

## ***Why Are You Crying?***

Scripture and Sermon for Easter 1A/Earth Stewardship Sunday, April 24, 2011

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### **Pastoral Prayer**

(Helen Nelson)

Ever-creating God, we rejoice this day in the newness of life made possible because of Christ's resurrection. In the beginning, by your very word, all creation was spoken into being. But that which you have pronounced as good has been damaged by the ones you trusted to care for it. We have harmed others. We have harmed creation. We have harmed ourselves.

We pray for all who are hurting because of us. Forgive us our sins and help us to be the good caregivers you commanded us to be. Empower us to speak and act on behalf of the world you created that we too may call it good.

In the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus showed us at his baptism our need for repentance; show us how to restore polluted waters that you created to be cleansing and refreshing.

In the wilderness of temptation, Jesus refused to turn stones into bread; help us to resist the urge exploit rock and mineral resources in ways that render the earth unsuitable for food production.

From the mud of the earth, Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth; help us to respect the bio-cultures of the soil so that it may nourish diverse eco-systems to sustain a vital healthy planet.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus inhaled the fragrance of flowers as he awaited death; enable us to tend the garden you have entrusted to us that we may enjoy its beauty and that we may experience the fullness of life on earth.

In the name of the risen Christ, who sustains all who are faithful. Amen.

### **Scripture: John 20:1-18 NIV**

<sup>1</sup> Early on the 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. <sup>2</sup> 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!"

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did

not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup> 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."<sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are 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."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

<sup>17</sup> 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 your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> 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.

### **Sermon: Why Are You Crying?**

In many denominations, the Sunday after Earth Day is observed as Earth Stewardship Sunday. This year that happens to coincide with our observance of Christ's Resurrection, or Easter. The fact that Good Friday coincided this year with Earth Day, which falls on April 22<sup>nd</sup> each year, has not gone unnoticed by Christians of various denominations. Several websites featured quotes this month from denominational leaders suggesting Christians consider the degradation of the earth as they reflect on the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday. It seems to me that to meditate upon the suffering of others and of all creation as part of the observance of Christ's passion is well within the spirit and scope of Christ's ministry of justice, as expressed in Matthew 25:40: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Among clergy and laypersons there exists a dilemma as to how to observe these special days when they coincide as they do this year. At a Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition green team rally last month where I was to deliver the closing prayer, members of local congregations voiced their frustration that their pastors had not been active in preaching on environmental stewardship and eco-justice.

I tried to explain to them that many clergy, such as myself, preach from Bible passages arranged in a three-year cycle in an attempt to organize worship in an orderly manner. I also told them that some pastors have been taught always to craft sermons based on the scriptures for the day, not based on social issues or non-Christian special days, such as Earth Day or Memorial Day. My personal approach, I explained to them, has usually been a compromise that involves preaching as directly from the planned scripture passages as I can, weaving the social issue or special occasion into the pastoral prayer or benediction.

Given the dire condition of the environment and the urgent need to combat climate change, my response seemed pretty lame to them. I have to say, at that moment it seemed a little lame to me, too. So here I am on Easter morning grateful for an opportunity to share the good news of the resurrection in a way that I hope will be faithful to the scriptures we cherish while at the same time offering a message of hope for all creation.

John's gospel account of Jesus' resurrection gives us a glimpse into the emotional response of Mary Magdalene following the death of Jesus and upon finding his remains to be missing from the empty tomb. She weeps as she stands at the entrance and the angels sitting on the stone where his crucified body had lain ask her, "*Why are you crying?*" She turns around as she senses a man she assumes to be the gardener to be standing behind her and he asks her, "*Why are you crying?*"

If we have ever read or heard the story before, we cannot help but know why Mary is crying. Whose eyes would not be moist standing at the gravesite of a friend or family member? Who wouldn't weep to see a loved one's burial place apparently vandalized? Who wouldn't cry at the sight of such desecration?

For the Jews in Bible times, proper burial was of vital importance. It still is so today. While a few nonreligious Jews may opt for cremation, the majority of Jews still choose a traditional Jewish burial. In fact, I recently heard Rabbi Jonathan Rudnick of Jewish Community Services state that having a proper Jewish burial is so important to most Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, that members of the Jewish community contribute to a fund that pays the burial expenses for any Jew who wishes to be buried and dies without the means to pay.

The integrity and purity of the body is a foundational teaching of Judaism, as the detailed laws and ordinances outlined in the Old Testament indicate. The careful preparation of human remains without embalming is part of a plan for maintaining ritual purity even after death. Today, we may recognize these more natural burial practices as one expression of God's plan for a sustainable creation. Interestingly, a few cemeteries now offer green alternatives for anyone who, like the Jews, prefers not to be embalmed, and wishes to have their remains to be buried in an unmarked grave in a forest setting. While it won't solve all the earth's problems, it is one option for becoming a little greener, literally.

John's gospel also tells us (in John 3:16) that God values the body, the physical world, all of creation, so much that he sent his son to die for it. Moving from the realm of Spirit, or non-matter, God took on physical form and stepped into the very real and historical human person called Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout his life and ministry Jesus provided care to the bodies, as well as the souls, of others. He taught them spiritual truths using stories about birds and flowers, sheep and trees. He gave them fish and bread. He turned water into wine for them. He healed them of various diseases and injuries. He even brought them back to life after they had died. John said that whoever believed in this divine-human Son of God would live forever.

We have been taught that salvation is for the human soul, and surely it is. The resurrection of Jesus we celebrate today is evidence of the hope we have in him. Yet, that is not the full promise of scripture; there is more good news. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:20 that we are not

alone in our hope of receiving the promise of redemption: *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

Although we are the ones who have corrupted creation, we have been offered the gift of grace. If we repent and believe, we will be saved. True repentance leads us to become the good stewards of creation God always meant for us to be. The grace we receive is the grace we extend to our brothers and sisters in the human family and to all of creation. Surely the grace God grants so generously to the repentant sinner is sufficient for the ones we have sinned against.

*“Why are **you** crying?”* Do you weep with remorse because of the guilt and fear and shame you’ve stored up all these years? Don’t you know that an angel rolled away the stone?

*“Why are **you** crying?”* Do you weep with grief because you fear that death will separate you forever from the ones you love? Don’t you know that Jesus is risen from the dead?

*“Why are **you** crying?”* Do you weep with loneliness because you feel abandoned by everyone and isolated by the circumstances of your life? Don’t you know that Jesus is standing right behind you?

*“Why are **you** crying?”* Do you weep with sorrow because you’ve been rejected, disrespected, unrecognized, or unappreciated? Don’t you know that Jesus is calling your name?

*“Why are **you** crying?”* Do you weep with despair because you believe that the damage is done, it’s too late, and there is nothing left but to give up? Don’t you know that you have seen the Lord?

*“O Mary, don’t you weep.”* O my dear ones, if ever you must cry, let your crying include a cry of praise to the Lord. Cry out in song; let all creation sing a song of praise to our God. Amen.

## **Invitation**

Please pray with me, “Dear God, I confess that I have not cared for creation, for others, or for myself as you would have me to do. I feel so small and helpless in a world overwhelmed with troubles. I surrender my worries and my fears to you, Lord. I look to Jesus as my only hope for salvation in this world, and for this world. With gratitude, faith, and hope I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

## **For Our Online Community**

If this is the first time you have ever prayed a prayer like this, or if you are already a believer in Jesus Christ, but have been away from church for a while, we encourage you to connect with and get involved in a church as soon as possible. If you are in our area, we invite you to worship with us whenever you can. You may contact us by phone at [913-375-1164](tel:913-375-1164) or

email [helenjnelson@juno.com](mailto:helenjnelson@juno.com), for more information about the Christian faith or about our particular faith community.

**Benediction**

(Helen Nelson)

Go in peace -- your sins are crucified with Christ.

Go in joy -- Christ is risen from the dead.

Go in hope -- Christ is coming again.

Go in love -- and be sustained in the love of Christ.

Amen.