

“The Weeping Resurrection”

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Third in a series on John 11

John 11:25-37

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

“Martha went and called her sister Mary.”

Mary. Which Mary? We have lots of Marys in the Jesus-story. It gets confusing.¹ Why so many? In those, days “Mary” — or *Miriam* — was the most popular woman’s name. If you had a women’s conference with 500 attending, about 100 of them were Miriams.² I think it had something to do with who Miriam had been. She was Moses’s big sister, the one who hid him in the basket floating down the river and kept watch over him. With Moses and their brother Aaron, she became a prophet and hero of the exodus, when God led Israel out of slavery. In Jesus time, people were desperate for God to free them again. Naming your daughter *Miriam* was a sign of hope.

So in Jesus’ story, we have:

- 1) Miriam — Mary — his mom.
- 2) Also Mary, the mother of James and Joseph.³
- 3) Also Mary, wife of Clopas.⁴
- 4) Also Mary the Magdalene, the first person to proclaim Jesus’ resurrection.
- 5) And today’s Mary, from Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus, who has just died days before.

II

So this Mary is not happy. Grief has broken her.

This Mary and Jesus, they were close (though, despite modern imaginations, there is absolutely no evidence Jesus was close to her or anyone else in any romantic sense). Jesus was Mary’s rabbi. For a woman to be a rabbi’s disciple was thought to be improper. Yet Jesus had honoured her as no one else ever had. She must have trusted him.

But when Lazarus was ill and dying. . . . They knew what Jesus had done for others. Yet

¹ Famously, near the end of the 4th century CE, Pope Gregory confused Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and a third woman, a “sinner” who anointed Jesus’ feet (Luke 7). This gave rise to the persistent belief that Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute, a claim for which there is no textual support.

² From statistics provided to Richard Baukham and posted by Ben Witherington III on his blog <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/jesus-tomb-titanic-talpiot-tomb-theory.html>. (Accessed February 1, 2008)

³ Mark 15:40,47 (paralleled in Matthew 27,61). In Mark, “Joses” is the variant name for “Joseph.”

⁴ John 19:25.

when they needed him most, Jesus was absent.

Grief has broken Mary. Has it broken her trust in Jesus?

When Jesus finally arrived, Mary did not rush out to see him. Martha did. Not Mary.

Martha reports back: *"The Teacher is here and is calling for you."*

Mary is grief-broken, and Jesus calls her. Mary is trust-broken, and Jesus calls her.

Isn't that good news? When we are grief-broken and trust-broken, Jesus our Teacher is still calling us.

She comes to him, and collapses. She sobs to Jesus the exact same words her sister Martha said, moments before. Well, almost exactly. Mary cries, *"Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* That's what Martha said, word for word. But Martha said more. *"But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

Martha cried to Jesus both her disappointment and her trust. But Mary does not say the second part. No words of faith. Just broken, sobbing disappointment.

Still, Jesus calls Mary to him.

III

Isn't that what we need? When we've got nothing: nothing to offer, nothing to bring. When nothing is making sense. We need Jesus to keep calling us.

Peter Chrysologus was a fifth-century bishop in Ravenna, Italy. *Chrysologus* was a nickname. It means "golden-words."⁵ Bishop Peter said this:

*. . . when death appears it is so grim, so morbid, so very cruel,
it could not but unsettle and disturb any mind,
no matter how full of faith.⁶*

When that has happened to us, we need Jesus to settle us, calm us and soothe us. We need Jesus to do what he promised: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* *"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."⁷*

Grief-broken. Faith-broken. Like Mary, Jesus keeps on calling to us.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Chrysologus

⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 678.

⁷ Matthew 5:4 and Luke 6:21b.

IV

Yet when Jesus calls us, and when we come to him, what do we find?

*When Jesus saw her sobbing and those with her sobbing,
a deep anger welled up within him.⁸*

What is Jesus angry at? I dug deeper into those words. One literally means to snort, like an angry horse. It is indignant, offended. Another word means, literally, to get something moving. Jesus is stirred up, troubled, disturbed.⁹

Is it with Mary? Is it because Mary is broken, disappointed? Because her faith is weak? No. Don't forget, Jesus blesses those who mourn.

No, Jesus is stirred up by Death. He has had enough of Death. He is done with Death.¹⁰

That's what we find when Jesus calls us to him. A holy, righteous, love-filled anger against the tyranny of Death, the arrogance of Death, the horrific toll Death takes on those whom Jesus loves.

Then what?

*When Jesus saw her sobbing and those with her sobbing,
a deep anger welled up within him.*

He said, "Where did you put Lazarus?"

"Master, come and see," they said.

Now Jesus wept.¹¹

Jesus cried tears.¹²

⁸ John 11:33 (The Message, adapted)

⁹ *Embrimaomai* and *tarassō*.

¹⁰ Herman Ridderbos wrote, ". . . the context as a whole makes clear that Jesus' anger is directed not against unbelief (on the part of Mary and those accompanying her) but against that which brought them to this outburst of grief: the death of Lazarus itself. . . . Jesus allows himself to be caught up in the general grief of Lazarus' death, and here he experiences and participates in the grief of all whose loved ones have gone to the grave. . . ." Quoted in Bruner, 679.

¹¹ John 11:33-35 (The Message, adapted)

¹² Two distinct words are used to describe the crying in this episode. *Klaiō* is used for the that of Mary and those with her. It describes a loud, uncontained wailing and sobbing. However, when Jesus cries *dakruō* is used. It describes quieter weeping. While everyone else is overcome, swamped even, by the reality of Death, Jesus' sorrow is fitting of the One who knows he will defeat that enemy.

Jesus. Cried. Tears.

Wait! This is Jesus. He knows how this is going to end. He knows it is going to be good. In his own body, in his own being, Jesus is the fullness of God's passion for life, and God's passionate commitment against anything that destroys life.

This is Jesus. We just heard him say it. Jesus is the Life. Jesus is the Resurrection.

The Resurrection weeps.

Yes, Jesus is like us. He is the completion of our humanity, finally and fully for us what we are all meant to be and made to be. He shows us how to be us. So weeping is not a weakness, a frailty. Struck with sadness, we are made to weep.

Jesus is calling us to him, to be as human as he is.¹³

Jesus weeps.

V

Here's the thing, though. Jesus is also God with us. Of the four Gospels in the Bible, it is this one, John's account of Jesus, that most revels in his divinity. Right off the bat, John rejoices that Jesus is the Word who is God. John's Gospel shows us Jesus fully in control, the Master of every situation, before whom his critics, opponents and enemies don't stand a chance.

John's Gospel shows us Jesus weeping.

Tom Wright digs into this:

. . . when we look at Jesus, not least when we look at Jesus in tears, we are seeing not just a flesh-and-blood human being but the Word made flesh (1.1-14). The Word, through whom the worlds were made, weeps like a baby at the grave of his friend. . . . Only when we put away our high-and-dry pictures of who God is and replace them with pictures in which the Word who is God can cry with the world's crying will we discover what the word 'God' really means.¹⁴

Want to know what God is like? What God cares about? Look at Jesus. Look at everything

¹³ "The world's certainty that the ultimate reality is death breaks Jesus' heart. The world's (and the Church's) anguish in the experience of death breaks Jesus' heart. The deep pain that death and the devil (who uses death so mercilessly) both bring to human hearts breaks Jesus' heart. . . . Death hurts *everybody*, including Jesus. And I think our verse is asking us to be this human too." Bruner, 676.

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 10f. (emphasis in the original).

about Jesus. Look at Jesus, weeping.

Jesus weeps, not despite the fact that he is God-with-us, but because he is.

“God [weeps], moved by the tears of mortals.”¹⁵

VI

Now, there is Lazarus. He has been dead in the tomb for four days. Next week. . . .

Today, let me leave you with this thought.

Something that’s taken off lately is that whenever a tragedy falls upon a community, people all over start Tweeting “hashtag – whatever its name is – strong.” Last week was #TorontoStrong. Before that, #HumboldtStrong. We’ve had #ParisStrong, #FortMacStrong, #ManchesterStrong, #OrlandoStrong, #VegasStrong, #LondonStrong. It expresses support, and resilience, and defiance.

What goes into being strong?

#JesusWept

*Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, wouldst cry for me!*¹⁶

This is the Good News of Jesus the Messiah.

¹⁵ Potamius of Lisbon (about AD 350), quoted in Bruner, 679.

¹⁶ Adapted from Charles Wesley’s powerful hymn, “And Can It Be.” I got this idea from Bruner, 676.