

COLLECTIVE

The Love of Christ

Read: John 20:11, 14-18

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.....

¹⁴she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:11, 14-18)

When the risen Jesus approached Mary, she saw him but “did not realise that it was Jesus” (verse 14). In fact, she thought that he was the gardener. This is not surprising as we have seen how the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him at first.

Christ’s resurrection body was the body he had before, yet it was now wholly transformed and perfected, and so people who had known Jesus could not immediately identify him when they saw him raised from the dead.

This encounter also shows us one thing – that we cannot see God unless he first reveals himself to us. There would be no hope for us if God waits for us to make the first move. We would be lost if he stood apart from us, waiting for us to figure out for ourselves who and where he is. Unless he calls us by name, we would never come to him.

And that is exactly what he does with Mary. He begins with questions – “Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” (vs 15). He does not approach her like a commander seeking submission, but like a counsellor seeking insight. And Jesus breaks through to her heart.

Notice the sequence and order. Jesus does not wait until she calls him “Rabboni (Teacher)” before he responds and calls her “Mary”. Instead, we hear him call “Mary” first before she responds in amazement and calls him “Teacher”.

This shows us that the Christian salvation is never our attainment, a prize that we achieve after a long struggle, a reward for our work, a qualification for our achievement. No, he comes to us first. It is always a gift of grace, not a reward.

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We also learn that the Christian faith means intimate, personal communion. As soon as Mary cries “Rabboni (Teacher)!” Jesus says to Mary, “Do not hold on to me” (verse 17). It seems like a strange thing to say.

But what he is saying to Mary is: “Mary, I know why you are clinging so tightly to me. You are grieving because you think you have lost me. But you don’t understand. When I ascend to the Father and sit at his right hand and send the Spirit, then everyone in the world who believes in me will be able to have personal intimacy with me. Through the Spirit I will be able to come to you, to commune with you in love, to have my presence within you. Let me go to the Father, and you, and all who seek me, will have a fellowship with me beyond anything you can imagine.”

Intimacy with the risen Lord is one of the gifts given to believers in the resurrection. When you pray, you can feel his presence, you can have his wisdom, his mercy, and his goodness. It can become big and clear, comforting and delightful, and your burdens can be eased.

These are all available to Christians who have this precious blessing of knowing the risen Lord. Jesus has to go away in order to come closer to us than he has ever been.

This is something of unsurpassable encouragement to us today. We might be tempted to think that it would have been so much better to have been there with Jesus, like the first disciples, to have actually heard his voice and touched his hand.

But Jesus is saying that we can have a view of his glory, a relationship and intimacy with him better and greater than any of his followers had when he was here on earth, a love greater and deeper than if Jesus had actually held us in his arms.

Reflection/discussion:

- 1) What is your perspective and approach to the love of Christ? Do you often feel that His love is something you need to struggle to earn, to work and to qualify for? In what instances in your life and your relationship with God do you feel like this?
- 2) What is your understanding of the grace of God – that we are saved by grace alone, and through faith in Christ alone? Grace alone means that God loves, forgives, and saves us not because of who we are or what we do but because of the work of Christ. Is it only head knowledge or something you profess in your mouth and heart?