

DO NOT CLING TO ME

→ “There is a story told about a family who had a particular treasure, a family heirloom. It had been handed down through several generations. It was a genuine antique vase and it was kept on the mantel shelf in the living room as a special object of enjoyment for all who sat in that room. One day, when the lady of the house came home, she was greeted by her daughter. The daughter said, “Mum, you know that vase you told us had been passed down through our family from generation to generation?” Her mother acknowledged that she knew exactly which vase she was talking about and then the daughter said, “Well Mum, this generation just dropped it!”

.....In the passage of scripture we have read this morning, we heard how Jesus said to Mary on that first Easter morning, “Do not cling to me Go instead to my brothers and tell them!” As we read those words, we may well think what an awkward so and so Jesus is. It’s almost as if he doesn’t understand human nature. How strange for him to tell Mary not to do the very thing that would have come most naturally to her. She had watched him die; she thought she’d lost him. Now here he is standing in front of her – alive!! Of course she wants to hold on to him – she doesn’t want to run the risk of losing him again.

.....I guess many of us might have reacted in a similar way to Mary. It’s natural for us to need security and to feel safe. There are things and events and people that we really treasure from our past, and when the future is uncertain, well, we hold on to the past for as long as we can. But Jesus said; “Do not cling!” What point was he seeking to make to Mary?

→ These words of Jesus have been interpreted in many ways over the years. Some have said that Jesus, as a high priest who will offer the sacrifice of his own blood in the Tabernacle in heaven must remain ritually clean. So he is forbidding Mary to touch him. But, if that is so, why does he later ask the disciples to see his hands and feet and side, to touch him and see that he is not a ghost?

.....Some have tried to suggest that there was in fact some kind of scribal error, because if you change just one letter in the original text, the words would read not “Do not cling to me,” but rather, “Do not be afraid!”

.....But, as always, in these cases, we need to be careful that we don’t take a few words out of context, but rather concentrate on the entire statement that Jesus makes. And if we do that, it perhaps seems more likely that Jesus is, almost playfully, telling Mary that she needn’t try to hold on to him, because he’s not going anywhere just yet. There’s time for her to go and tell the others what has happened. She will see him again, before he eventually leaves them for good.

→ But, is there even more than that to be gleaned from this strange and powerful command from Jesus? I think perhaps there is! Mary had grown to know and love Jesus – she wanted him back – the Jesus she had known and loved. But this Jesus before her now was not the old Jesus but a new and risen Lord. Jesus didn’t want her to simply hold on to the old Jesus, but to experience the risen Christ and all that he would be able to achieve in her life from now on.

.....It's a bit like the story of the child who "at the breakfast table asked his father if God is everywhere? "Of course," said his Dad. "Is God in this room?" "Without doubt, Son." "On this table?" "Er, yes!" "In this empty cup?" persisted the boy! Well if you put it like that, yes!" said his Dad. The boy immediately covered the cup with his hand and cried triumphantly, "Got him!"

.....That is exactly the opposite of what the resurrection does for us. If we try to box Jesus in, and pin him down in a particular place and time, then we will never experience the new ways in which he wants to be with us and work in us. If we always look towards our old experiences of him, then we will fail to relish the new things that he wants to show us.

→ I don't believe for one minute that Jesus is telling us to forget everything that has happened to us in the past – that would be impossible anyway. But the message I believe is a challenging one. "Do not cling to me" does not mean abandon the past, but it does mean don't be afraid to look forward. Let the past be transformed into a glorious future. That surely is the message of the risen Christ.

.....The church that we are glad to be part of today only came into being because those first disciples, despite the uncertainties of the future, had a faith that enabled them to move forward with the help of the spirit. They risked persecution, they stood firm, and their openness to God's will helped them to build the church that we are part of today.

.....Jesus said, "Do not cling to me ... Go and tell!" If our Easter celebration means anything to us, then I hope we will leave this building today wanting to make a determined effort, as those first disciples did, to build the church by going and telling the news of the risen Jesus. True growth will be the sign of a living church. Today the risen Christ says to us, "Do not cling!" There are new things to do, new experiences to have, new possibilities of service. There are countless new people with whom we need to share the gospel so that they too might be part of our life together here.

→ The resurrection joy that we share today came at a tremendous cost and there is never any true growth without real pain. But today the risen Christ reminds us of the power of God's love, the triumph of good over evil, the endless possibilities and opportunities that are ours. Some of us may prefer to cling! More us I hope will want to grow. So, let us rejoice today that we are an Easter people, sent out as Mary Magdalene was to tell others about the risen Jesus. What wonderful news!