**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-113**. **THE RESURRECTION MORNING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 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. 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. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. 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. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her."*

*John 20:1-18*

John's purpose in his narrative of the resurrection is not only to establish the fact, but also to depict the gradual growth of faith in it, among the disciples. The two main incidents in this passage, the visit of Peter and John to the tomb and the appearance of our Lord to Mary, give the dawning of faith before sight and the rapturous faith born of sight. In the remainder of the chapter are two more instances of faith following vision, and the teaching of the whole is summed up in Christ's words to the doubter, Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!

**I. The open sepulchre and the bewildered alarm it excited.**

The act of resurrection took place before sunrise. At midnight, probably, the Bridegroom came. It was fitting that He who was to scatter the darkness of the grave should rise while darkness covered the earth, and that no eye should behold howthat dead was raised up. The earthquake and the descent of angels and the rolling away of the stone were after the tomb was empty.

John's note of time seems somewhat earlier than that of the other Gospels, but is not so much so as to require the supposition that Mary preceded the other women. She appears alone here, because the reason for mentioning her at all is to explain how Peter and John knew of the empty tomb, and she alone had been the informant. In these Eastern lands, as it began to dawn, very early at the rising of the sun, and while it was yet dark, are times very near each other, and Mary may have reached the sepulchre a little before the others. Her own words, We know not, show that she had spoken with others who had seen the empty grave. We must therefore suppose that she had with the others come to it, seen that the sacred corpse was gone and their spices useless, exchanged hurried words of alarm and bewilderment, and then had hastened away before the appearance of the angels.

The impulse to tell the leaders of the forlorn band the news, which she thinks to be so bad, was womanly and natural. It was not hope, but wonder and sorrow that quickened her steps as she ran through the still morning to find them. Whether they were in one house or not is uncertain; but, at all events, Peter's denial had not cut him off from his brethren, and the two who were so constantly associated before and afterwards were not far apart that morning. The disciple who had stood by the Cross to almost the last had an open heart, and probably an open house for the denier. Restore such an one, ... considering thyself.

Mary had seen the tomb empty, and springs to the conclusion that they--some unknown persons--have taken away the dead body, which, with clinging love that tries to ignore death, she still calls the Lord. Possibly she may have thought that the resting-place in Joseph's new sepulchre was only meant for temporary shelter (ver. 15). At all events the corpse was gone, and the fact suggested no hope to her. How often do we, in like manner, misinterpret as dark what is really pregnant with light, and blindly attribute to themwhat Jesus does! A tone of mind thus remote from anticipation of the great fact is a precious proof of the historical truth of the resurrection; for here was no soil in which hallucinations would spring, and such people would not have believed Him risen unless they had seen Him living.

**II. Peter and John at the tomb, the dawning of faith, and the continuance of bewildered wonder.**

In the account, we may observe, first, the characteristic conduct of each of the two. Peter is first to set out, and John follows, both men doing according to their kind. The younger runs faster than his companion. He looked into the tomb, and saw the wrappings lying; but the reverent awe which holds back finer natures kept him from venturing in. Peter is not said to have looked before entering. He loved with all his heart, but his love was impetuous and practical, and he went straight in, and felt no reason why he should pause. His boldness encouraged his friend, as the example of strong natures does. Some of my readers will recall Bushnell's noble sermon on Unconscious Influencefrom this incident, and I need say no more about it.

Observe, too, the further witness of the folded grave-clothes. John from outside had not seen the napkin, lying carefully rolled up apart from the other cloths. It was probably laid in a part of the tomb invisible from without. But the careful disposal of these came to him, when he saw them, with a great flash of illumination. There had been no hurried removal.

Here had been no hostile hands, or there would not have been this deliberation; nor friendly hands, or there would not have been such dishonour to the sacred dead as to carry away the body nude. What did it mean? Could He Himself have done for Himself what He had bade them do for Lazarus? Could He have laid aside the garments of the grave as needing them no more? They have taken away--what if it were not theybut He? No trace of hurry or struggle was there. He did not go out with haste, nor go by flight, but calmly, deliberately, in the majesty of His lordship over death, He rose from His slumber and left order in the land of confusion.

Observe, too, the birth of the Apostle's faith. John connects it with the sight of the folded garments. Believedhere must mean more than recognition of the fact that the grave was empty. The next clause seems to imply that it means belief in the resurrection. The scripture, which they knewas scripture, was for John suddenly interpreted, and he was lifted out of the ignorance of its meaning, which till that moment he had shared with his fellow-disciples. Their failure to understand Christ's frequent distinct prophecies that He would rise again the third day has been thought incredible, but is surely intelligible enough if we remember how unexampled such a thing was, and how marvellous is our power of hearing and yet not hearing the plainest truth. We all in the course of our lives are lost in astonishment when things befall us which we have been plainly told will befall. The fulfilment of all divine promises (and threatenings) is a surprise, and no warnings beforehand teach one tithe so clearly as experience.

John believed, but Peter still was in the dark. Again the former had outrun his friend. His more sensitive nature, not to say his deeper love--for that would be unjust, since their love differed in quality more than in degree--had gifted him with a more subtle and swifter-working perception. Perhaps if Peter's heart had not been oppressed by his sin, he would have been readier to feel the sunshine of the wonderful hope. We condemn ourselves to the shade when we deny our Lord by deed or word.

**III. The first appearance of the Lord, and revelation of the new form of intercourse.**

Nothing had been said of Mary's return to the tomb; but how could she stay away? The disciples might go, but she lingered, woman-like, to indulge in the bitter-sweet of tears. Eyes so filled are more apt to see angels. No wonder that these calm watchers, in their garb of purity and joy, had not been seen by the two men. The laws of such appearance are not those of ordinary optics. Spiritual susceptibility and need determine who shall see angels, and who shall see but the empty place. Wonder and adoration held these bright forms there. They had hovered over the cradle and stood by the shepherds at Bethlehem, but they bowed in yet more awestruck reverence at the grave, and death revealed to them a deeper depth of divine love.

The presence of angels was a trifle to Mary, who had only one thought--the absence of her Lord. Surely that touch in her unmoved answer, as if speaking to men, is beyond the reach of art. She says My Lordnow, and I know not, but otherwise repeats her former words, unmoved by any hope caught from John. Her clinging love needed more than an empty grave and folded clothes arid waiting angels to stay its tears, and she turned indifferently and wearily away from the interruption of the question to plunge again into her sorrow. Chrysostom suggests that she turned herselfbecause she saw in the angelslooks that they saw Christ suddenly appearing behind her; but the preceding explanation seems better. Her not knowing Jesus might be accounted for by her absorbing grief. One who looked at white-robed angels, and saw nothing extraordinary, would give but a careless glance at the approaching figure, and might well fail to recognise Him. But probably, as in the case of the two travellers to Emmaus, her eyes were holden, and the cause of non-recognition was not so much a change in Jesus as an operation on her.

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that His voice, which was immediately to reveal Him, at first suggested nothing to her; and even His gentle question, with the significant addition to the angelswords, in Whom seekest thou?which indicated His knowledge that her tears fell for some person dear and lost, only made her think of Him as being the gardener, and therefore probably concerned in the removal of the body. If He were so, He would be friendly; and so she ventured her pathetic petition, which does not name Jesus (so full is her mind of the One, that she thinks everybody must know whom she means), and which so overrated her own strength in saying, I will take Him away, The first words of the risen Christ are on His lips yet to all sad hearts. He seeks our confidences, and would have us tell Him the occasions of our tears. He would have us recognise that all our griefs and all our desires point to one Person--Himself--as the one real Object of our seeking, whom finding, we need weep no more.

Verse 16 tells us that Mary turned herself to see Him when He next spoke, so that, at the close of her first answer to Him, she must have once more resumed her gaze into the tomb, as if she despaired of the newcomer giving the help she had asked.

Who can say anything about that transcendent recognition, in which all the stooping love of the risen Lord is smelted into one word, and the burst of rapture, awe, astonishment, and devotion pours itself through the narrow channel of one other? If this narrative is the work of some anonymous author late in the second century, he is indeed a Great Unknown, and has managed to imagine one of the two or three most pathetic situationsin literature. Surely it is more reasonable to suppose him no obscure genius, but a well-known recorder of what he had seen, and knew for fact. Christ's calling by name ever reveals His loving presence. We may be sure that He knows us by name, and we should reply by the same swift cry of absolute submission as sprung to Mary's lips. Rabboni! Master!is the fit answer to His call.

But Mary's exclamation was imperfect in that it expressed the resumption of no more than the old bond, and her gladness needed enlightenment. Things were not to be as they had been. Christ's Mary!had indeed assured her of His faithful remembrance and of her present place in His love; but when she clung to His feet she was seeking to keep what she had to learn to give up. Therefore Jesus, who invited the touch which was to establish faith and banish doubt (Luke xxiv. 39; John xx. 27), bids her unclasp her hands, and gently instils the ending of the blessed past by opening to her the superior joys of the begun future. His words contain for us all the very heart of our possible relation to Him, and teach us that we need envy none who companied with Him here. His ascension to the Father is the condition of our truest approach to Him. His prohibition encloses a permission. Touch Me not! for I am not yet ascended, implies When I am, you may.

Further, the ascended Christ is still our Brother. Neither the mystery of death nor the impending mystery of dominion broke the tie. Again, the Resurrection is the beginning of Ascension, and is only then rightly understood when it is considered as the first upward step to the throne. I ascend, not I have risen, and will soon leave you, as if the Ascension only began forty days after on Olivet. It is already in process. Once more the ascended Christ, our Brother still, and capable of the touch of reverent love, is yet separated from us by the character, even while united to us by the fact, of His filial and dependent relation to God. He cannot say Our Fatheras if standing on the common human ground. He is Sonas we are not, and we are sonsthrough Him, and can only call God our Father because He is Christ's.

Such were the immortal hopes and new thoughts which Mary hastened from the presence of her recovered Lord to bring to the disciples. Fragrant though but partially understood, they were like half-opened blossoms from the tree of life planted in the midst of that garden, to bloom unfading, and ever disclosing new beauty in believing hearts till the end of time.