

Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' most beloved disciples and closest friends, peers into the empty tomb. Just days prior she stood at the foot of the cross and witnessed Jesus's agonizing torture, saw him pass from this world. The pain and loss she feel must be crushing. And now, realizing his body is gone, she hears the question, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She explains to the angels that they've taken away her Lord. The grief she felt days before has grown nearly unbearable. Perhaps she wished to finish anointing Jesus' body, an important part of the Jewish burial custom. But now, she cannot pay those respects, cannot move toward any closure. It could be tears that keep her from recognizing Jesus when she turns around, supposing him to be the gardener.

And again, she's asked, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

I imagine Mary may have been perplexed by the question. How is she to respond? Why would she *not* be weeping?

Those of us experiencing loss of some kind may be similarly perplexed the question, or by variations of it we encounter, particularly this time of year. The words may not be the same, but the message itself rings clear:

In the Fa La La's and the Ho Ho Ho's, in the festive parties and exchange of gifts, amid the glow of twinkling lights and ringing of bells, in holiday movies and Christmas carols and Jolly Santas, all around us, we are told: Be happy! Be merry! It's "the most wonderful time of the year"!

Woman, why are you weeping?

Like Mary, our pain may come from losing a loved one—people we will remember tonight. Or we may be experiencing the hurt of broken relationships, struggles with addiction or other health problems, financial difficulties, or the loss of a dream.

Whatever we are feeling loss around, whether we are able to name it or not, Psalm 139 tells us, God knows. He knows our sitting down and rising up, he discerns our thoughts from afar. Indeed, there is not a word on our lips that he does not know. No thoughts hidden from him. There is nowhere we can flee from his presence.

This time of year, the world can seem to be spinning madly around us, caught up in merriment and myriad distractions. We may encounter people confused by our sadness, sometimes impatient with us, or worse, overlooking our pain. But God sees us. God knows why we are weeping. God weeps with us.

Psalm 139, one of the most well-known and well-loved psalms, speaks to the pervasive and enduring presence of God, the deeply intimate nature of our relationship with him, and the hope we can find in that intimacy.

It is an intimacy unlike any other we know. Renowned Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen elaborates on this in his book “Life of the Beloved,” through a modern interpretation of the Psalm:

“I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with care most intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you,

and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover, and your spouse...yes, even your child...wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.”

As we offer our pain and grief to God this evening, and honor it among each other, may we find some measure of peace in the scope of this intimacy and of God’s love for us—the depth and breadth of which we can only try to wrap our heads around.

Tonight, we are grateful for your presence here at Christ Church. We want you to know we see you. We are present with you. You are not alone. It is okay to weep. It is okay to be not okay. We hold this space sacred and safe for you to grieve as you need to grieve. We pray you find healing in connection and community. And may the Holy Spirit comfort and keep us this season and all year long. Amen.