

Everyone wants to cover up the sinking pit in their stomach. Slap a smile on their face. But suddenly it hits everyone at some point. Through the open doors stands the grieving family in the greeting line at a funeral. I was doing quite well the last time I had to go through that, until I actually had to look them in the face. A high school classmate's brother had suddenly just taken his life in a tragedy no one saw coming, as our congregation faced two different suicides in one week. I spent years sitting in the same classroom with both of them. *What to do? What could I possibly say?* All of a sudden that sinking feeling in my stomach which wants to choke you up hit me.

For as much benefit Christianity gives during this life, finally at the end of the day this is where it all matters. What happens at death? What does death actually mean? Are we really ok with death simply being a natural part of reality? Christianity either means absolutely everything, or it collapses in one big laughable spectacle as a giant waste of time.

You're not alone in asking that question. Mary Magdalene did too. In the West, we bring out the Kleenexes to quiet the crying. Try to cover up one little shed tear. Go off into a separate room. Not at this time or in this culture. Mary's crying was wailing, loud mourning. No shame. Let the flood of tears flow. Kept on doing it. People all over could hear it. Think about the professional mourners at Jairus' daughter's funeral, or the crying at Lazarus' death. We try to be polite and cover up our tears as much as possible. Mary let it all out.

After all, dead people are dead. Mary wants to make sure to give the body a proper burial, especially if in a hasty mix-up the owner of the garden suddenly took it away and threw into a dump. An improper burial would cause great grief to a Jewish person. If Jesus' body was disrespected in any way, she looked to herself to fix it. Jesus was not there. Someone had to have taken him away. But I don't know where. If I did, then I could get him and that would solve everything. If I can lay hands on the dead body of Jesus, then it will all be better. This is simply the hard reality in life. This is how it is.

After all Jesus, if you truly had the power over death, why do dead people stay dead for hundreds of years? Why have I yet to see a body get up from the cemetery? If your miracles are really real and actually happened, why don't I see any of them today? If you really had the power, wouldn't you do something I can see? In my grief, I can only focus on what is staring me in the face, what is right in front of me. Do something for me *here!*

Could it be any different? ***“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*** Why would you even be asking me that question? Isn't it self-explanatory? I'm looking for a “what,” a thing, a body. Why would you even be asking about a person? Why would you be asking what kind of a Messiah I'm looking for? I'm looking for a dead Messiah whom I can pay my respects to, a Messiah who would operate like we all know the world does. The only hope is to focus on how to get on with our life. We ought to pay our highest respect and devotion to him. But even with that, do you mean that what we think of him is still too small?

Jesus knew Mary needed him the most. So he came to her right away. Mary needed to see something with her eyes and hear something with her ears. Jesus gave her just that. ***“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’”*** All it takes is one word from Jesus. The most personal touch ever: simply her name. With one word Jesus shows he has risen to wipe away Mary's tears and bring her the comfort she needs. He could have corrected her lack of faith, her slowness to believe everything

he had said again and again, her reluctance to believe the Scriptures. He does nothing of the sort. All he does is wipe away her tears.

Jesus does not forget you in the mass of humanity. You are not just a number in the countless pile of grief and the innumerable funerals every day in this world. He takes the time just for you, to come greet you by name with his comfort. He does not abandon you whenever you doubt and waver for a bit on whether Jesus can actually deliver on his promises. He comes to you when it's not even remotely on your radar screen that Jesus could possibly have the power over death. He knows you need reassurance every day. With the assurance of salvation complete, **“Jesus Rose to Wipe Away Your Tears.”**

Before you're tempted to believe only what's in front of your eyes and dismiss the resurrection as a clever myth invented later to be a crutch for the weak, consider this. At the climax of the narrative about Jesus, as the claims of his divinity hang in the balance, Mary Magdalene is the first eyewitness. She's a witness who thought like any other human: death is death – the sad reality is that it's the end. A witness who showed even she didn't believe Jesus' promises at first. A witness who is not afraid to tell others about her weaknesses. A woman whose testimony wouldn't even have been accepted in a Roman court. He didn't appear to Peter, the later pillar of the Jewish church. Not to Pilate, the governor who could report straight to Rome. Not the Jewish Sanhedrin or chief priests, the esteemed and respected religious leaders of the day. *You'd never invent a story like this one.* The only way to have a story like this ... is if it actually happened this way.

Dr. Donald Barnhouse, the famous creator of the radio broadcast *The Bible Study Hour* in Philadelphia, once had to break the news to his children that their mother had died. As they were all driving to the funeral, they stopped at a stop light. Ahead of them stood a huge truck. The sun cast its large shadow across the snow-covered field next to it. Barnhouse pointed to the shadow and asked, “Look at the shadow of that truck on the field, children. If you had to be run over, would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow?” The youngest easily chimed in, “The shadow. It couldn't hurt anybody.” Barnhouse replied, “That's right. And remember, children, Jesus let the truck of death strike him, so that it could never destroy us. Mother lives with Jesus now – only the shadow of death passed over her.”

See Jesus as the Savior he promised to be. Trust him to have the power to do what he said he would. That is your absolute certainty. An absolute certainty which gives you something to choke out standing in a line when someone lost their loved one. An absolute certainty that Jesus rose to dry your tears. Amen.