

John 20: 15 Woman, why are you crying?

Read 20:1-9, 10-18 See first Friday's sermon Luke 23:26-49

Our reading on Friday was about the *death* of Jesus, and we read what he said to the women of Jerusalem who tearfully watched the procession to the cross.

On Easter day, the reading is about the *resurrection* of Jesus.

Once again we read about tears, this time from just one woman, Mary from Magdala, whom Jesus had healed of demon possession (Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9). She had been at the cross, with Mary the mother of Jesus and others.

Here she is again, at the grave.

The other gospels mention other women, but maybe they arrived at slightly different times: Mary is here just before dawn, others come at dawn, or just after.

Here is Robin Robinson to read to us.

### **Sermon starts here**

It may seem incongruous, after singing so cheerfully, to begin an Easter sermon talking about tears. But that is how Easter Day began for Mary from Magdala.

She had wept on Friday, when the man who had healed her from a serious condition had been cruelly put to death.

She had come at the earliest opportunity once Sabbath was over to his grave; and to her consternation, the stone had been rolled away. She ran and told Peter and John, v2b they have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we (so the other women are mentioned) don't know where they have put him!'

The men also ran to investigate, as v3-10 record, and went home. But Mary stayed. Standing outside the tomb, she wept

Were they tears at the loss of her Saviour, her healer?

Was there an element of anger at the desecration of the grave?

Was there a fresh sense of loss that the body was missing?

Maybe she was afraid that, with Jesus gone, her mental illness might come back.

Our experience of tears is that they can be triggered by a variety of circumstances. And pressures accumulate, so that when one frustration and another and another mount up, one tiny added straw can break the camel's back. We burst into tears over something trivial, or fly off the handle at someone for a mere peccadillo.

The trouble with grief is that it must come out. When people *weep*, we recognize it, but the British are less demonstrative than others, and there can be subtle ways in which that form of expression is denied us.

In my youth, parents could order children to stop crying.

Grief is less recognizable when it emerges in other ways – anger and indecision being among the most common, guilt and depression being others.

Far better, to talk. The angels asked Mary a question. In NIV it says they addressed her as 'Woman'. Well, that's an accurate translation, but it is too cold in today's English.

(normal accent) "Excuse me, Miss, why are you crying?"

Or (Glasgow Accent) 'Whit's the matter, hen?"

She answers, by making two assumptions. ‘They’ have ‘taken’ my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him. Jesus nearby listens to her answer, following up the reference to a missing person, by asking, who are you looking for?

Can we learn this art? To approach someone who is upset, in a way they do not find threatening, and help them start talking?

It is fraught with difficulty in today’s society, when everyone has a suspicion of strangers coming up to us in the street. They must be trying to sell us something, we imagine:

In Buchanan Street recently, I nearly walked away from a woman who approached me, when she only wanted directions to the railway station. I thought she was on the scrounge.

But in other places, at school, at the office, in the canteen, or even just on the phone to someone; can we be aware that something is not OK? Can we find ways to ask, politely, if there is something the matter? To offer to listen.

Jesus repeated the angels’ question: ‘Why are you crying?’ He already knew the answer. He knew she did not need to cry, but he was too gracious to try to stop her. Was he trying to get her to look at him?

At least he wasn’t pooh-poohing the idea of tears.

She continues to answer him without looking at him. Isn’t that typical of us when we are upset? We hardly notice who is around us. We don’t look people in the eye. She took for

granted this man was 'just' some gardener, some functionary who was not important. She was looking at the grave. (W Barclay)

We sometimes get engrossed in our misery, don't we?

I can't help thinking that Jesus was smiling, even laughing, when he said her name.

With emphasis. With a tone of, 'look at me, you daft lassie!'

Affection, not rebuke

He said just one word: her name. 'Mary!'

And she turned from the grave and looked at him, full in the face this time, and burst out in her native tongue, Teacher.

She did something else as well, not fully spelt out in Scripture. I visualize her flinging her arms round him, and hugging him tightly.

We used to read, in the AV, 'do not touch me', as if Jesus pulled back from her arms. But the tense of the verb is present continuous, 'Do not keep touching me,' hence, in NIV 'do not hold on to me.'

Was she pawing at him? Feeling his arms, head, face, beard? I imagine she was trying to check if he were real. And concluding he was! Trying to keep him and never let him go.

He gave her simple instructions. Go and tell my brothers...

When someone has been on an emotional roller-coaster, they need simple, clear steps of what to do next.

Did you notice how he used the word 'Father', as he always had done, for God.

I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

I failed to end Friday's message as I had planned. On the cross, Jesus said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Most of that was a quotation from Psalm 31 v5. Words that every Jewish mother taught her child to say at bedtime, according to William Barclay. Only Jesus added a word: Father.

This is how he could go to his death telling the women of Jerusalem not to cry for him. For him death was as easy as falling asleep in his Father's arms.

He knew he was returning to his Father. Here is added assurance for any who doubt Christ's power to save. He not only addresses God as Father in his own right, he allows us who believe in him to do the same.

To my Father *and your Father*  
To my God and your God.

Please feed this into your conscious and unconscious brain. Program it to remind you of this truth: the risen Christ, who has conquered death, invites you to address God as your Father.

When you are conscious of a loss and are moved to tears, please take your trouble to the Lord Jesus in prayer. In his arms he will take and shield you. You will find a shelter there.