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TEARS IN THE MORNING

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When was the last time your happiness turned to tears?
Was it a phone call with tragic news, a visit to the doctor, or simply a cruel or insensitive remark that changed your world and your relationships for the worse in an instant? Many things in life can turn laughter into tears. That is especially true when someone we know and love dies. Times of laughter and joy together are replaced by feelings of grief, loss, sadness and tears as we stand around the grave of our loved one.

Easter Day went the opposite direction for one woman. It began with tears but it ended with joy, pure unexpected joy, a joy that we can all share in today.

Her name was Mary, and her close friend had died, someone who had shown her extraordinary love, taught her how to live, and promised her he would never leave her and their circle of friends. But then he died, in fact he was brutally killed, taken from her all too soon.

No doubt still numb with shock, disbelief and sadness, on Easter morning she stood weeping at his grave.

“Woman, why are you crying?” a man standing nearby asked her.
Imagine asking that question at a cemetery today!
“Why are you crying?” “Why the tears?”

Isn't it obvious?

- “I'm crying because I've lost someone I love.
- I'm crying for all the memories, the times shared, the love shown, the laughter enjoyed, ...the burdens shared.
- I'm crying for all that I miss and the missed opportunities - the things I didn't say and could have, the things I did say and shouldn't have, but it's too late now.
- I'm crying because I am so helpless and alone in the face of death.
- I'm crying because I can't see a future without my loved one.
- I'm crying because I'm scared of my own death.”

“Woman, why are you crying?”

Now that would be a dumb, insensitive and even cruel question to ask a teary eyed woman at a cemetery – unless the one who asked that question knew something that she didn't and could do something about her tears, unless the one who asked it had power to do something about death.

The one who asked the question and challenged her tears was Jesus Christ, who had been killed on Good Friday and placed in a grave, but had now risen from the dead himself that morning! He was in a position to question her tears and offer her hope. Wiping the tears from her eyes Mary was overwhelmed with joy and reached out to take hold of Jesus.

Alive again after his death, Jesus restored Mary's joy in living. Normally our joy is turned to tears because death intrudes on life, but on Easter Day life intruded on the realm of death. Because of Easter our tears can turn to joy again too, because what happened was not just for Mary's benefit but for all of us.

Jesus once said: "Because I live you will live also". "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live even if they die and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.....Do you believe this?" Those words were meant not just for Mary, but for us.

I once conducted a funeral for a lady from South Africa. Her family travelled to Australia to be there on the day, and at the last minute they asked me if they could sing at the graveside. I was hesitant, thinking this could be embarrassing for everyone, but agreed with their request. The family circled the grave of their loved one, and without any music they sang. Oh how they sang. They had tears in their eyes but joy all over their faces as they sang songs of resurrection and life and hope in Jesus Christ. They sang the song of Easter that says because Jesus is risen and alive again, their loved one is safe with him, and her body too would be raised to life with him one day. And one day, because of him, they would be reunited with her.

We sometimes talk about "closure" to describe a point beyond which we can move forward rather than backward in life after a time of loss, grief and sadness. Easter enables us to move forward in the face of death. Although we still have to go through grief just like anyone else, we can grieve with hope, hope because we believe in Easter, we believe in a resurrection to new life – Christ's resurrection and our own.

Whatever the sadness in your life right now, wherever it is "raining on the inside" for you, the same Jesus wants to come alongside you today and ask you gently, just as he asked Mary "Why are you crying?" The one, who was mistreated and killed and placed in a grave himself, understands your tears. He also has the power to stop the flow of tears and turn them into joy again. He enables you to not just look back and remember, but to look forward in hope, not just for this life but for the one after we die.

The Bible says that on Easter morning the earth shook, but a grave opened up, and death itself was swallowed up by life! St Paul wrote: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The last laugh, the victory belongs not to death but to Jesus who is alive again.

Easter morning began in tears but ended in extraordinary joy for one woman. And she is not alone. Her joy has been shared by billions of people all over the world ever since, and it is a joy and a hope that is available to everyone, including you. A joy and hope that can sustain us throughout this life with all its ups and downs, and a joy that we can one day fully experience together with the risen Jesus and those who love him in heaven.

I hope that this Easter, with Mary, you too will hear his voice and reach out to him in faith.

Happy Easter!