the effects, which is resurrection faith. [ 27 : 23 ] We have the originating event, which is the living Christ. And then we have the implications of that event, which is a living faith. And we see that in verse 16.

Jesus said to her, Mary. And she turned toward him and cried out in Arabic, Rabboni, which means teacher. And Jesus said to her, do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. And I assume in this moment, like this is the bear hug to end all bear hugs.

That Mary has wrapped Jesus up and she's clasping to his arms, maybe to his legs. And she's like, I am never, ever, ever, never going to let you go, ever. And in one sense, Jesus is welcoming the towering strength of this woman, the towering strength of her love and devotion.

And yet while he welcomes it, he also gives her this firm negative. Don't hold on to me. Now, no writer of fiction could have come up with this because this is just strange, right?

[ 28 : 43 ] This is just odd. Like, I'm so puzzled. Later this evening, Jesus is going to come to his disciples. He's going to say, see, here's my hands and see my side.

And the next week, he's going to go to Thomas and say, Thomas, handle my wounds. And yet, why does he invite the apostles to handle him and here tell Mary not to hold him?

What's the difference between handling and holding, right? Well, handling is all about verifying that Jesus is, in fact, not a ghost. And this is not a hallucination.

Go ahead, touch me, and see. That's what handling is about. But holding is something different.

Mary wants to hold on to Jesus because she wants to resume the old relationship with her teacher and go back to this familiar friendship that she had enjoyed where they walked and talked and ate and prayed together.

But Jesus is saying, nope, you can't hold on to me like that. And I think he says this for three reasons. First of all, you can't hold on to me because the me you're holding has been raised from the dead.

[ 29 : 53 ] This me is a recreated, transmuted me into a new and glorious body that's been invested with undreamed of powers.

That's no longer subject to pain or disease or aging and death. This me that you're holding on to has actually gone into death and out the other side.

Into a new creation, into a new world, into a new life out beyond where death has been defeated and life in all of its fullness has begun.

You can't hold on to that. Reason number one is the resurrection. You can't hold on to me. Reason number two is the ascension because Jesus says, you can't hold on to me.

I'm about to ascend to my father. In other words, I'm about to be enthroned in heavenly majesty and exalted at God's right hand. Where I'm no longer going to be the humiliated Jesus of Nazareth.

[ 30 : 52 ] I'm going to now be the exalted Christ in glory. So don't cling to me. Don't try to keep me or possess me and don't be overly casual with me or too familiar with me because the proper place of all people from here on out is to fall in your face before the throne of the extended king of glory.

Don't hold on to me because the me has been resurrected and the me is about to be ascended.

And also, don't hold on to me because of the mission I have for you. That's the third reason Jesus gives is that this old relationship of teacher-disciple has now changed into a new relationship of king and ambassador.

That Jesus is king and therefore you, Mary, you're my ambassador. Verse 16, don't hold on to me.

Verse 17, don't hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my father and your father to my God.

God and your God. Mary has a new relationship with the Lord and therefore she has a new relationship with other people.

Jesus says, let go of me so that you can go to others. And that's exactly what this apostle to the apostles does. She's bold in taking this message of the new creation back to the old creation where she knows she's going to sound stupid.

[ 32 : 23 ] She knows she's going to look foolish. In fact, we're told when she goes in Luke 24, it says that they, the apostles, they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like utter nonsense.

But she went anyway because Jesus told her to go. You see, up to this point in the gospel, Jesus has spoken about God as the father, the father who sent me or my father.

And he's called his followers, disciples, servants, and friends. But the resurrection has changed all of that.

And now he sends Mary to these men who denied him and deserted him his hour of greatest need. And what does he call them? My brothers.

What a word of mercy. What a word of forgiveness. What does he call their God? He says he's your father. And Christ Church, that is what the resurrection does.

[ 33 : 29 ] A new reality has sprung up. A new relationship has become possible that God, who is Jesus' father by nature and by right, can become our father by grace and by adoption, that we can know him as his children, as his beloved daughters and sons.

In Christ Church, you are not only the receivers of that good news, but you are the king's ambassadors of that good news. You are the king's diplomats to your networks and to your neighborhoods, to your friends and your colleagues, to tell them that this is the way the world now is.

And Mary gets it in verse 18. Mary went to the disciples with the news, I've seen the Lord, and she told them that he had said these things to her.

And that's the effect of the resurrection, is a resurrection faith that invites people to learn with us about the evidence and about the encounters of people who've actually seen the living Lord and to say to them, Jesus not only died for you, but he's alive, and you can come and get to know him too and discover what we've discovered about this unbelievable reality of being the children of God. Christ Church, Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and he's launched a new creation where all is forgiven, all is remade, and all is reborn.

[ 35 : 08 ] So let us join in this project and become a resurrection people. Let us be a people of life for a world that's still in death. And let us love this world and the people around us with the kind of love that caused Jesus to give his life for the world.

Let us go out and celebrate today God's victory over death, and let us commit ourselves afresh to follow Jesus in his mission of giving life to this world.

Amen? In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. So I want to invite our choir to come back up, and as they're coming, I'll grab my cowbell and my picture of Christ Church.

And I want to just say as they're gathering up here a word about our Easter offering. If you have not yet heard about this or had an opportunity to give, our special mercy offering today is going to help people who've been torn apart and their lives have been torn apart by the war in Ukraine.

And we're supporting a church in Kiev. The pastor there, Sasha Stripak, his family has actually fled the country, but he's there helping people around the capital, and we're sending money to their church, Alma's church, and also we're sending money to West Christian Fellowship in Warsaw, who's been helping to re-house people and help them get settled, women and children and the elderly and all kind of vulnerable people.

[ 36 : 51 ] And we're sending money directly to these groups. And you can use our QR code that's on our liturgy here if you want to scan that with your phone, or you can go on our website and click our Give tab, or you can just write a check that says Easter Ukraine offering.

And all these funds will go directly to them later this week after we've had a chance to gather these things up and to bless them and let them know that we're praying for them, that our hearts are with them this Easter.

So with that, let's pray this prayer, and let's offer not only these special gifts, but all of our time, our talents, our treasures, and our lives to God.

Almighty God, we marvel at the gift of your Son, Jesus. We're astonished at your power in raising him from the dead. We're amazed at your love in lifting him once again unto yourself.

We pray that you receive our gifts now as symbols of our love. of our participation in the grandeur of salvation through your Son, and of our readiness to commit these resources to your work in the world.

[ 38 : 02 ] We pray in the name of Jesus, the risen Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. ... Thank you.