

Thank you for reading that Anthony. It's a beautiful story and even more beautiful with a wonderful reader as yourself. Well it is Easter and Easter is the good time. This is the time of joy, Jesus is resurrected, the tomb is empty; everybody's happy; Easter's the good day on the Christian calendar. We had some bad days this last week but this is the good day on the Christian calendar. This is all about joy or at least that's the way it's often told. I'm going to argue today that the text is a little bit more complicated. There's a lot more going on here in the Easter story. You really can't have the Easter Story without the Passion of Christ and the struggles and the weeping of Mary, which is why that song was so beautiful about crying out to the Lord today. So let's get a little context here for where Easter is. A lot has been happening in the last few weeks but I want you to experience a story that you've already heard so many times probably, but it's like watching a movie that you've seen and you know the ending, guess what, spoiler alert: He rises from the dead. So it's sort of like "I know where this is going." But I want you to experience the story emotionally through the eyes of the disciples and kind of living it more in your heart than in your head, the way you've memorized it. And in that context it's a very different story. So the disciples have been following Jesus and they've all had absolutely transformative experiences. And that's the key. They're not intellectual followers of Jesus, they've experienced personal transformation. If you're Matthew, you used to be a tax collector now you're following Jesus. If you're Peter you were a fisherman and now you're called the leader of the group. If you're Mary the mother, you heard a secret when you were a baby and you've watched this boy grow up and watched the amazing miracles and the great deeds He's done. If you're Lazarus you

were raised from the dead not too long ago. If you're Judas, you probably are thinking "finally we're going to get a political leader that's going to lead us out of this situation. It's going to crush the Romans and we're going to get the temple back." Everybody has had a transformative experience and everybody has an expectation of what's next right? They're all like "this is where I think this is going. I think it's going to go here." And what they're probably thinking: "Things are pretty good." They come into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and they're treated like a rock star; people are throwing their robes down, they're cheered and the disciples must be thinking "finally we're getting the recognition and Jesus is getting the recognition he deserves. People are really excited about Jesus." And they come into this week and Jesus keeps giving them hints that He's coming to Jerusalem for his death and nobody seems to get it. If you remember back, weeks ago in scripture and months ago in time, Mary washes His feet with an expensive ointment and He says "That's preparing me for my burial." And people are like "What is he talking about; His burial? It doesn't make any sense." So the last supper they were all eating together in the room, things are going well, there's a discussion with Judas but nobody really is able to figure out what's going on. For those who came Thursday we had communion and we celebrated it here which was very moving and powerful. And it's the night of Jesus' betrayal. One of his own turns against him, turns him over to the authorities and all the disciples flee in panic, and they all deny any connection with Him and that's Thursday. Friday of course is the torture, humiliation, mockery and execution of Good Friday and it's obviously a very sad day, not just for the physical pain involved but also for the humiliation, for the death of a dream. If you're a disciple, you're thinking "my Gosh, I thought this was the God who was

going to make things happen. I thought he had super powers of some kind, some mystical powers. If he's dead, we're all dead. This is not looking good." And almost all the male disciples leave the women to stay with Jesus at the Cross and they find a tomb and they bury Him in the garden. And at this point they've gone from fully "Isn't this great to be a follower of Jesus." Palm Sunday to their hiding in their houses because whoever killed Jesus is probably going to kill them, so they're terrified, a lot of fear a lot of hopelessness. And these are emotions we can relate to today. The fear, hopelessness, probably the biggest emotion they're feeling at this point is disappointment. "This isn't working out the way we all planned it. And psychologists today will say that most of our anxiety or stress or depression is a product of unattained vision of what's going to happen; we're disappointed. We think one thing is going to happen and something else happens and frankly we're disappointed every day. I know in my own coaching practice I help people do time management and I say just pick one day and plot it out- hour by hour, exactly what you're going to do: When you're going to eat lunch, when you're going to go to the gym, when you're going to work, whatever you're going to do; put it all in one day. Invariably they come back and say "It didn't work. I couldn't even plan one day. I was disappointed." So, that's just one day, imagine a life.

So we're often very disappointed with our life and many of the Eastern religions, particular Buddhism, talk a lot about detaching from expectation to relieve disappointment. But that has to be one of the overriding emotions of the disciples' disappointment. Second emotion that I think would be rampant among the disciples would be anxiety. And I just read something this last week that I never thought

about before. It said "human beings have this gift of self-awareness and the curse of self-awareness is that we are anxious because we remember the past and we anticipate a future and we worry about both: "Why didn't I do that? Why did I miss that opportunity? Why didn't that happen? "We go back into the past in our mind with regret- things we can't change. And then we look at the future right? And we say "Oh my gosh, am I going to have enough money to retire? Am I going to get into that school? Am I going to get that job? Am I? Am I? Am I?" And we're living today but we're living in a anxious future and in our world today, our news media and our entertainment industry has really tapped into this anxiety that we have and they play on it because we are addicted to it. So the terrorists know that in the Middle East. They know that when they do their terror attacks, our anxiety will Skyrocket and they'll get a reaction. Our politicians very often don't talk about their vision anymore. "This is where I'm leading you and it's a good place." It's more about "Don't have that other person elected. If you elect that other person, the country is going to hell in a handbag. So anxiety in our news reports in our updating news and we're constantly filled with stories that increase our anxiety. I was just reading recently that it says 70 billion dollar industry in the United States medication for anxiety. So it's something we can imagine the disciples lived with then right, in this story? And something we certainly live with now right? So you take the disappointment of the disciples, you take the anxiety of the disciples that week, you put them together and you get a real sense of hopelessness. This thing has completely failed. There is no light at the end of the tunnel and there's only one disciple who goes out in the darkness and she Mary Magdalene, goes out into the darkness not guided by intellect because it doesn't make sense. He's dead. We saw

him murdered. She goes out of love, compassion. She goes to the grave. She's doing the only thing she can do just probably to bring perfume to the tomb. It's not logical, it's not rational; it's compassion. And again and again in the scriptures and if you've heard my sermons you'll find, I keep emphasizing this that women, throughout the gospel, always lead with compassion; Men follow but women lead. It's always the women. It's important to say, particularly for groups that say "women can't have authority in the faith. The first witness to the resurrection is Mary Magdalene and she's guided by compassion so we can get into the male and female but it's that compassion and that nurturing that leads us when logic doesn't make sense and can lead us to places we don't know. She didn't know where she was going that day but she changed the history of the world forever by getting up in the morning and trying to do something.

So we see here, she gets there and she's hopeless and her hopelessness gets worse not better because what does she see? The tomb is empty so clearly what any of us would have concluded right; someone had stolen the body. "Oh my God after everything else we've been through this week, even the body they've stolen? " And so she is just feeling extremely hopeless and then she runs to get the disciples. No one's quite sure what happened. The men come in, Peter and John and they peak in and they see that the linen is still in the Tomb and then they leave and Mary is in this utter state of hopelessness, sitting there and she's just burst into tears and in that moment she burst into tears, she sees two men sitting on the slab of concrete rock where the body had been laying and those of us in the Swedenborgian tradition, we're very familiar with who those angels were because in our teachings

everybody is guided to the next World with two angels, one at our head and one at our feet so that's part of our own teaching. So we're familiar; we know who these people are. She doesn't and she assumes logically you must be the guys who took the body so give it back or tell me where it is and they asked her "Why do you weep;" which is kind of an insulting question I think. She must know why she's weeping . She's still in a fog, she's crying, she walks out of the tomb where she saw these angels and there she is still crying and she sees what she thinks is a gardener and he asks the same question "Why are you weeping?" And she basically just says to him "Look, if you've taken him away, tell me where His body is, I want to take care of the body." And then through those tears she looked again; the Bible says she turns again toward the figure and He says "Mary." And in that moment of recognition, God calls her voice and she can see through the tears and experience that connection that had been lost, the hope when there is no hope, the end of the anxiety and, for that moment and depression and hopelessness is all gone in that moment. She is thrilled and Mary becomes the first disciple. She's called the Apostle of the Apostles because she then goes to the apostles and tells them I saw the resemblance to the first Christian evangelist for the resurrection. And I think there's a lot to learn from Mary in this text but I'm primarily impressed with the courage that it takes when the men stay behind and she went out in the morning in the dark guided by compassion. I'm also moved by the fact that in her weeping and her sadness, she doesn't recognize God. All of us have been there. There's times when we've really been lost in the weeping and the sadness. And it's part of the Easter Story and we feel somewhat helpless and we can't recognize Angels around us who are trying to help us, we can't recognize Christ who's trying to help us and if you're wondering

about the gardener, why the gardener, I thought that was an interesting twist in the story-this is just my theory for whatever it's worth, that the more I thought about it, God comes to us first in the garden of Eden, Jesus is betrayed in a garden, His body is laid in a garden and we know in Revelations that it says that in the holy city, and this church is named after it, there will be the tree of life again in the city in a garden. So god as gardener, it's a pretty good image. And then through that she experiences the connection with Christ. And then faith and love it's not enough just to believe, it's not an individual experience; she then goes into action. Faith and action have to be together or they don't exist. You can't live in a connection with God by yourself. And then she goes and then now maybe close to 25-33 percent of the world are of a faith because Mary went and proclaimed it that day. She couldn't see the plan. That's not her idea. She couldn't see it. We can't often see it and so I think Mary's teaching in this weeping is that when we are in those moments when things don't seem to be going our way, when we can't seem to break through in our life, we have to remember that Easter is about dying to an old self and rising to a new self and we have to keep doing it again and again and again and Christ is with us in that Resurrection; that's our hope; we can move through it but to say that there's going to be a world where they will not be weeping, there will not be terror attack, there will not be disease, there will not be sadness, that is not the story of Easter. It's in the midst of that, in the midst of our weeping, it's in the midst of our pain, it's in the midst of the suffering of the world that Christ comes to us and calls us by our name to say "I'm risen tell the others." Amen