

WOMAN WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

John 20:1-18

Leo Douma

Easter Sunday 2018



I want you to picture yourself, very early of a morning in a garden. In the garden is a tomb. It's the tomb of Jesus. In John 19:41-42 we read *"At the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden and, in the garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of preparation and since the tomb was nearby they laid Jesus there."* Let me show you pictures of a garden with a tomb close to where Jesus was crucified, near the church of the Holy Sepulchre. Now to get a feel for the wonder of the Easter event we will look at it through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She was in the garden that amazing morning and mistook Jesus for the gardener. Imagine with me her thoughts and emotions that first Easter morning. For the next little while we are Mary. It has been a traumatic weekend for her. One she will never forget, though she wishes very much she could. No, it's not easy to cope when someone you love dearly has been taken away and brutally murdered! Yes, that's strong language but how else would you describe all the terrible things done to Jesus. And then being put to death by crucifixion! Crucifixion of all things! He was their Rabbi, their teacher, their Lord; not a hardened criminal. Mary feels so bitter because so much had been taken away from her. Like the others she had put all her hopes and dreams on Jesus. He seemed to have the answer to all their struggles. He had given hope and vision. He had taught with such clarity and authority. But now, now he is gone...gone! Mary is shattered. Her mind is numb with shock, her feelings are in tatters. In her grief she finds it hard to accept Jesus is dead. She will see him no more. Never, ever again hear him speak words of hope. All that is left now are the memories; and his body. Ah, yes, his body. She wants to cling to whatever there is of Jesus. She wants to express her love by anointing his body. That is where her mind focuses; on Jesus' body. Come to think of it there is nothing else to remember Jesus by. He had nothing. And his clothes were gambled for by the soldiers. At least Jesus body is there. She can attend to that as the custom of the day prescribed.

There she is very early Sunday morning. The Sabbath is just over. Now she may officially do some work and embalm the body. The Pharisees and that ugly mob are gone. So she and the other women can quietly go on their way. But the shock of it all makes thinking difficult. It dawns on her. She hasn't made arrangements to have that large stone rolled and removed from the entrance to the tomb. Maybe one of the

disciples will be there. But now as she arrives she sees the tomb is open. Someone must have come overnight and opened it. Why? Has someone robbed the tomb? Why else would the tomb be open at this early hour. But Jesus had nothing. Have the Pharisees taken his body? O God, they haven't taken his body! Confused and angry she runs back to the house and tells Peter and John. The news startles them and they race each other to the tomb. They can't comprehend it either. The tomb is empty. The trips of linen that covered Jesus body are lying there. It's as if Jesus simply passed through the material. But they don't understand what it means. There is no 'Ah huh! Of course! It is just like Jesus said that he would rise from the dead.' No, it is total confusion here. Peter and John walk off forgetting all about Mary who is still trying to catch up. Nobody is thinking clearly this morning. How devastating are the effects of death on those left behind. Oh, how the world needs a way to overcome the power of sin and the terror of death. And yet, yet on this glorious morning sin and death have been overcome! But the disciples of Jesus cannot comprehend it. Such, it seems is too much to hope for.

There is Mary, overcome with grief and now further distraught because even Jesus' body is gone. While sobbing uncontrollably she looks into the tomb again. And there she sees a remarkable sight: two angels. Yet in her numbed state it makes no impression. Their very presence, sitting where 'Jesus body was laid' is a message in itself. But it does not register with Mary. So the angels ask her: "Woman, why are you crying?" It is not a question of 'please tell us because we don't know. Help us understand your problem.' Rather it's a rhetorical question. 'Why are you crying? How can you be grieving on this most glorious day?! Woman, don't you realise? Don't you understand? Christ's body is not here because he has risen! The greatest day in all of history is here. This is what heaven and earth have been waiting for! Sin and death have been beaten. The curse is broken. That's why we are here!' That is what the question implies.

But Mary cannot think past attending to Jesus' body. What the angels imply just does not register. Why is she crying? Well "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him". Mary weeps, but let me tell you we would all be weeping if she got what she really wants here. If she had received Christ's body, we would all have lost our hope. And hope is what we all need so much off. Sin, and the misery it brings, leave hearts and minds and lives broken. Our emotions can leave us unable to hear the good news, unable to comprehend the grace of God. We can think and ask for the most stupid of things; even things that will destroy us. 'Please give me Jesus body! Mary, we notice must have seen the angels give a gesture to someone outside. So, she turns around to see who is there. It is at this point that we are really seeing just how distraught Mary is. There is Jesus himself. Not his dead body, but Christ himself, alive

and well! But Mary doesn't recognise him. She thinks he is the gardener. When the devastating effects of sin really strike home in a person, when grief and pain take their toll, then a person can completely break down. They can lose all sense of reality. They can no longer see things for what they really are. Here is Mary, face to face with Jesus and she cannot see that it is him. Her experience with life says a person who has died stays dead. So, this cannot be Jesus. We cannot 'see' what the mind can't take in. We cannot 'see' what does not fit our 'world view', our 'paradigm', our experience of what is reality. Jesus wants to encourage her, so he asks that same question again; the one the angels asked: "Woman, why are you crying?" In other words, 'No, not today, don't cry today. There is no need to cry. Not today! Today I have conquered death. "Who is it you are looking for?" I am not gone and lost forever. I am here! You are looking for me, aren't you? Well here I am!' We said that Mary was broken. Well now we can really see it. I guess we have all cried at times when we have seen pathetic scenes of a man or woman or child broken by the cruelties of disease or hatred; bodies, minds broken; people clinging to obsessions.

Observe the sadness of this scene, of a person no longer coping because of the cruelties that have been thrown against her Lord and herself. There is the living Jesus standing before Mary and she asks for his dead body. She wants it, so she can drag it back to the tomb. (Verse 15). *"Thinking he was the gardener, she said "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."* Oh Lord please bring hope to the sick and those physically and mentally challenged. Bring hope to the ones broken by the cruelties of life and to those ruined by their own hatred and addictions and obsessions. Bring peace to warring nations and starving peoples. Bring hope of life for the dying. Bring back creation to its God! Yes, we know who Mary is. We can feel what she feels. 'Lord step into our world and bring hope!' And he does. He steps up to Mary and gently brings her to her senses. He simply, quietly says her name as only he can say it 'Mary!' Then the joy cuts through the fog of grief and depression. She sees clearly, and her shattered emotional state is healed and the jubilation bursts through: "Rabboni!" That is the incredible jubilation of Easter. The 'teacher' has risen! Death is overcome! "I have seen the Lord".

Yes, Jesus is alive, and Mary is very thankful and rejoicing. But she needs to see something more. That power over death is not just for Jesus. You can imagine Mary hugging Jesus tightly, so strongly she will not let go in case she loses him again. But Jesus tells Mary "Do not hold onto me" or as the Greek can perhaps better read 'Don't keep clinging to me'. That is, 'Don't continue to be obsessed with my earthly body, my earthly presence. For I am alive, yes! But I am not staying on earth. I have to return to the Father. Through my saving work there is now forgiveness, so that My Father is your

father (note verse 17). I must send out the Holy Spirit so that you and many, many others can have the life I have gained. Mary I am not just alive again for a while like Lazarus. I live forever. And so will you through your faith and love. For I have taken the sting out of death. Sin is paid for and hell is overcome'. "Mary, go tell the others!" What Jesus says here is very significant: go and tell the others. In other words, be a witness. Tell others what you have seen. As we see in verse 18 Mary *"...went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord'..."*

This is the call for all of Jesus' disciples. In Acts 1 we see that over a period of 40 days Jesus gave *"...many convincing proofs that he was alive"*. And he then instructed his disciples: *"...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."* That is our task as well. It is a calling we have made our own. As our mission statement says: 'Hope in the Hills Christian Church is called to bring hope to the hills community by sharing the good news of Jesus through word and action and growing as disciples who also make disciples of others.' How do we make disciples of others? We do it by being witnesses of the resurrection. Now that won't be easy. From a modern scientific approach, the resurrection is regarded as nonsense. Dead people don't rise again. Those are the facts. But don't forget that was Mary's position too! She didn't believe it possible. Her mind couldn't even comprehend it when Jesus stood in front of her. But the reality was that Jesus was there, alive and well. And when she finally saw it she ran to tell others. She was no mystic or theologian. She was a witness to what she had seen.

Perhaps in our post-modern world people don't care if something can really happen or not. In our day people say if you want to believe that sort of thing, that Jesus rose from the dead, well if it works for you great. But don't bother me with it. It isn't important to me. Isn't it? In Acts 17 we see Paul preaching to the philosophers in Athens. He finishes by saying *"God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."* It is interesting to note that many of those listening cut Paul off at this point because he spoke of Jesus rising from the dead. So, don't get the idea that back in those days they believed in people rising from the dead. They were very sceptical back then as well. But what is important to note here is that Paul says God will judge everybody by Jesus. So, nobody can say they don't care if Jesus rose from the dead or not. One day every single person will be answerable to this risen-from-the-dead Jesus. We need to make clear that what Jesus achieved by his resurrection has enormous impact for the entire universe. As he has risen so shall millions, billions of those who believe. As Jesus has overcome death and the curse of sin so shall the entire creation when God restores all things when Jesus comes again. So, talk about Jesus. Above all talk about the events of

Good Friday and Easter. Be a witness and help people to 'see' what happened on that first Easter morning. Talk about Jesus and witness to how he and his Spirit are at work in your life. Let your life and your daily walk and talk with Jesus be the proof of the fact that Jesus is alive. Let them 'see Jesus' in your life by the hope and joy you have. Do it because their eternal future depends on it.

Let's celebrate what today stands for. Despite the failures of us human beings, God in his grace, has brought forgiveness and eternal life. To a world that is devastated by the misery of sin, where disease and hunger kill the poor, and stress and obesity kill the rich, where relationships are torn at and broken daily, where the newspapers recordings of society's hatred and stupidity give shock and dismay almost every day, where death is the fear of us all; to this world the good news is declared: 'Jesus is alive and with us today!' He is here and brings the way of forgiveness and hope. Jesus has overcome. All you need to do is believe it and 'see' the truth. Let the wonder of the gospel break through into your life. Christ has risen. He has risen indeed!