

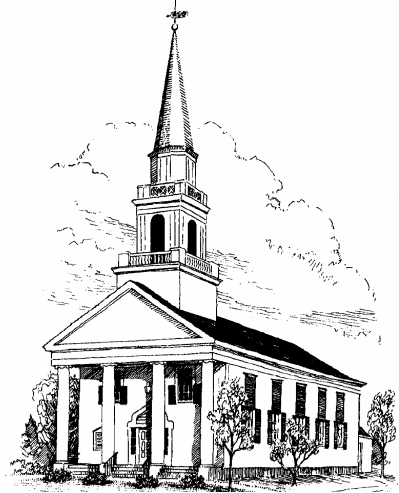
Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from April 4, 2010

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg
“Blinding Tears”

Scriptures:
Isaiah 65:17-25
John 20:1-18



They say each one of us grieves in our own individual way. Whatever the deep loss may be—be it the death of a dear loved one or the loss of a way of life we once knew (which often happen at the same time)—each of us deals with the grief in our own way. Some of us become paralyzed, unable to put one foot in front of the other. Some of us become angry, meeting each day with a measure of irritability, the source of which we cannot quite identify. Some of us immerse ourselves in busyness, attempting to preoccupy our sorrowful minds with all the details of daily living so as to keep the terrible hurt at bay. Some of us cry, often uncontrollably, when even the slightest reminders of our loss trigger a familiar ache inside which will just not leave us be.

It may be because of our personalities. It may be due to the people after whom we've patterned our lives. It may be because of our own experiences, with new losses triggering old ones. Or it may be that our previous joyful experience makes this new loss impossible to bear.

Whatever the reason, for a period of time, which also varies individually, we can see nothing except through the lens of our loss. The past feels like a dream snatched away. The present offers only the quicksand of grief through which we must struggle to keep our feet on solid ground. The future becomes dim because we cannot imagine it anymore.

It was no different for Mary Magdalene or Peter or the beloved disciple whom tradition maintains was John. They had lost their beloved Teacher, their Lord. Their lives had changed dramatically. And each one was dealing with grief in his or her own way. And no matter what time period we estimate for grieving, on this third day after Jesus' death, we can safely assume that the grief of all who loved him was very raw.

And they behaved in their own ways, from their experiences, their personalities. Some say Peter ran to the tomb that morning because of his own guilt at his behavior before Jesus' death. Some say the beloved disciple ran to beat Peter because he felt, given his relationship with Jesus, that he should be first.

From the way Mary had described it to them, their first thoughts were probably that the body had been stolen. And the linen wrappings and head cloth left behind would indicate that. If Jesus' body was simply being transported to another tomb, the wrappings most likely would have been left on. If it had been stolen, with the horrible thought of desecration, the cloths probably would have been discarded.

The scripture is unclear on what Peter and the other disciple thought upon their confirmation of Mary Magdalene's discovery; but it appears that the immensity of what had happened had not registered

completely, because we read “for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” They returned to their homes. They went home.

They were grieving after all. Not thinking clearly. Preoccupied with what might happen to them next. Perhaps angry with each other. And now their Lord’s body has disappeared right out of the tomb.

And Mary, too, was grieving in her way. Weeping. Crying, perhaps frantic. She came early in the morning, when it was still dark, alone according to this account. Maybe she couldn’t sleep with the empty aching. Other versions say she came with other women with spices to anoint the body. Something constructive to do. Maybe she just wanted to sit there to be as close as she could to her most recent memory of him. And now this.

Peter and the other disciple go back home, but Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels, but she’s still weeping. Woman, why are you weeping? And she tells them, but she’s still weeping. She sees what looks to be the gardener and he asks her, Woman, why are you weeping? And through her blinding tears and her overwhelming grief, she doesn’t see angels, she doesn’t see Jesus, she can’t really see a thing. She only feels. The past is a dream snatched away. The present is the body of her cherished teacher snatched away. The future does not exist. She is weeping the tears of deep pain and sorrow and, like our own, they have clouded over her eyes and she can see nothing else.

Why are you weeping? Is it a broken heart?

Why are you weeping? Is it someone in your family?

Why are you weeping? Is someone you love dying?

Why are you weeping? Is there a problem in your marriage?

Why are you weeping? Is it your relationship with your child?

Why are you weeping? Is it the uncertainty of your livelihood?

Why are you weeping? Is your body in pain?

Why are you weeping? Do you feel lost? Alone?

Why are you weeping? What is wrong? Who are you looking for?

Listen, now, because Jesus is saying your name. Your name. Jesus said to her, Mary. And it was at that moment, when Mary heard Jesus say her name, Mary, that she turned toward him and the veil of tears was lifted and she could see. And she could hear him and touch him and understand him and she could go forth as he instructed her, as he commissioned her, to tell his brothers. And she returned to tell them, I have seen the Lord!

Do you hear it? Maybe it’s a faint whisper right now and you have to strain. Maybe your anger or your paralysis or your busyness or your deep, deep sorrow is blinding you to his presence, so listen. In your confusion and fear and anxiety, try to listen. He is saying your name and he is reminding us all on this glorious day that death has been conquered, that evil does not win, that he has prepared a place for us, that this is not all there is, that this is not the end. He lives! And he is with us until the end of the age.

Why are you weeping? Listen for Jesus and dry your tears. Yes, living our human lives is difficult and painful and sometimes we can’t find our way and we don’t know how we’ll go on. But why are we weeping? Hear the good news from the garden, from 2000 years of testimony, from the faith of our mothers and fathers, from the angels in heaven and from the depths of our souls. We are forgiven, we are not alone, he is with us always. We are deeply and divinely loved and nothing, nothing can separate us from that love. Why are we weeping! Christ is risen and he is calling our names! Amen and Alleluia!