

Woman, Why are You Weeping?

John 20:1-18, Easter Sunday

April 4, 2010

Beloved of the Lord.....It is simply not possible to appreciate the resurrection of Christ, nor take it to heart, unless we truly know what death is and where it came from. Death is in no way a natural thing, nor is death a part of life, but God tells us in the Bible, "the wages of sin is death". Death is payment for sin. Likewise, "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." When we see one that we truly love dying, they are dying because they sinned against God as we will one day die. While the pain and grief we feel in our heart at the death of a loved one is almost unbearable, what is worse is when an unbeliever is near death himself, and they do not know their Lord and Savior. Such do not have the hope of Christ, the hope of life, the hope of the resurrection, and having no hope they are rightly terrified at the thought of dying.

Yet thanks be to God, we are gathered here today as a Christian congregation who know well our Lord Jesus who came to conquer our sin, our death, our devil, and in His triumphant resurrection revealed our life everlasting. While we know well the bitter grief of Mary Magdalene that morning, we also know well what Jesus meant when He said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She need not cry because Jesus had triumphed and conquered all in His glorious resurrection. Death had lost its sting. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Therefore dear Mary "Why weepest thou."

I. The confused disciples. On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene arrived slightly ahead of the small group of devoted women. As soon as she sees the stone rolled away, she runs and tells Peter and John "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher." Not even considering Jesus had risen, she assumes the Jews out of spite stole the body. In the Gospel of Mark we are told, "she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept." All eleven disciples at that time were in a state of shock. In their hearts they experienced a far greater grief than we experience at the loss of a loved one, for they knew well Jesus to be God, but now their God had just died. What was it like on that Black Friday to see Christ dead on the cross, after they had seen His Almighty power in countless miracles? Jesus had raised a little girl from the dead, also the son of a widow at Nain, and but a few days ago Lazarus. Now He who had power over life was dead? Suddenly their whole world came crashing down. The Jews had murdered Jesus. Would they be next?

When they ran to the tomb to investigate, John outran Peter, but Peter was the first to go in. This was indeed a puzzling sight. If the body of Jesus was stolen, why are these linen clothes neatly folded at the head and feet of where Jesus lay? This is not the action of a thief in a hurry? Peter walked away puzzled but John concluded Jesus had risen. "He saw and believed", but John adds, "for as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." It seems John believed in the resurrection, but he didn't understand the heart of the resurrection, namely Jesus, having paid for our sins, was "raised again because of our justification."

In like manner many today deny both the resurrection and the very heart of the resurrection, that "God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of God the Son for the reconciliation of the world." When God raised Christ from the dead, this was God's public declaration to the whole world, His seal, His stamp of approval that the sacrifice of His Son was perfect and complete, hence God's heart was reconciled with all men, all sins being forgiven. The importance of the resurrection and how it is a necessary to believe it for the sake of our salvation is explained in I Corinthians 15 which says, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." This passage is a two-edged sword. For those unbelievers who laugh and say Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, since they have despised their own Savior who earnestly shed His blood to deliver them from their sins, by way of their own unbelief their sins yet cling to them like tar. Unless they repent and are converted before they die, they will certainly descend into the fire, and their damnation will be just. To such Jesus says, "ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins." Now let us speak of the other edge of that sword, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." We who believe Christ was indeed raised find the greatest comfort! Because He is raised all our sins ARE forgiven. Hence Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Nothing but heaven awaits all those whose turn from their sins and place their faith in Jesus. "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

II. Peter and his struggles. For a moment now let us consider Peter and his struggles that day. Remember that though Peter had publicly vowed he would never deny nor abandon his Lord, he did both in the hour of temptation. From then on his guilty conscience gave him no peace. There are many like Peter today. When they are young they are taught the Christian faith and they sing with the greatest of joy, "Jesus loves me this I

know, for the Bible tells me so". Later they renew their baptismal vow and take a public oath on the day of their confirmation. But sadly in the hour of trial some break their oath to God. Some deny the Lord and defile their body in premarital sex and do not repent. Some completely give themselves over to drugs and drunkenness. Some want to live free of God's commandments and just do as they feel. Others walk away from the truth of the Word and instead choose to believe a lie. It is a crime of the highest order when a believer willfully chooses to despise their own Savior, the Son of God who came not to condemn, but only to save. The Bible says, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." On such a day as this then let us understand "the Lord is, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If we have departed, now is the time to return, for Jesus came to save all fallen sinners, by shedding His blood for all fallen sinners, yea the whole world. Whatever then our state may be, let each one of us sincerely and earnestly confess our sins to our Savior – for He already knows them all, and He by His blood has already paid for all. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

II. Why should we cry when He is risen? Moving on now to Mary, at the tomb Mary Magdalene was consumed with the most bitter grief. Her love for Jesus was perhaps stronger than any other, for she was the first at the tomb, and Jesus appeared to her first. Mary Magdalene might have loved Jesus more than Mary the mother of Jesus. In her hour of grief Mary was simply inconsolable. Even when she peers into the tomb and sees two angels, she does not realize they are angels. They simply say to her, "Woman why weepest thou?"

Note the simplicity of their words! We cannot say that angels have a childlike faith, for they see God daily and know His love perfectly: nevertheless their love and trust in God is childlike. While Mary can only contemplate that Jesus is yet dead lying somewhere, the angels cannot contemplate Mary's belief that Jesus is yet dead! "Why weepest thou?" which is to say, "Why do you weep on the most joyful day your world has ever known? How could there be sorrow in your heart? Didn't you hear Jesus say He would die and rise again? Didn't you believe? Why do you doubt when even the saints and angels above you are now singing praises to the Son of God who has triumphed so valiantly over death! Why seek ye the living among the dead? Dear Mary, dear woman, if you are looking for death you will not find it here, for

Jesus is the Lord of Life your Prince of Peace and Jesus has ALL power over death! Indeed then dear woman, why weepest thou?"

Ah, but the true words of the angels yet fell upon dead ears, much like many today who hear the sweetest words of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in church, yet the words which hit the ears do not enter the heart! Mary, not believing, not understanding now turns around and LO there is Jesus. Yet being so consumed by grief, she does not yet know Him. "Woman why weepest thou?" Jesus' words agree with the angels, for the angels only speak Jesus' words. Dear Mary, why are you crying? Look at Me Mary, and stop your crying. If only you will see Me alive, as I am, you will have no reason to cry at all." Then Jesus simply says that one word "Mary" and everything changes. Hearing her own name, Mary's eyes now beheld Jesus as He was and yet is – Risen, Alive, my God and my Lord! He does indeed have power over death! With the greatest of joy suddenly Mary thought to herself, Why am I weeping?

Beloved of the Lord, Jesus not only knows the name of Mary, but the names of all who believe in Him. "Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Why then do we weep? We weep because we yet live in this veil of tears. We weep and mourn our sins. We weep when a brother or sister in Christ dies, even when we know their soul is now in heaven. Yet as Jesus said to Mary, so Jesus says to you, "Why are you weeping". Jesus is our Life! In His glorious and triumphant resurrection, we see the death of our death, for Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Whereas the common denominator of death, hell and the devil is sin, Christ, having paid for our sins on the cross, takes that common denominator down to His own grave, and in one stroke defeats all our enemies at one! As He then rises to life in triumph over the grave, so we too triumph and arise with Christ saying, "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory!" Though we like Mary cannot now touch our Savior nor behold Him with our eyes, for we are to walk by faith and not by sight, the day will certainly come when our eyes shall behold Him, and not another, and we shall see Him as He is, face to face. Our days of tears, fear, and sorrows will have their end. Therefore dear Bride of Christ, dear Woman, why weepest thou? Your names are written in heaven. Amen.