

"BLINDED BY TEARS"

A Sermon By

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### INTRODUCTION

It was to Mary Magdalene that Jesus first appeared after His resurrection. She loved him greatly. It was from her that He had cast out seven demons. We don't know the nature of those demons. Popular tradition would lead us to believe that Mary of Magdala was a woman of questionable reputation. The Scriptures do not tell us that. Those seven demons may have been manifested in mental or emotional anguish. It may have been from the slough of despondency that Christ had delivered her. We do not know. We only know that He healed her mind, soul and body - as He has so many others since that day long ago.

We also know that in return Mary Magdalene loved Jesus with all her heart. When most of His big, strong male disciples had fled into the night at His arrest and crucifixion, there was Mary - His mother - and Mary Magdalene - a friend keeping their faithful vigil at the foot of the cross. Yes,

Mary Magdalene loved Him dearly. She felt such an immense gratitude for what He had done in helping to turn her life around that His death was almost too much to bear. She hurried to the sepulchre that Sunday morning to express her love through the last rites of anointing His lifeless body.

### DEVELOPMENT

And then to arrive and to suddenly discover the stone rolled away and His body gone was shock added to her grief. What have they done with Him? The picture in John is quite moving. Hear it again.

"Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him'. Saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away'" (John 20: 10-15)

Blinded by tears. Mary's grief was very deep and very real. Her sense of loss was so great. Many of us have been there, have we not? In times of loss...

When George Meany died at the age of 85 in January of 1980, he had completed 24 years as the first president of the AFL-CIO. Remember this tough, ex-plumber...cigar firmly clenched in his mouth. They say that Meany never spoke, only growled. Yet this supposedly tough man was so touched by his wife's death the previous March that he himself lost all interest in his job and even in living.

Many of you have known that kind of grief. Blinded by tears as was Mary that first Easter morn.

Grief accompanies not only death, however. Many people can tell you that divorce and the break-up of a relationship is a fate worse than death. Not only is there the terrible sense of loss, but there's also the added sense of rejection. As one woman put it to me in a recent letter,

"...no one can imagine the pain, the absolute hell that people who are rejected can feel. You feel like you've been stabbed to your very soul, and on top of that you lose your identity as your husband's wife, your retirement, your hospitalization...."

Some of you have been blinded by tears as a relationship comes apart.

The death of a dream can be equally shattering. One pastoral psychologist has put it this way,

"When a man has a heart attack, ask what it is that is breaking his heart..."

There is a grief that many of us carry just beneath the surface. There is a sense of failure...a loneliness...a despair. And there we stand with Mary in the garden blinded by our tears. But blinded...from...what? What is it we fail to see through the veil of grief that mars our vision? The message of Easter is that it is the presence of the risen Christ.

John continues his narrative,

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary'. She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni' (which means teacher)."

The moment of recognition has arrived. Divine reality has broken into Mary's consciousness. He is alive. Love has triumphed over the grave. There is life beyond death - not only for the deceased, but also for those left behind...hurting and grieving...feeling abandoned and all alone.

Could it be that you are blinded by your tears this morning? Could it be that you are blinded to the reality of the Risen Christ? What is there in Easter that can dry the tears of those who are hurting and what does it mean to say that He is alive today. Let me briefly touch on three things that hopefully will be a signpost to you.

A FRIEND WHOSE LOVE IS UNFAILING

a friend whose love for us is unending.

First, to recognize that Christ is alive in our world is to recognize that we have

One of the paintings stolen from the Gardner Museum in Boston last month was Rembrandt's painting of Christ in the boat with His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Remember it? It's always been one of my favorites. It's the one where Rembrandt has painted himself into the scene. How many times I've thought of that painting as people have asked me that age old question, "Does God really care?" There they were on the Sea of Galilee...in distress, frightened...and He came to them. He cared. He quieted the seas as well as their hearts. I hope that painting is returned...that we'll have a chance to see it again.

George Fearnough, a microbiologist and prayer leader, once said:

"Jesus told us, 'I am the Light of the world'. And always remember...the most remarkable thing of all about light is the speed of its coming!"

And Theodore Parker Ferris who preached from the pulpit of Trinity Church in Boston in the forties and fifties and who wrote the little prayer that I have used before the sermon for many years here sums it all up in a sentence,

"The primary purpose of prayer is not to get something, but to be with Someone."

And the colorful language of a Pentecostal preacher tells us what it means to have a friend whose love is unending. He writes,

"Some morning you may get up and feel like your Heavenly Father was dead and hadn't left you a nickel, but before you get through with family prayers, Jesus will come and whisper in your ear that the 'Joy Wagon' is just around the corner and maybe by the time it turns the corner a front wheel will come off and an axle will break, and a whole wagon load of joy will roll out right into your own front yard!"

Remember that. We have a friend whose love is unending. That's part of the Easter message, a part of the message of this Church every Sunday. A man once saw a boy flying his kite. Observing something a little peculiar about the way he walked with the string, he approached the boy and suddenly noticed the lad was blind. He asked him, "Do you like flying your kite?" "Oh yes sir, I do" was the reply he received. "But how is that when you can't see it" was the next question. "I can't see it" said the boy, "But I can sure feel it tugging!" Something or someone tugs at your heart. You've felt it. I have, too.

We have a friend whose love is unending. Let's move on to the second thought for this Easter Day message.

A FOUNDATION ON WHICH TO BUILD

We have a foundation on which to build a new life.

There is one basically "obscene" word in the vocabulary of a Christian and I'm going to take a great risk here this morning and tell you what it is. I had a feeling you'd sit up on that. I may be in trouble if I say it. The word is "hopeless". I don't want any of you ever to repeat it. It's obscene.

The hope that Christ gives us is nicely expressed in the language of the five year old boy who was on his first ride on a train. When the train plunged into the first tunnel and blackness enveloped them all, the boy gasped in surprise. Seconds later the train cleared the tunnel and daylight over took them again. The boy exclaimed, "Look, it's tomorrow - today!" In Jesus we have always found it to be so. It is tomorrow today!

An old hulk of a ship was sunk in the mud of a river. All efforts to raise it had failed. Someone noticed that the river was affected by the tide. So at low tide he harnessed an empty barge to the old hulk with strong chains and

cables. Slowly and surely the waters came flooding in and the great lifting power of the ocean surged under that barge. My friend and colleague, David Read, says that something like that happens to us when we are linked by faith, and worship and prayer to our Lord. The tide of His Spirit lifts us up time and again from the mud of our sins and our follies and defeats.

I hope and pray that you feel that tide lifting you here this morning. You need not sink in despair and discouragement. Your life is not over. At any age - whatever your situation - it is never too late to begin building a new and more satisfying life. The risen Christ provides you with the foundation for that life. He can turn your life around just as he did Mary Magdalene's.

Unfortunately many there are who build their lives on foundations that are fragile and unable to stand up against the storms. Recently there was a scientific paper with the intriguing title, "If You Build Your House on a Crack in the Earth, It's Your Own Fault". I'm glad that the writers of scientific papers have a sense of humor. Nobody would knowingly build their house on a crack in the earth, but people do build their lives on fragile foundations.

What is your life built on - your job? Family? Health? Good looks? Pocket book and what's in it? They can be so fragile. Using the analogy that Jesus offers of the house built on sand, we can easily see how one of life's unpredictable and treacherous storms can quickly wash away such a foundation. But there is one foundation that cannot be washed away. And that is the foundation of our faith in Christ, our Risen Lord.

#### OUR FAITH

And this brings us to the concluding point. Mary Magdalene that first Easter morn was blinded by her tears, but when the Master spoken and called her by name, it changed everything. She knew Him. She knew Him...because she had devoted her life to Him. He was her friend. His way had become the foundation of her life from the moment they first met.

There may be some present this Easter morn whom He is calling by name. It can begin here as you respond to the "tug" you may be feeling in these very moments. Take that leap of faith. It makes all the difference.

I close with a story that has been one of my favorites since I first heard him call my name and felt that tug. When Holman Hunt painted that wonderful picture of the "thorn-crowned" King outside the door...knocking...he showed his picture to his dearest friend in the study before it was publicly exhibited. His friend looked at the kingly figure of Christ, at the rough and ready door, and at the clinging tendrils which had spread themselves over the door. Suddenly he said, "Hunt...you've made a terrible mistake here". The artist asked, "What mistake have I made?" and the reply was, "Why, you have painted a door without a handle".

Holman Hunt replied, "Why that's not a mistake. The door has the handle on the inside".

The painting hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral and whenever I'm in London, I always make a point of seeing that painting and remember his comment. The handle is on the inside. Only you can open that door. As you do, Christ comes in.

May the message and the music of this Easter service send you out of here now with a song in your heart that Christ is alive. That He is calling you by name even as He called Mary in the Garden. And may you answer that call and let Him be your friend and the foundation of your life..

PRAYER

In faith, dear God, we would each in our own way respond to that call. Through our tears of hurt and loss and loneliness may we hear the Risen Christ speaking in our hearts. And may we open that door and let Him in. In the name of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION      As we now prepare to celebrate the Easter Faith and its glorious message of new life, let us begin our worship by coming together in a time of silent meditation.

In quietness, let each pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION      We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead - yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth me In shall never die."

Said Paul:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life - nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers - nor things present, nor things to come - nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

"For this day of days, O God, we bless Thy name. With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we rejoice that death is finished, that love prevails, That Christ is alive and here."

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

Touch with healing those whom we mention in our prayers this Easter Day:

cherished members and friends of this parish. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us with the lifting message of this hour.

Answers the unspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Christ who taught us to say when we pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen".

PASTORAL PRAYER: April 15, 1990

O GOD, OUR FATHER....FATHER OF OUR SPIRITS and FATHER OF ALL MANKIND -

We thank YOU that we may gather here this hour,

Not for a MEMORIAL SERVICE to a dead prophet,  
But for a FESTIVAL OF THANKSGIVING for a conquering Christ!

Remind us, once again, of the empty Cross,  
of the empty Tomb, and  
of that truth of all truths,

That the Spirit of Jesus is ever alive in our world, present where  
we are to have dealing with our trials and troubles, our lust and  
our loneliness, our sin and our sorrow...and to have ULTIMATE  
DEALINGS with our death.

In all we do this EASTER DAY, make real to us HIS SHINING PRESENCE,  
and HIS RESURRECTION'S quiet joy.

WHEN days of discouragement come to us, give us the Easter assurance that  
Your eternal purposes are at work.

WHEN we struggle with the difficulties of life and do not know which way  
to turn, turn us again to the Easter Faith that sees Your Presence  
quietly removing heavy stones that block a path to life and greater  
meaning.

WHEN days of sorrow come to us...and when our loss seems unbearable...like  
Mary let us hear You call us by name. Assure us that all is not  
lost, that the grave is not the goal of life, and that we are not  
alone!

WE NOW OFFER to YOU our thanks for this Easter Day in April and for all that  
it means to us.

WE PRAY for the hungry and hurting, the homeless of our society.

WE PRAY for peace among the nations of the world and our prayers  
this hour reach out to include the leaders of our land,  
and for all in positions of authority and responsibility.

WE PRAY for loved ones, no longer with us, but now "gone home" to  
be with You - a part of Easter past ... in the great Kingdom  
of light.

TOUCH OUR restless, doubting minds with the profound message of this Day,  
that we may depart from here BELIEVING that with YOU there is no  
death, that with YOU "all things are possible...that all things  
work together for good to those who love and serve You". In  
the strong name and lifting spirit of the Risen Christ, we offer  
You our prayers.



ANNOUNCEMENTS: April 15, 1990 / Easter

GREETING / VISITORS

We greet all of you - young and old alike - on this Easter Day. And to each and to every one of you go our warmest wishes for a joyous and lifting celebration of the Easter Faith!

If you're a visitor, take a moment to fill out a visitor card and to drop it in the offering plate...or to sign one of the Guest Books in the narthex before you depart. Make yourself known to us. If your Easter Day schedule permits, join us downstairs for a few moments for a cup of coffee and some Easter fellowship.

Worship with us on other Sundays. Work with us in the various programs of outreach that we're involved in here in this community. The roots of this church are deep in the soil of this part of the city. We've been doing the Lord's work here at this busy corner since 1837...some 153 years. Our fourth building. We minister here in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit aht we greet all of you and embrace all of you with a wish for a joyous Easter.

PARISH CONCERNS

The parish concerns are there in the bulletin...review them on your own in these moments or after the service...noting -

The Fellowship Supper scheduled for next Sunday evening, sponsored by the Outreach Committee. We'll have supper together and then Eileen Lyons, Director of Interfaith Neighbors, will tell us about the good work of this 35 year old organization in our community. Sign up to bring something for the food table and check in with Jane Chaney on this.

Next Sunday, the Rev. Kenneth Halcott, a friend of our parish will be preaching. I look forward to a less hectic week and am grateful to Ken who worships with us regularly for giving me a bit of a break on the preaching end of things. Ken's messages are always solid, down to earth and I'm always helped as many of you are by hearing from him.

EASTER APPEAL

The Easter offering this year will help us to meet our responsibilities both here at home and in other places out there "in the community and the world" that we support. We're grateful for your response to our Easter appeal thus far and would say, "thank you and bless you" for your generous gifts.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us now worship God with our morning offering and our "once a year" special Easter appeal.