

## Sermon – 25/03/2007 pm

### Weeping Mary

Study Text: John 20:11-15

*Seek and ye shall find.* These words are written on a giant billboard in our city. Thousands of motorists must see it every day. But the message leads to a job Website rather than to the Bible, and to Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is the one who said *ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find.* He was referring to life, eternal life that is found only in him.

At Athens Paul preached that we should seek the Lord and we will find him, for *he is not far from each one of us* (Acts 17:27). Jesus is not hard to find. He was not far from Mary as she wept by his empty tomb. She could not find Jesus but he was right there beside her. He was not among the dead but among the living. Are you looking for Jesus? Are you looking in the right place? Do you believe that he is near, that he wants you to find him and have life in him?

### Weeping

It was very early on the first day of the week when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried three days before. This was no ordinary morning. This was no ordinary place. What Mary saw and heard was far from ordinary.

Mary's initial shock came when she saw the heavy stone rolled away from the tomb. She assumed that the body of Jesus had been stolen, and clung tenaciously to this belief. From what he saw John concluded otherwise. He *saw and believed* even though at that time he did not fully comprehend what it all meant. He did not share his belief with Mary, or if so, she did not accept it.

After seeing the empty tomb John and Peter went off to their own homes. Mary stayed behind. She stood outside the tomb weeping. She desperately wanted to find the dead body of her Lord. This was the One who had saved her from a life of misery when he cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2). She followed Jesus; she loved him, and depended upon him for everything. But now he was dead – or so she thought.

Was her crying necessary? Was her weeping justified? Was her weeping a sign of unbelief? Of course someone she loved had died. But even as she wept Jesus was alive. She was weeping when Jesus was alive. She was weeping when she should have been rejoicing.

Mary was weeping when she should have remembered the words of Jesus, the promise that he gave before he was crucified – *the Son of man must be delivered in to the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise again.* The angels reminded her of these very words according to Luke (Luke 24:7).

There is a lesson here for us today. How often do you worry and weep unnecessarily? How often we are anxious when there is no reason for anxiety? Ryle says 'that 2/3 of the things that we fear in life never happen at all, and 2/3 of the tears we shed are thrown away and shed in vain'. We worry and mourn over so many things when in fact they are right there available to us. Do we not have everything we need in Christ Jesus?

In the wilderness Hagar ran out of water (Genesis 21:15 f). She sat there weeping expecting to see her son dehydrate and die. She wept in despair – but there next to her was a well of water. Water was right at hand but she did not see it. God sent his angel to Hagar and he opened her eyes to see this life-giving water.

Mary was weeping because she could not find the body of Jesus. Where was Jesus? He was right there near her – not dead but alive! Why are you weeping? Are you worried and anxious about many things when only one thing is needed? Can you see what alone is needed?

In a village in India we visited a Christian family we knew. There was sadness and some tears as they told us how a young son had died only two weeks before. But as the illiterate mother told how the thief on the cross next to Jesus turned to him and was taken in to paradise, her weeping turned to joy. She knew her son was with Jesus. We went into her room and sang and prayed together. This boy had cut his Hindu thread and confessed Jesus not long before he died.

## **Wonder – Angels**

When Mary stopped to look in the tomb what did she see? Peter and John saw only grave cloths – no body. What did Mary see? She saw two bodies! She saw two young men in shining garments (Luke 24:4) or two angels in white. They were sitting at either end of where the body of Jesus had been placed. The angels said to Mary *why are you weeping?*

Remember back to the birth of Jesus and another Mary. This Mary was betrothed to be married when confronted by an angel and told she was pregnant. What terrible news for this girl. She would be shamed and might even be stoned for adultery. She might well have wept with worry and fear. But she listened to the words of the heavenly messenger. She said *let it be to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38). She became the mother of the Son of God.

The incarnation, and the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are events marked by heavenly messengers or angels. Almighty God was orchestrating these events from his throne in heaven. These events were at the centre of his great and only plan of salvation for the world. At the centre of this plan was his only Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Jesus was not born in obscurity and he did not die in obscurity. Jesus did not live and do his mighty works in a corner. His birth, death and resurrection were not only marked by earthly rulers but by heavenly messengers. His coming again will likewise be marked by angels – if the visions of John in the book of Revelation are any indication. Jesus himself said God would send his angels with a great sound of trumpet (Matthew 24:31). Are you ready for such wonders and such glory!

Mary Magdalene saw two angels in the tomb. She did not react with fear as human beings usually do – although Luke does tell us that the women were afraid when they saw the angels (Luke 24:5). Mary was so overcome with grief she was not even aware that angels were speaking to her. She answered their question ‘without batting an eyelid’ we might say.

Her weeping, with maybe some degree of self pity, had blinded her to the reality of what she saw. She saw angels without recognising them as God’s messengers. She went on to see another man without recognising him as Jesus, the very one for whom she was searching.

## Wonder – Jesus

Not only angels but the risen Jesus himself spoke to Mary that wonder-filled morning – and even before the sun rose in the sky. After answering the angels question she turned around to see Jesus standing there. She had been stooping down looking into the tomb when Jesus came up behind her. Did she hear him approaching, or did the angels indicate someone had appeared? We are not told why, but simply told the fact that Mary turned around and saw Jesus.

Why did she not recognise Jesus instantly? After all this was the beloved Lord for whom she was searching – with so many tears. Why did she suppose that he was the gardener (20:15)? Was it that Jesus was rugged up because of the cold? There was more to it than this. It was matter of expectations. Mary did not expect to Jesus alive – she only expected to see a gardener.

Emotions and expectations can hinder our vision of the Lord. As sinful human beings living in a fallen world are expectations are often limited to this fallen world. Even as Christians we can be surprised when God does a mighty work in our midst. Liberal theology stripped the Bible of all such mighty works and Christians who hold such a view do not expect God to act in this world – apart from their own good works.

Emotional Christianity also faces the danger of blindness to the truth of Jesus Christ. Mary was so filled with emotion she did not recognize Jesus. Emotion comes from our own hearts. It is a vital part of our being but not a reliable source of truth. We are to worship the Lord in spirit and truth, not just in spirit or emotion as some seem to think. Too many are caught up in emotion and feelings without recognising Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible.

Jesus, or the gardener as Mary thought, said to her *Woman, why are you weeping. Whom are you seeking?* (20:15). Still focused on finding the dead body of Jesus, she pleaded *Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away* (20:15).

What a tragic scene. Desperately looking for Jesus, albeit his dead body, Mary asked the risen Jesus for the whereabouts of his own corpse! Such tragedy is lived out daily, hourly, every moment, in this fallen world. In pain, in grief and suffering men and women cry out ‘where is God, where is Jesus when I need him?’

And where is Jesus? The apostle Paul said the Lord is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:22). Jesus said *seek and you shall find*. Jesus is near and he will hear all who call upon his name – who call upon him in faith. We must come to God *believing that he is and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him* (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus is near to you. Do you see him? Have you come to him in faith? Do you know Jesus who died for you and who rose from the dead and now reigns over heaven and earth?

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*