The Feast of the Resurrection
Rolling Meadows - 1966

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. John 20:11-18 (RSV) 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 round 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teache Jesus said to her, "Do not hold Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord;" and she told them that He had said these things to her.

The Resurrection message comes to a gray and bitter world, divided against itself and drifting farther and farther away from the ways of peace and Christ. There is no way of reducing the woe of the world, bent on its own destruction, into focus more quickly than by the experience of death and grave and Resurrection. It is as simple as that! We are watching the death struggle of the world. We shall stand at the mass graves of millions. We shall either then HAVE the Resurrection Hope, and a chance for survival, or WE SHALL BE LOST FOREVER!

Yesterday I stood beside the open grave of a young woman, 21 years old, who had been brutally stabbed to death several months ago. Her corpse had been left to rot in a farmer's field. Suddenly, forcefully the words of Luther came home to me, when he said: The Gospel of Easter is understandable only in the light of your own bitter experience. When you have stood at the grave of father or mother, son or daughter, then you will know the sense of utter emptiness - the los which no one can define or describe. This is the grief of Mary!

Mary Magdalene weeps at the grave of Jesus. We would evoke no sad thoughts for Easter when the glory of the Resurrection sun shines down upon us, but yo will understand Resurrection better if you know a grave. A grave is not only a ditch, or a furrow, or a hole in the ground. It reaches up to receive and enfold the casket of a loved one. No matter how you try to describe it, it is the End! We try valiantly to keep it alive with flowers, and the evergreen of ivy and arbor vitae. We set a marker - a grave stone. In spite of the hopeful inscriptions, it is still a milestone, a boundary marker, between the life that now is, and ends, and the life which is coming, and is forever. It is the division between life and

death - between two worlds.

Mary refuses, as we all do, to accept the stone as finality. When she comes to the grave on Easter Day she looks both fearfully and hopefully past the stone into the grave. She sees the angels and the questions and answers begin. Not even angels can help her. They ask the reason for her tears, but they have no way of giving her a new hope. Then Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing ther and, all of a sudden, Easter began. Jesus addresses her, Why do you weep - whom d you seek? Notice that He is not recognized - even Mary who has followed Him all through His ministry and life of love and service does not know Him now. She mistakes Him for the gardener. Some new glory had been added. The two disciples on the Emmaus raod did not recognize Him either. Why?

This was a common experience in the life of Jesus even before the days o Holy Week and Easter. People did not really know Him. The voices of the chosen race said that He had a devil; that He cast out devils with the help of Beelzebub, the chief of devils; that He was a blasphemer who had spoken against the temple an made Himself the Son of God; that He was a criminal worthy of death. On the other hand there were His followers. In the good days they looked for Him to be the Restorer of Paradise; that He would redeem Israel; or, better still: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But when He dimmed His glory their faith faded - they all foresook Him and fled.

Do WE recognize Him? This is supposed to be an enlightened age, but for many Jesus remains only a great man. He may rank with Moses, Isaiah, Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato, and even Gandhi. It seem almost a pattern - to try to recognize Jesus as something else than He really is - to try to make Him do thins that He did not come to do. We make a serious mistake when we reason that somehow Mary recognized Him by His face or form - by the sound of His voice, Easter says, No! It was altogether different. She recognized Jesus only when He speaks her name. Then came hope, and joy, and recognition.

Names are important. This is our IDENTITY. This is our PERSON. Vaguel we sometimes see an approaching figure. We become aware, Here comes someone. The

as they come closer, we say, I know who that is - That's John or Thah's Mary. No longer are we vague - no longer is it just SOMEONE. Now suddenly it is very personal, very real, and very warm. This is my friend. You feel hurt if they do not recognize you by name, as a person. NAMELESSNESS - a lack of identity - is one of the real problems in our big cities and even in our larger congregations. They tell us that the nameless loneliness in the refugee camps of Europe and Asia broug about a tremendous increase in mental illness. It is certainly one of the great diseases of our time. People feel themselves lonely, forsaken, misunderstood, unworthy, without a name.

Jesus changed all that. He calls Mary by her name. No longer is she just a grieving woman, she is a redeemable soul. This was one of the foremost reasons for combining Easter with Baptism, making people names and persons in the sight of God. The Name Feast meant that our names were combined and joined with the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is the Good Shepherd come alive - calling His sheep by name. He speaks to us - He addresses us - He comes to us in Holy Communion and says it again and again, FOR YOU - FOR YOU! You are SOMEONE, because Christ died for you and rose again. Easter is not something OUTSIDE. The Resurrection begins when the Risen One addresses me and I listen - Mary - Rabboni Master. Then Easter begins. We know to whom we speak, and that we speak about death that once was, and life which now is, in Him.

Then comes the MESSAGE, Do not hold Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. It was natural for Mary to reach forward to hold Him fast. She wanted to convince herself, It is really He - He has risen - He is alive - The stone is gone. It is natural for moderns to want facts. We wil look into the grave. We will know how the grave clothes are arranged, but we will want to go further. We will want to see Him, touch Him, join Thomas in putting ou fingers into the nail prints, and our hand into the wound in His side. We want to hear His voice. We wish that someone had been around to make a documentary film o the entire proceeding - to make a recording of His voice. Then we feel we could believe. But Jesus said. Do not hold Me. or touch Me. Do not look for evidence

like that - I ascend to My Father and your Father - to My God and your God. Easte is not something OUTSIDE. Easter begins when the Risen Christ address me, and I listen. Easter is something INSIDE where your heart is and your faith. WWe are in volved with Him who has Risen from the dead - this is what He said, MY Father is YOUR Father.

We dare not become jubilant too quickly! The Passiontide remains. The offense of the Cross and its shame is very real. Betrayals are there where money played its dirty part. Cursing denials are there where fear made cowards of saint False witnesses are there who sold their souls for gold. Corrupt judges are there who let personalities play a part while they forgot justice. Frightened disciples are there because the memory of grace was far shorter than their fear of men. The prayers are there - from the anguish in the Garden, Thy Will be done - through to the hope of, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do, and the peace of Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit. There is the unbelievable horror of the cry from the depths of loss and hell, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? We cannot drown out the agonies of Calvary with the songs of Easter and the trumpets of joy. There is no magical transfiguration which says, Oh, it was not s bad after all! The message of the Resurrection tells us that the meaning of Easte lies in recognizing all this as LIFE - suffering, and death, and grave, and Re-surrection -- this is ALL LIFE! But Jesus has broken the chain because He broke the power of death. Jesus conquered the last persistent foe. Now there is a new language - God is with us - If God be for us who can be against us? - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Is the stone gone from our graves? No, but it has become only a marker which says clearly where the one world ends, and the other begins. It says also that everything, everything, belongs now the the Kingdo of His Power, and His Love, and His Grace.

Now comes the obligation to Witness: Go to My brethren and tell them. In other words, this was not to be a secret locked away in Mary's heart. This is no hush-hush affair which Christians whisper to one another. No, Jesus is alive! Jesus ascends To MY Father, and YOUR Father. These things you cannot keep to your self. These things belong to the whole fear-filled world. These things need the

songs of Easter. They need the trumpets, like a roll of thunder, for the frighter ed people of our time. Tell it to strangers, but tell it to your brethren too. Tell it to those who are nearest and dearest to you. Tell them this is the heart of the Church and the Kingdom. Christ lives and reighs to all eternity!

This message needs proclamation. Resurrection needs witness - Resurrection needs confession. Easter demands great preaching from the Church, The Lord i risen, He is risen indeed. Easter demands great songs from the congregation - the response of believers - the hymns of the faithful: Christ is risen, Alleluia! Easter demands the witness of man to man: Listen, God is not dead - we have the victory through Christ our Lord. Easter demands the respons of the sorrowing: Gravestones and graves no terror hold - Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ - Christ hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Jesus wants and needs our witness - today and every day - that Christ lives and reigns to all eternity! The Risen One ascends - HIS Father is MY Father NOW! Amen.