

I love the Easter story in the Gospel of John. It captures the emotion of that first Easter morning in a unique way, and perhaps a way that speaks to us today.

The story begins early on Sunday morning, when Mary goes to the tomb where they had laid Jesus on Friday. She goes fully expecting to find the large stone in place and Jesus' body lying there, wrapped in linen clothes, just as they had left it.

But when she arrives, the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty. Jesus' body is gone.

Assuming the worst, she returns to Jerusalem and reports back to the disciples. And then, with Peter and John, Mary returns to the tomb. And when Peter and John leave, Mary stays. And Mary begins to weep.

The other resurrection narratives tell of the women's perplexity, excitement or terror. But here, the writer depicts grief, which isn't exactly what we associate Easter morning with.

But, I think, it makes sense. On Friday Mary watched her friend be crucified at the hands of the Romans. And now, as she stands at the empty tomb, perhaps she feels like those same people had not only killed him, but what wiped away every trace of him.

And so, the missing body is catastrophic for Mary. And it crushes her. And so, she weeps.

Mary's weeping testifies to the darkness. A darkness that we know all too well...it's the "would have been," "could have been", or "should have been" moments in our lives.

But then Mary's weeping is interrupted. Two strangers, sitting on the large rock, say, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Mary blurts out her answer, but before the two strangers can respond, Mary turns away, this time to find another stranger in front of her, whom she assumes is the gardener.

This stranger asks her for a second time, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Assuming he is the gardener, Mary speaks her last hope, and begs him to tell her where the body is, so that she can put it in a better place.

The gardener doesn't respond, and so Mary turns away, but as she walks away, Jesus simply calls her name, "Mary." And it stops her in her tracks. She turns, and now she sees that the gardener is in fact the risen Christ.

This is the turning point in the story. Nothing makes sense and Mary is overwhelmed by grief up until the moment when the risen Christ speaks her name.

“My teacher,” she cries, and reaches for him. In that moment, everything changes.

What I love about the gospel of John is there is room, even in the joyous resurrection, for mourning and tears. And perhaps, this year, we need to know that even our tears have a place in the Easter story. So, wherever you are, and however you feel, know that Christ is still risen, and Christ is still calling us by name. I pray that in this Easter season, we may find reason to have hope and to celebrate, even with our tears.