

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”* Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood there **weeping** outside the tomb. As she **wept**, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, **“Woman, why are you weeping?”** She said to them,

*“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*

When she has said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”** Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, *“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”* **Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).** Jesus said to her, *“Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, **“I have seen the Lord;”** and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

At BBC we offer two different styles of worship, what we call traditional and contemporary, so I found it interesting last week when my uncle Dave sent me an email about a church that decided to have four worship services each Sunday to reach different people. There was one for those new to the faith. Another for those who liked

traditional worship. One for those who'd lost their faith and would like to get it back. The last was for those who had bad experiences with churches and were complaining about it. The church came up with names for each of the services: FINDERS, KEEPERS, LOSERS, WEEPERS.

**All joking aside, there is a sense in which Easter *is* for finders, keepers, losers, and weepers.** Easter comes upon us in the midst of the struggles, heartaches, losses, grief, and unanswerable questions of life. Easter is for those seeking to **find Jesus and faith** in the midst of it all. It is for those seeking to **keep their faith** regardless of the hurts and shocks of life. Easter is also for those the world considers **“losers.”** It is for those who are often looked down upon, disrespected, or disregarded. And Easter is a day for **“weepers,”** for those who have lost loved ones and who long for a word of hope about heaven and resurrection and life after death.

With all the joy and celebration so many of us associate with Easter, it's possible to forget that the location of the Easter story is a tomb in a cemetery. On that first Easter morning, the followers of Jesus are in mourning, grieving the loss of their beloved friend and leader. Mary comes to the tomb weeping, her agony heightened because she can't find Jesus, his body seems to be lost and so does she in her distress. In the last eight days I have been in two different cemeteries because of the deaths of a 17-year-old son and a 42-year-old husband and father. Because of the first I missed my own family's gathering in a cemetery in Maine to bury my aunt's remains. Cemeteries are not places of joy and celebration – they are places of pain, heartache, and tears.

There is a lot of sadness in our midst today. It is the first Easter for many people without a particular loved one: a husband or wife, a mother or father, a son or daughter, an aunt or uncle, a grandparent or a friend. Many of us come ready to weep like Mary did when she came to the tomb that first Easter morning.

Most of us walk with heavy hearts and slow steps when we visit graves. We go with our memories, thoughts, and feelings as Mary did, and we kneel, sit or stand and we remember. Sometimes we smile with longing at good times, but more often we weep. Shocked to find the large stone rolled away and the body of Jess missing, Mary runs from the cemetery spurred by grief and fear and says to Simon Peter, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”* Not only is her beloved gone, she cannot even see or touch the body. So she runs to get Peter and John.

When they arrive and look in the tomb they see Jesus is not among the dead even though he had been extravagantly anointed, wrapped and buried by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The linen wrappings in the tomb were similar to those that bound Jesus' friend Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. On that day Jesus ordered the stone taken away that blocked the tomb, and called Lazarus saying (John 11:43-44), "*Lazarus, come out!*" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "*Unbind him, and let him go.*" While Lazarus needed people to help him get unwrapped, Jesus didn't. The linen wrappings had not been unwound but were lying like a flattened cocoon bearing mute testimony to one freed from the bonds of death. All three of Jesus' closest friends are genuinely and clearly shocked at the emptiness of the tomb. Let's not pretend that believing in the resurrection is easy. The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the most radical Christian doctrine and people respond to it in different ways, including the characters in the biblical story.

Thinking in terms of finders, keepers, losers, and weepers, there is a sense in which the disciple whom Jesus loved is a **Finder**. Verse 8 says John "*saw and believed.*" Some of us are like John. Finding faith in the risen Jesus is not difficult for us. We come to church on Easter Sunday thinking, "*Of course he's risen. He's risen indeed.*" If we're like John we may not even remember a time when we didn't know or love Jesus. It doesn't necessarily mean we're simple-minded, easily manipulated, unaware of the grief and heartache of life, or religious fanatics. But finding Jesus and faith comes more easily to folks like John. But if we're like John we need to remember, it isn't so simple for everyone else. John is the only person for whom the empty tomb was sufficient evidence to find the "yes" of faith. It wasn't enough for Mary, Peter or anyone else.

Peter is a **Keeper**. He is struggling to keep his faith. Some of us are like Peter. Perhaps Peter was slower because he ran to the tomb weighed down by the memory of his own weakness and failure. It is hard for Peter to keep his faith because he is gnawed by guilt, haunted by his failures to stand by Jesus or even to admit being associated with him. Peter is a bit skeptical. It will take a variety of experiences before all his questions are answered and his doubt overcome. Peter knows dead is dead and he has never seen anything to convince him otherwise.

Peter sees the exact same things John does. But there is no flash of insight, no declaration of faith. Instead he walks away scratching his head wondering what it all

means. Simon Peter walks away from the tomb early that first Easter morning not yet a believer in the resurrection. For Peter, the truth dawned a little later, gradually, as Jesus appeared to him, forgave him, and gave him a job to do. Part of the meaning of Easter is that **Jesus came back especially for people like Peter who struggle to keep their faith.**

John and Peter are typical men. Mary came to them gulping through her tears that the Lord was nowhere to be found. She is weeping and grief-stricken. Peter and John survey the situation, reach their own conclusions and then leave Mary alone in her heartache. No word of consolation, no hug of support, nothing. Having been left completely alone when she could have used a shoulder to cry on, Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Mary is **A Weeper**. As she wept, she over to look in the tomb and she saw two angels. As we would all assume, angels are much more sensitive to suffering than most of us guys because they immediately ask her, *“Woman, why are you weeping?”* She said to them,

*“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*

When she has said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not that it was Jesus, she thinks he is the gardener. Of course Jesus is even more sensitive to and aware of our pain than angels so Jesus said to her, *“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”* And then he calls her by name, *“Mary!”* It is no surprise that Jesus calls Mary by name.

In John 10 Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd. *“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice (John 10:3-4).”* Jesus calls Mary by name and leads her out of the night of grief into the dawn of hope. **Mary’s grief was turned to hope when she experienced Jesus calling her by name.**

There may be some of us who feel like Mary did. Some of us may be so burdened and blinded by grief that we’d have difficulty recognizing Jesus even if he were right in front of us. But Jesus knows your name and he can ease your pain.

I wonder if Mary got to see Jesus in part because she lingered at the tomb and didn’t immediately leave. By looking for Jesus in the midst of her pain, Jesus ends up coming to her and bringing her comfort that she can share with others.

Mary is to tell others who need to hear the good news that death is not the end. She went to mourn and give Jesus a wake. She didn’t know Jesus was awake.

She came searching for the dead body of Jesus. She was found by his living and life giving presence.

Like Mary, many people are weeping today. For a loved one who has died; for a relationship that failed; for health that is deteriorating, a job lost, dreams that never materialized. In midst of our weeping the resurrection may sound ridiculous, impossible, or too good to be true. It depends if we're more like John, Peter, or Mary. It depends if we are a Finder, Keeper, or Weeper.

From the perspective of the powerful and those in authority - all of the disciples would have been considered **losers** that first Easter morning. Their leader and teacher was dead and gone. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter.

But Easter is a story about joy that comes even to those the world considers losers. God often uses the small, the poor, those of little reputation, the humble to accomplish God's work. Easter is also about the new beginnings that are available to those who have lost or been perceived as losers.

In the news this week was the story of Kai Leigh Harriot, a five-year-old girl with a beautiful smile who appeared in court in Boston on Thursday along with her mother to give an emotional victims-impact statement. What she ended up giving was a powerful Christian witness about forgiveness and hope. On a summer night in 2003 while sitting on the deck of a three story home in Dorchester a bullet fired to scare someone else severed the then 3-year-old's spine, paralyzing her from the waist down. In court she said to the man who pulled the trigger, *"What you done to me was wrong. But I still forgive him."* Interestingly, the day after the story of her forgiveness in the paper appeared, another front page story followed with some people amazed at her ability to forgive Anthony Warren, others saying there is no way they would forgive. Her mother, a strong Christian, was quoted as saying, *"We live in a world today that seems to want people to be bitter, angry, but I don't want bitterness and anger in my life, and I don't want that for Kai Leigh. We are Christians."* Asked what she said to Warren when they hugged in the courtroom she said, *"I whispered in his ear, 'Here is your chance for a new beginning. Don't let God down.'"*

Easter is a day for new beginnings. Whether we are a Finder, Keeper, Loser, or Weeper, the promise of Easter is that Jesus knows our name and he can ease our pain. He can give us hope when hope is gone.

God raised Jesus from the dead and that changes everything.

Christianity began when Jesus' followers experienced Jesus after his death in an entirely new way. Jesus is absent from the place of death and **he goes to God before us and for us**. That is why we believe in heaven.

It has been said that HEAVEN is a place where: The lovers are Italian, the cooks are French, the mechanics are German, the police are English, and the government is run by the Swiss.

HELL is a place where: the lovers are Swiss, the cooks are English, the mechanics are French, the police are German, and the government is run by the Italians.

In Revelation 2:17 the risen Christ says, "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. **To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is a written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.**"

At the end, Jesus doesn't want to call us finders, keepers, losers, or weepers, he'd rather call us conquerors and by a new name that he has for us that will be known only to us. We may not know the name we will have in the future, but we know our task in the present, with God's help, is to keep persevering, overcoming, and conquering the challenges we face. In our struggles we know Jesus is with us.

Easter has come and Jesus is calling your name.  
How will you respond? Mary came to the tomb to weep.  
She ran from the cemetery the first time **filled with grief and a question**.  
The second time she ran **with joy and a message for all who will believe**,  
*"I have seen the Lord!"*  
**HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!**