

Jesus' Appearance to a Weeping Mary

Preached in New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church, Middleville, MI,
on Sunday morning, April 24, 2022 by C. VanSteenselen.

Text: John 20:11-18
Psalter 226:1-2
Psalter 264:1-2
Psalter 373:1-2
Psalter 196

Congregation,

Who has not stood at the grave? What happened? A loved one had passed away. Maybe a grandparent, a father, or a mother. What an impact it had! You had to say farewell. You would never see each other again. When that gave you some impression, you felt deeply grieved. Those days are days of tears. You grieve together. You weep one after the other. Will you get that person back with weeping? No. Certainly not. But why would you weep? You miss a loved one. Such grief causes tears.

Are there situations in the Bible that people weep? Yes. Hezekiah wept when he was sick. It was told him that he would die. Then he cried out to God. But do such situations only happen in the Old Testament? No. We also find instances in the New Testament. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He saw that they did not want conversion. Mary Magdalene wept over the loss of her Master. That is what we will hear this morning.

Theme: Jesus' Appearance to a Weeping Mary

I. Mary's Weeping for Her Lord

II. Mary's Rejoicing for Her Master

I. Mary's Weeping for Her Lord

Background

What happened before our passage? Matthew 28 tells us that it had become Sunday. In the early morning an earthquake takes place. Then an angel of the Lord comes to roll away the stone of Jesus' grave (Matt. 28:1-3). Yes, in this early morning the Lord Jesus rose again (Mark 16:9). This was exactly according to God's promise. It was said, "God hath fulfilled the same...in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as *it is also written* in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:33). After this moment, the saints, risen on Good Friday, went into Jerusalem. They appeared unto many (Matt. 27:52-53). In this early morning, when it was still dark, Mary Magdalene goes to the sepulcher (John 20:1). When she came there, she saw that the stone was rolled away. She warns the disciples. Then Peter and John come to check. When they arrive, they see that the cloth of Jesus lies on one side of the grave and the napkin around his head on the other side. But they did not understand that Jesus had risen again. They returned home (John 20:3-10). How? Confused? We do not know. What we do know is that Mary thinks that Jesus' body is taken away. She remains outside the grave. She weeps (John 20:11). And we are in our text.

Deeply Grieved before the Sepulcher

First, we see that Mary is deeply grieved. She stands outside the sepulcher. We read in verse 11, "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre." Mary. Who is this woman? Her name means "bitter, gift of God, or beloved." It comes from the Hebrew name Miriam. This woman came from Magdala. A town on the west shore of the sea of Galilee. Most likely she was rich (Mark 15:40-41). We know that she served Christ from her possessions (Luke 8:2-3). Ah, her past was not so good. She had been a sinful woman. Likely a prostitute. Also, she had been possessed by seven devils. But Jesus had cast them out of her (Mark 16:9). The Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip say that she was the wife of Jesus and that they had children. But that is not Biblical.

But what did Mary do here? We read, "Mary stood...weeping." That means, she was lamenting. She showed signs of pain

and grief. This is a mourning for the dead. The same we read of Peter, “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus...And he went out, and *wept* bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). What a grief for Mary! Her Master was taken away. The disciples had left her. She was alone. What a love does she show. She cannot leave the place of burial. Why? As we saw, her former life was sinful. She had been a slave of Satan. But she was redeemed and forgiven. Jesus had said to her that her many sins were forgiven her, for she loved much (Luke 7:47).

What does Mary do more? It says, “She stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre.” It means that she bowed her head forward to see. She looked into the sepulcher with her body bent. The same happened with Peter before, “Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and *stooping down*” (Luke 24:12). What is the reason for Mary to bow? Most likely the height of the sepulcher. The same is true for a believer. He or she can be spiritually bent too. For Mary it is a desire to look into the sepulcher. We read the same word for the angels, who are desirous to see how God would save men (1 Pet. 1:12). The same desire we see with Mary. She is desirous to look. She wants to see her Master.

Application

Child of the LORD, are there not many things that you recognize? Ah, do you not know about that weeping life? That is not only about sin. It is also about a missing of God and a missing of Christ. Before when you saw His face, you had such a joy. But after God withdrew Himself, you had nights of tears. You could not be without Him. But do you not know the Word of God? Ah, but the same is true as Mary, she did not remember, the word had no longer power. And for you too, the Word lost its power. At least that is what you felt. Then you can read the Bible, but you cannot apply it to yourself. What do you need? The power of the Holy Spirit to apply. Do you see the importance of the work of God Himself?

But we can draw another line. Mary had to stoop down. She had to bow to see. Even when she did not see Him, she still desired to look into. What a similarity in spiritual life. A bowing down. Ah, what does that need much humility. Yes, our natural heart is opposed to that. The religious world is opposed to it. But the true child of God knows about that. Then they go over the earth with a burden in their soul. Then they have a problem that they cannot solve themselves. They need Christ. What does then happen at such times? There is much bowing their knees. A bowing before the LORD. Yes, that only happens by grace. But what a sweet place if you may come there. Ah, yes, true humility will glorify God.

Congregation, do we know of such a life? Have you had a time of weeping and humiliation? If not, you need to seek for it. But do you know the greatest issue? That you do not see that you are dead. You are not aware you have lost God. What is the result? That you will not seek Him. You are not desirous. Friend, may we tell you, like Mary, such times of weeping take place because these people have love in their heart. With all those challenges, they do not want to have it any different. Pray then the Lord to show you. Ask Him, “LORD, I do not see what I am missing. I do not see anything of myself. But wilt thou show it to me?” No, no matter how sinful you are. Mary was subjected to seven devils, but she was healed. All sins had been forgiven her. That is why Mary has so much love for Christ. No, no matter how denying you have been. Peter denied His master but he was received back. When Jesus asked him the question, “Peter, do you love Me?” He could say, “Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.” Ah, seek then! Beg then. You can still obtain grace. But what happens when Mary looks into the sepulcher? She sees angels. She expresses her fear.

An Expression of Her Fear in the Sepulcher

We read in the verses 12 and 13 how Mary expresses her fears, “And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” What happens with Mary? We read that she “seeth two angels.” What are angels? They are servants of God. They are His messengers. Angels brought the message to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to announce His birth. They told the shepherds that Christ was born. Yes, angels are pure and holy. They serve God day and night. They worship Him. They do understand something of God’s holiness. They cover their eyes and their feet with their wings (Isa. 6:2-3). How do angels look like? They have wings. They are clothed with white garments. At times, they take a human form. But what do we see with Mary? She is not even surprised. She is not frightened like the other women were (Mark 16:5). How can that be? She was too busy with herself. She was too much grieved. She only thought about her Master.

What do the angels do? They ask her, “Woman, why weepest thou?” What a tender question. No, they do not use her

name. Yes, they could have known that. Think about Gabriel how he speaks to Mary. But it is like Jesus on the cross to His mother. He said, “*Woman*, behold thy son!” (John 19:26). Jesus showed there great care and not rudeness. Now, these angels ask her, why do you weep? What is the matter? It is the same when a child comes home weeping. Then mother asks him, why do you weep? Then he has to explain what happened. And what is the answer of Mary? “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (John 20:13). What an answer! My Lord. So personal. He is her Owner. They have taken Him away. This word for taking away means to bear Him or to carry Him away. John said of Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God, which *taketh away* the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That means He would bear the sins of the world away. No, Mary does not know where He is. If she just knew! Then! But she does not know. And now, she expresses her fear and ignorance. But Mary, do you not remember the words of Christ? What had He said, Mary? Ah, she is so blind. If the Holy Spirit does not apply it, then she cannot see. And now she does not know it anymore.

Application

Congregation, have we seen our blindness? Have we noticed our ignorance? The world does not. They ‘enjoy’ life. They think that they see. If God’s messengers, the ministers, speak to them, they simply ignore it. They will not hear. They do not listen for an answer. No, such people are not shocked. They do not see the holiness of the office. May we ask you, “Man, woman, boy, girl, what grieves you?” Is it a lack of knowledge? Is it because of issues at home? You may lay that before the LORD. He can give help for common life. But have you also seen that you lack the true light and joy? If that is not the case, pray the LORD for your poor soul! He can give it to you.

Seekers in our midst, what lessons do we find here. Is this not often the case? Then you do not know it anymore. Where can you find the Lord? How can you obtain salvation? Then you feel yourself so blind. How must it go further? How can you ever be saved? Yes, then you see your blindness, misery, and sin. You have tried so many things, but all what you did failed. May we ask you, “Man, woman, why do you weep?” Is your answer like Mary? “They took my Lord”? If that is the case, then it feels for you that the way of salvation is closed. Ah! Is that the case? May we then point you to another part of Scripture? What does it say? “And I will bring the *blind* by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they *have not known*: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isa. 42:16). Ah. What a promise. No, we do not say these words, but it is the LORD Himself. Is that not your hope? Go then with all your blindness and ignorance to Him. Then there will also come a time that you will get light on your path. Yes, then you get light on *the Way*, Jesus Christ. Because what happens in our passage after Mary expressed her fear and her ignorance?

Meeting With an Unknown Lord

We will first see that she meets an unknown Lord. Read with me in the verses 14 and 15, “And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, *Woman*, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” The verse begins with, when “she had thus said, she turned herself back.” No, she does not wait for an answer of the angel. She is so confused in mind. But what happens? She sees Jesus Christ. We read, “She...saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.” No, it does not say that she saw the Lord standing there. Neither do we read that she saw the Christ. But it is Jesus. The Savior. He paid for the sins on the cross. He that was risen again. He stood there. But, she does not know that it is Jesus. She did not understand it. How can that be? There can be different reasons. Maybe she did not expect him, as Barnes says. Let’s say that grandpa died ten years ago. You went to his funeral, and saw that his body was laid in the grave. One day a person knocks at the door. He says, “I am grandpa.” Would you believe that it would be him? No. Another reason can be that it was dark. Mary was also too busy with herself. That is why she thought that this was another person, the gardener. But we believe that more likely the reason is that her eyes were held that she did not see Him. This is what the annotations on the Dutch Bible point out. We read a similar history of the men to Emmaus, “But their eyes *were holden* that they should *not know* him” (Luke 24:16). What does Jesus now do? He wants to know the issue. He wants to teach her. He asks the same question as the angel. Jesus says, “*Woman*, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?” No, Jesus does not make any statements. But He asks two questions, Why do you weep? What do you seek? In other words, who are you looking for? Yes, Mary sought to

find Him. She sought what she had lost. It is the same as we read about the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel of John, “What seek ye?” (John 1:38).

Application

Those in their natural state, what a picture of you is drawn here. Mary was very close to Christ, but she did not see Him. She thought that He was someone else. How is that possible? But what about you? The Bible says that God is everywhere, “He [the Lord] is not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28). Do you see? God sees us. He sees our heart. But we do not see Him. We are so blind by nature. And another question, what picture of God do we have? That can be all kinds of pictures. Maybe you think that God is a nice ‘grandpa’ or the ‘fulfiller of wishes.’ But is that true? No. What you think is a different god. It is not the God of the Bible. If that is the case for you, ask the LORD, “LORD, I have a different picture in my mind about thee than in reality. Wilt thou show me the reality?”

Church of God, do we not remain seekers? Ah! Yes, your life is a seeking life. When your eyes were opened, you sought. But where did you seek it? In many wrong places. Mary sought it with the grave. The convicted sinner seeks it with the law. But what do they realize? That they cannot find life in it. It is all dead. And when they have nothing left, only then they seek it in Christ. Ah, then they need indeed God’s revelation. He can be so close. He can teach them. He can speak with them. And then He asks, What is the matter? What is the issue of your heart? Then they have to tell him, I am such a wretch. I am so sinful. I am a dying man. But ah, they do not see Him. They do not recognize that He speaks to them. What is then needed? His revelation. In our passage, after this question of Christ, Mary first reveals the issue. She looks for the body of Christ. Where is He? Then she will take it. But what happens then? Jesus reveals Himself. That is our second thought.

II. Mary’s Rejoicing for Her Master

The Joyful Revelation of Her Master

There is only one reason why Mary rejoiced in seeing her Master. He revealed Himself unto her. We can read this in verse 16, “Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.” What does Jesus do here? Does He give a great show? No. Does He explain the Scriptures, as He did with the men to Emmaus? No. He simply speaks one word. Only one. It is her name, “Mary.” How personal. Ah, does it not show that He is God? He knew about her situation. But by speaking this one word, everything changes. The same was true for the resurrection of Lazarus, “He [Jesus] cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus*, come forth” (John 11:43). A similar situation happened at the beginning of time, then God said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Is it not the same here? It was dark in the soul of Mary. And with one word it became light. Suddenly. Mary recognizes Him. The annotations on the Dutch Bible say, “She recognized his voice.” Ah, did not become true what Jesus said? “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). This is what she hears. She hears her master speak. But how do we know that she recognized Him? She responds with, “Rabboni.” This is Aramaic term. That is the language in the days of Jesus. It is related to the word Rabbi, which means teacher or master. Literally the title Rabbi should be translated as “My great one.” But the word Rabboni shows more honor. It is of greater respect, and more personal. We see the same with Bartimeus. Then we read, “The blind man said unto him, *Lord* [Greek: Rabboni], that I might receive my sight” (Mark 10:51). For Mary, it is not only to show honor, but also an expression of great joy. Her master is alive.

Application

Congregation, do we see how God works? Sometimes things change with one word. Think about the conversion of Spurgeon. He experienced many struggles. He was in a deep sense of need. Then one day, the preacher repeated, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). Then he said, “Look young man, Look.” Spurgeon later describes that he then saw who Jesus Christ was. Maybe you ask, what does then happen when God speaks? Then light begins to appear in the heart. For some more gradual, for others faster. But in essence it is the same. They feel life. They have hope. They see who Christ is, the Savior. Then their mouth opens. Why? Because there is such love in their heart. Then they desire to glorify God. Then their mouth opens in speaking and singing. They have much reverence for him. Ah, what a blessing if we have experienced that.

Those that have never heard their name, for you preaching never became personal. No. It was always for the neighbor, the

world, and another. But not for you. We hope that God will speak one Word. That the word “sinner” becomes reality. But also the word “son, daughter.” If that is true then there is a deep joy. That is why you have still hope, friend. God still works. He still speaks through the preaching and by the reading of the Bible. It is true that you need the power of the Holy Spirit. But He will convert sinners till the end of days. Lazarus was alive by one phrase. That can be for you too. Pray therefore to the Lord to apply it unto your soul.

Congregation, let us draw another lesson. How do we speak unto the Lord in prayer? Or how do we speak about Him to others? Is it with all reverence? Mary showed high regard for Jesus. Or do we pray in a demanding way? Ah, let us do the first. God is worthy of all reverence. But after Mary recognizes Christ, does everything go back to normal? No. Christ explains her more.

The Great Revelation of Her Brother

What we see in the next verse is that Christ reveals Himself as her Brother. Verse 17 says, “Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” What does Christ exactly reveal? Two things. That he is brother and that they share the same God. He speaks of “My Father, your Father,” and “my God,” and “your God.” Do we see the close relationship between Christ and the church? But there is a difference. Christ is the eternal Son of God. But the children of God are adopted children. Jesus Christ is eternally related to God the Father. But the believers are in relationship to God through Christ. But will Jesus be Mary’s earthly brother? No. Physical connections will be broken.

Christ says, “Touch me not.” That means, do not lay hold on me, do not cling to me. Jesus forbids her to touch Him or cling to Him. Why does He say this? Is that not a setback? It seems but that is not the case. But what does Mary want? She desires her old life back. The physical relationship with Christ. She is connected to her feelings. We know from Scripture that Christ often touched people. For example, He healed people, “Jesus put forth his hand, and *touched* him” (Matt. 8:3). The word for touching is used in physical relationships. Paul writes, “It is good for a man not to *touch* a woman” (1 Cor. 7:1). In that sentence it means to have no physical relationship. Why does Christ Mary not to touch Him? She has to learn to live by faith. Later He says, “I am not yet ascended.” That means, I have not moved to heaven yet. The same phrase we find in John, “No man *hath ascended up* to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). Some commentaries say, do not haste Mary. There is still enough time to before He will be ascended. We can still speak to one another. You can still honor Me. Yes, at ascension, Christ would send the comforter, Lightfoot says. They would not be without comfort, but have it in a spiritual way.

Application

What a lessons for God’s people we can find here. In those first times of the revelation of Christ, there are so many feelings involved. There is such a love. They want to cling to Him. But afterwards, God teaches them that they have to go into death with all of those experiences. Then there comes again a weeping and a missing of Him. Yes, it can even become dry within. What is the issue? They depend too much on their feelings and emotions. They can think that their tears moved God. That their tears make God to listen to them. But what do they have to learn? That it does not depend on those experiences. No, it only depends on God’s election and on His Word. No, do not understand us wrong. We do not say that God’s children will not have feelings or experiences. Absolutely. We dare to say, a religion without feelings is no religion at all. But it is never the basis for salvation. That is only the sacrifice of Christ applied by true faith. And when God continues to work, they are not only taught that Christ is their Lord. They also learn that He is their oldest Brother. What a sweetness if you may experience that. Then there is such a close relationship. Yes, He desires to have sinners as His brothers.

My unconverted friend, Christ said to Mary not to touch Him. Is that not a picture for you too? What kind of god are you seeking? Is that one you can touch? Is it a god you can see? Someone that speaks directly with an audible voice? Why would you desire that? It is indeed in the human heart. But may we ask you, how do you know if that would be God? No, the Bible reveals a different God. One that is Spirit. One you cannot see with your eyes. One that speaks through His Word. What does God then ask? To have true faith without seeing. To listen to the voice of His Word. Yes, if it is from Him, you will experience such a surety in that Word. Maybe you ask, what do I need to do then? Ask the LORD to give

that faith. Study your Bible. If you do not study, do not expect God to work. No! He works through the means. But if you do, you may expect Him to work. No, not because you use the means, but because He will work through means. But after Jesus explained this to Mary, He commands her, “Tell this to the disciples. Tell them what happened.” This will be a powerful testimony.

The Powerful Testimony of Her Self

We find this testimony of Mary in verse 18, “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.” Yes, she indeed goes to the disciples. No, her mouth is not closed but open. What does she do? We read, “Mary Magdalene...told.” This phrase is closely connected to the phrase “Mary Magdalene came.” It happened at the same moment. No, she does not wait. Before, she ran to tell that the body of Christ was taken away. But now it is a totally different message. In the original this word for telling is closely related to evangelizing. She brought tidings and reported the situation. What did she tell? Two main things: First, she had seen the Lord. Second, what Christ had said unto her.

In the first place, Mary tells the disciples that “she had seen the Lord.” Yes, she had seen Him with her own eyes. Not someone else had. No, she had not heard it. But she had beheld him. We read the same word in the first chapter of John, “No man *hath seen* God at any time” (John 1:18). Yes, Mary had seen Him. Who did she see? Her Lord and Master. What more did she tell the disciples?

In the second place, she said that “He had spoken these things to her.” What kind of things do we need to think of? First, Christ had called them *his brothers*. What a tender message! Second, He had spoken of their Father in heaven. Ah, He had often pointed to that. He had taught them the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father.” Yes, there is a difference between the father of Christ and His disciples, but still a close relationship. That they may be one. Third, Christ had spoken of their God. That means, God cared for them. He was truly their God. He had worked in their heart. The disciples were truly God’s people. What a comfort that was. And fourth, He would ascend unto heaven. No, this was not new for them. He had told them before, “I will go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). And in the same chapter He told them that He would send another Comforter, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). What a message did these disciples receive. Yes, a message for such weepers. A message for such doubters.

Application

Congregation, do we see how Mary responds? She does precisely what Jesus tells her to do. She let the disciples know that He is alive. He tells them that Jesus revealed Himself unto her. But what about us? If we hear a good sermon, do we share that with others? If we find something interesting in Scripture, do we tell it to our neighbors? Do we realize that such things can be used for their eternal welfare? It is true that God needs to give a mouth to speak. But we see with Mary that she cannot remain silent.

My unbelieving friend, you have heard the testimony about Christ. He is alive! He speaks. He reveals. What do you do with that message? Do you disregard it or do you take it to heart?

Conclusion

Congregation, today we heard a great message about the risen Christ. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Yes, she was weeping for her Lord. What a challenge. What a fear. But when He revealed Himself, what a hearty rejoicing. Her master was alive. Did you recognize these things in your own heart? Or were you only a spectator? Each will meet Christ. But the question is, how? Is it as Rabboni? As My Great One? Or will that be as Judge? There are only two ways. Either it is eternal well. What a blessing that is for such ones. Then all their tears will be washed away. They will never have to sorrow anymore. Then they may use their voice to rejoice always in Christ. Or it will be an eternal woe. What horrible for them. That will be a beginning of fears and sorrow. They will have tears forever without end. They will use their voice to cry. Then there will be no answer. It will echo into an eternal night. That is why we ask you, how will we meet the risen Savior? Amen.