

The Women at the Tomb

I'd just like to extend a warm welcome to you all this morning. And this morning we're going to be looking at the women who came to the Lord's tomb to apply the spices to the Lord's body in a last act of love and devotion. And of course they found that He was gone. Last week we looked at Joseph of Arimathea and we looked at Joseph as the focus upon the understanding part of the mind as His application within us. And so, these women today represent the affectional side.

Last week we saw that Joseph was a new development in terms of the mind within a person who is growing and developing spiritually. And we see that Joseph's devotion to the Lord with such that he found a place for the Lord, His own tomb to lay Him in. And it was Joseph who took Him from the cross, purchased the grave clothes and wrapped the Lord's body in them prior to putting them into that tomb. And we saw how this is a simple devotion to the Word in its literal sense. And that the wrapping up of the body of the Lord, which is the Word that contains Him, this wrapping up is simple obedience.

Simple obedience in terms of things like the ten Commandments. Being obedient to how we understand the Lord would have us live. And the placing of the Lord's body within the tomb is the laying up in our memory of these things. For the Word 'tomb', in the Greek language means "*memorial-vault*". That which is of the memory or called things to remembrance. That is what that Word means. And we also saw that as far as Joseph was concerned, it was described as a time of preparation prior to the Sabbath. And this is that time of preparation for ourselves where we read and study the Word and seek in a simple way to be obedient in accordance with our understanding of it.

And in that process it is the understanding that takes the leading role. And we saw that last week, the women were described as "*being afar off*," but they had a knowingness as to where the Lord's body was placed. So, this week our focus shifts onto the affectional aspects. The devotion and willingness to be led by the Lord through His Word. And so, we will see today how this affection for the things of the Lord's Word, when we act upon it, that influx occurs and amazing things can happen in our life and in our understanding of the Word.

Our first reading from the Word this morning is from the Old Testament book of Joshua, Chapter 21, reading verses 43 to 45.

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Now reading from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 16 versus 1 to 8.

Now when the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, brought spices that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said, among themselves, who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us. But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away for, it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him as He said to you." So, they went out quickly and fled from the tomb for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

And the reading from the Heavenly Doctrine this morning is from the work, the Arcana Coelestia, paragraph 2405(8).

Seeing that 'the morning' in the proper sense means the Lord, His coming, and so the approach of His kingdom, what else is meant by 'the morning' becomes clear, namely the rise of a new Church, for that Church is the Lord's kingdom on earth. That kingdom is meant both in a general and in a particular sense, and indeed in a specific sense, the general being when any Church on earth is established anew; the particular, when a person is being regenerated and becoming a new man, for the Lord's kingdom is in that case being established in him and he is becoming the Church; and the specific, as often as good flowing from love and faith is at work with him, for this is what constitutes the Lord's coming. Consequently the Lord's resurrection on the third morning, [Mark 16:2, 9](#); [Luke 24:1](#); [John 20:1](#), embodies in the particular and the specific senses the truth that He rises daily, indeed every single moment, in the minds of regenerate persons.

So, we come to this episode in the Gospel where the women are coming to the tomb and they do so after the Sabbath. And so, it is the closing of the Sabbath which brings them to the tomb. And what this speaks of is the old dispensation was at an end. The Sabbath in that dispensation, which was the Jewish religion, fell at the end of the week. And so, in the Jewish faith the Sabbath was something looked forward to. And as soon as it passed then there was a further looking forward to the next Sabbath and so on. So, it being something looked forward to we can understand what it is that that Sabbath represented. For the focus of that Sabbath was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. And so it was that the Sabbath was at the end of the week. And so the Sabbath day in this context was a representation of what was to come.

And this is true for all the rights and rituals of the Jewish faith. The things of the Jewish religion in their detail spoke of their reality which was the Lord himself. But it's important that we realise that what is represented in the Jewish religion is something that exists in the human condition and something to which we are all prone. It is to be found in all of us. And so, the Lord in His Word, describes this religion and detail in both in its height and in its low points, to illustrate the principle within us. And so, what is this principle? Well, it is the tendency toward making the external aspects of religion the essential element of faith and love or devotion to God, so that religion and spirituality consists solely of external representative elements, forms, and rituals. And as we have seen over the course of our journey through the Gospel, how that faith amongst the Jews had become such that there was nothing of love and charity left. All that remained was the mere shell or representative of what a true religion could be.

So, we have the closing of the Sabbath. But it also says in the Word that on the first day of the week. Now in fact, in the Greek, the word 'week' is not mentioned. What it says is that on the first of the Sabbath, the woman came. And so, we have a new Sabbath, which forms the beginning of a new dispensation, the beginning of a new period in the spiritual life. But the idea captured here is multi-dimensional. For the first can mean the first of many. But in this context, it more likely means the first ever, the first Sabbath ever. Everything that had gone before was a mere representation that pointed to this time, to the coming of the true Sabbath.

The Word 'first' here also means what is *supreme*, what is *foremost*. And it carries the idea of a perpetual Sabbath, a full state now available to all people due to the Lord having completed His work on earth. Thus, the Sabbath is not a day but a state of spiritual life available to all members of the human race. It is

a transition from the representative, what went before into the reality of that representation and we find that the women in coming to the tomb are between Sabbaths. They are between what represents and the reality of the representation. And we also read that when they began setting out for the tomb it was a time of darkness, it was before sunrise. And so it is that this time represents every period in the spiritual life that exists between what has been and what is to come. Specifically, it outlines for us a shift of a focus on representatives to entering into the reality of what those representatives point to. And as such, it speaks to each and every person, speaks to each and every church that is involved in a transition from one state to another. Every progression in the spiritual life of an individual or a church involves moving from understanding something theoretically to living it out practically or entering into the reality of it.

So it is, we learn that we are to love the Lord and to love the neighbour. We know this theoretically. And the responsibility is on us to move out and see how that theory might be put into practise. And as we do that, it becomes obvious in many, many situations that the reality of the thing is very different to how we might have perceived it theoretically. And the reality is that it is difficult to break away from old habits of thinking, of being, and of doing but it is what the spiritual life is about. It is a life of flux, of moving from old state to new states, and in some sense, we are always caught in between. There is always a struggle to see the old forms, how they can be utilised in a new situation. It is always a struggle to see what the changes are that we have to make. It is always a struggle to have to change our way of thinking in any area of life, particularly where that form has served us so well for so long.

But these difficulties are outlined in the Lord's Word precisely because they are difficult times. And we need the Word to guide us through them. You see, the thing that moves us through this process is our devotion and commitment to seeing the Word expressed in living forms that have relevance and meaning for all people. It is a dark time between the Sabbaths and this speaks to the fact that there may be little light as to how to move forward. But our love for the Lord represented in this story by the women, for living our lives in accordance to His Word, is what can guide us through periods of transition.

They came with spices. And the Greek word is a word we are familiar with in English for the word translated 'spices' is *aroma*. And specifically, it refers to sweet smelling spices. And they came with these to anoint the Lord's body. And so, they make their way to the tomb carrying these spices. And so, the actions of these women describe how in times of struggle our love for the Lord

draws us to His Word. A powerful desire to serve Him to the best of our understanding and ability is represented in the spices they carry with them. For with every affection there is needed truths to give it expression. And so, these spices represent tender truths of devotion toward the Lord. The love and the devotion here finds its expression in these pleasant smelling spices with which they hope to anoint and minister to the Lord's body. For the root word from which 'aroma' comes from means *to raise up*. And so, it speaks of how the Word is truly regarded as Divine as an authority in our life, is raised up, when we seek to put it into practise. When we seek to live according to the truths that we have - so this is a sweet-smelling spice to the Lord. True devotional love of the Lord is love expressed in action. Love expressed from the Word in obedience to it. This gives rise to our ability to perceive things in new ways, to gain a sense of the deeper meanings within the Word, meanings that have application to how to love more effectively. In times of transition we must act on what we know so that new perceptions might arise and the way forward be seen. This for us, is the lesson of the spices.

The first Sabbath, not the first day of the week but the first Sabbath, is what the Word says. For the Lord Himself is the Sabbath. And so, while in the old dispensation, there was the looking forward to, so in the next, the idea is one of being in the Sabbath itself, of being in the Lord Himself, being in the Lord in His Word.

In states of transition, we see from this story that our affections are strongly attached to what was. And this is perfectly normal. This is the common state of human nature to hang onto what was. Yet we must be prepared to let go if we are to enter into the new day that presents itself. For in the spiritual life, our devotion can never remain in what was but must be ever ready to take hold of what must be. A true affection for the Word will guide and lead us in new ways of being in the world. We lack understanding and so we will often return to past associations and the hope of finding the Lord in them because it had so much meaning for us in times past. Those things that once defined us spiritually and now belong to a different era, a different dispensation under the Lord's Providence. These women are the genuine affections for the Word that exist within the Lord's Church but as yet without a clear understanding to guide them into the new state that is dawning.

So, they do the only thing they know they can. They go to where they believe the Lord is. They go to the tomb. They go to the memorial, to the reminder of what was. They go there believing they will find what they're looking for. And this speaks of our own sense, our own response to a sense of loss. An attempt

to recapture a sense of meaning and connectedness by re-entering into old ways of being and doing and thinking in the hope that they will restore to us what we seek. They cannot, of course, and this is the story of the Lord not being in the tomb. But this return and seeking in the things of the past is a part of the process for moving on. It is necessary because until we see that they can no longer serve us effectively, serve the Lord and what He's wanting to do, once this is seen, we are open to receiving new insight as to how our love might find a more relevant and fulfilling expression.

The affections expressed in the actions of these women are the true affections of the Church. It is not a desire to maintain and preserve what was, it is a desire to serve the Lord to the best of our capacity, yet it is often found in attempts to maintain what was. The motive is pure, what is lacking are the relevant forms and so an understanding of how we might serve the Lord better. For the Church, true service can only be understood in the light of the Lord's own desire for the salvation of the human race. We serve Him by being engaged in uses that bring this into being in the hearts and lives of those who are yet to know Him. It is this realisation within the Church that is the rising of the sun, the dawning, the birth of a new day. For as the women draw near to the tomb, in heartfelt devotion, so the sun begins to rise. And so, as we look to serve the Lord through cultivating a genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of others, so the sun rises. Light or enlightenment begins to come into our minds.

There is a deep sense of conviction as to the divinity of the Word, yet it seems something sealed in its ability to offer us a way forward. So it is, there is a stone in front of the tomb, which presents us with a problem. The woman's discussion regarding the stone is our sense that within the Word, lies the answers as to how the ruling love of the Church can find its full expression. We know that the Lord is within the literal sense of His Word but it is hard to penetrate, as our old understanding of it is like a large stone that obstructs the way. But what we see here is that affections that look to serve the Lord's own ends can see the stone removed.

The conversation is about how the stone can be removed. It's about how those things that obstruct can be taken out of the way and we can find a more fulfilling expression of our love. Here is revealed the key to the stone being rolled away. It is a genuine desire to have it gone, that we might usefully serve the Lord, an honest appraisal of where things are from a desire to serve the Lord and others. And this genuine desire to serve the Lord through serving others is what it is to look up. It is to raise our vision and we see that this is

done, so the stone is no longer there. To look up, is to look to the things of loving service. And as height corresponds to depth in the Word, it also involves us looking deeper. Looking beyond the literal sense of the Word and looking for insight regarding how we can love and serve others in a spiritual capacity, and so to organise ourselves in a way that more effectively supports this. To look up, to look to the Lord and the spiritual well-being of others. It is to look to the Lord's end in view and bring our lives as individuals and as a body of people committed to spiritual uses, into alignment with the Lord's ends. It is to ask how we might better serve the Lord to bring the Word and the Heavenly Doctrines to others, that they might be brought into a more conscious union with Him.

And so it is, they enter the tomb and within the tomb they find a young man. You see, we all have to enter this tomb. And in entering we will find what we least expect. The tomb, contrary to common belief is not empty. There's a young man sitting there. We are told he is sitting to the right and this young man instructs the women. And so, the young man represents a new understanding that can be gained from looking into the Word. A rational understanding, an understanding that thinks from spiritual principles and this understanding communicates with these deep affections.

For within this tomb is something living, shining, vibrant and very, very human. And at the same time magnificently, heavenly. Here is a rational understanding that sees things as they truly are. An understanding which the affections for service represented by the women are able to receive. It is a new vision of the Word and living spiritual teachings regarding how the Church's love can be fulfilled. Here, in this young man, lies the answer.

Of course, the young man being on the right is significant. For the right, represents goodness that flows from truth having been integrated into our life. It is the goodness that arises from being devoted to the Lord in His Word and seeking to make it the central part of our life and this is shining with the light of heaven. We read that this young man is dressed in a robe. The Greek word is *stole* from which we get the word 'stole'. But it is an interesting word in that its meaning means *fitted out for useful activity*. The inner sense of the Word is fitted out for use. It fits us out for use and can instruct us as to how we are to live the spiritual life.

What does he say? "Don't be amazed:

You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here.

This young man is a new understanding of the Word, which teaches us what it is we truly seek and where it can be found. You see, the Lord's Church seeks only to know the power of the Lord's life in our everyday experience of life. These women, those affections that desire to minister to the Lord do so when we work on our own inner lives with a view to being more effective in our capacity to help others. This is why the young man, or the Word as to its inner sense teaches - Go tell the disciples and Peter, that He goes before them to Galilee. The love for the Word that flows from these affections represented by the women is to flow into the understanding of the things of the Church represented by the disciples, and also into our capacity to believe represented by Peter. And it is to instruct the mind that the Lord will be found in Galilee. That is where He is to be found. And He is found when we believe that He is in fact risen. And on that belief, we go, taking our newfound convictions into outer life. For Galilee represents the outer activity of life. And it is there that we are the minister His love and His message to others.

But it doesn't happen straight away. We see that the women are restricted due to fear. The women we are told say nothing to anyone and this shows that the head is yet to grasp what the heart already knows. There's an inability for those deep affections to find expression in spiritual uses. And it is often due to believing appearances, unable to get beyond them, that people perhaps aren't receptive. Or perhaps it's keeping hold of things we need to let go of. These things must be broken down if these affections and the message that these affections bring is to be received. The desire of the heart lies bound up due to fear, unable to speak for fear of the implications, perhaps, this may have, for all of us.

In the level of the understanding there's an inability to see how it is possible that the Lord is risen, already risen and gone before us. Perhaps it is that we are unable to see yet the power of the Word in our lives. Yet we know in our hearts that the Word and the Heavenly Doctrines has the power to transform any life that is willing to turn to the Lord. To transform it into a richer and fuller experience for all people.

As a church, we need to challenge ourselves with the question, are we attuning the ear of our understanding to the voice of our heart? The Lord is risen. Let us seek how we might fulfil His call in our lives by finding Him in our Galilee.

Amen.

