

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
20:11-18

11. But Mary stood outside at the sepulchre weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre. 12. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13. And 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. 14. Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. 16. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned herself and said to him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Teacher). 17. Jesus said to her, Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and to my God and your God. 18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things to her.

11.--[*But Mary stood...weeping.*] The question naturally arises, "Why did not Mary go away from the tomb with Peter and John?" The answer to that question must probably be found in the curiously different temperaments of men and women. Mary acted like a woman, and Peter and John acted like men. The head of a woman is generally weaker than that of a man, but the affections are generally stronger. In the case before us, the heart of Mary was not satisfied. Her mind was not convinced, like that of John, that our Lord had risen from the dead. It was not enough for her to know that the body was gone and the tomb empty, and something wonderful had occurred, as it was for Peter. Her strong love and gratitude toward our Lord made her linger near the tomb in the faint hope that something might yet turn up to explain where the body was gone. At any rate, she could not tear herself away from the place where her Master's body had last been seen, and when Peter and John departed she stayed behind, like a real warm-hearted woman, and gave a natural vent to her feelings in tears. She felt as if she must see something before she could be satisfied, and so lingered near the grave, perhaps hardly knowing what she expected to see. The Lord had compassion on her. Her deep love was richly rewarded.

On Mary staying at the tomb, Andrews remarks: "The going away of Peter and John commends Mary's staying behind. To the grave she came before them, from the grave she went to tell them, to the grave she returned with them, at the grave she remains behind them." "To stay while others do so, while company stays, that is the world's love. But Peter is gone, and John too; all are gone and she left alone. Thus to stay is love, and constant love."

Epiphanius (an ancient writer, A.D. 390), according to Heinsius, maintains the monstrous theory that the Mary here spoken of is the mother of our Lord and not Mary Magdalene! It is well to know that the ancient Fathers were

not always wise, and are certainly not infallible in expounding Scripture.

Tholuck thinks that Mary did not go to the tomb with Peter and John, but followed them alone, more slowly. This is possible; but I rather doubt it.

[*And as she wept...sepulchre.*] How long Mary wept after she was left alone we are left to conjecture. Probably not very long. At last it came into her mind to stoop down and look into the tomb through the small door or opening against which the stone had been rolled. It is worth noticing that we are not told that she had either entered or looked into the tomb before. Up to this time, apparently, she had only heard the report of Peter and John. Now, left alone, she probably felt a natural curiosity and anxiety to see with her own eyes what they had reported, and so, in the middle of her weeping, she stooped down and looked in and at once saw a wondrous sight.

I think Mary's case teaches us that heart is of more value in God's sight than intellect. Those who feel most and love most get most privileges. The more we love, the more we are like Christ.

12.--[*And she saw two angels, etc.*] The incident here recorded is very remarkable and interesting. Mary saw figures in white sitting inside the tomb. They evidently looked like men, but they were in reality angels--two of those mysterious ministering spirits whom the Bible teaches us God is pleased to employ on great occasions. An angel announced the coming birth of John Baptist and of Christ himself. Angels told the shepherds that Christ was born. Angels ministered to our Lord after the temptation, and an angel strengthened him in Gethsemane. And now also angels appeared in the day of our Lord's resurrection. They first announced that He was born, and they again, after 33 years, announced that He was risen.

The whole subject of angels is very deep and mysterious, and one about which we must beware of holding anything that is not revealed. But the case before us teaches one or two wonderful things that we should do well to remember. These angels evidently came and went away, appeared and disappeared, after a manner supernatural, invisible, and inexplicable to our minds. It is clear that angels were at the tomb when the party of women arrived there, after Mary Magdalene had run to tell Peter and John. It is equally clear that they were not to be seen when Peter and John ran to the grave on hearing Mary's report. Not one word do we read of their seeing angels. Yet it is equally clear that when Mary Magdalene looked in, after Peter and John went away, she saw two angels and talked with them. These are very deep things. They prove plainly that the angels of God appear and disappear, are visible or invisible, instantaneously and supernaturally according as God commissions them. In short, they are beings of a totally different nature to our own, and are in all the conditions of their constitution totally unlike us. For anything we know, they were in the tomb when Peter and John inspected it, but at that moment were invisible. For anything we know, they are now very near us every minute of our existence and doing God's will concerning us, though we are utterly unaware of their presence. All this, no doubt, is very mysterious and past the power of man to explain and comprehend. One thing, however, is very certain. Neither here nor elsewhere do we ever find the slightest

warrant in Scripture for praying to angels any more than to dead saints, or for giving them the smallest portion of worship as if they were divine. Like ourselves, after all, they are only God's creatures.

The expression "in white" means literally "in white robes or garments." It is an adjective and we are left to supply the substantive. The Holy Ghost here abstains from telling us the precise fashion of apparel that these angels wore. The garment worn by the angel mentioned in Mark, at the resurrection, was a long stole or flowing robe (Mark 16:5). It is worth noticing that white was the color of the Lord's raiment in the transfiguration, and that it is the color in which the angels always seem to have appeared. It need hardly be said that the color is symbolic of that perfect purity and freedom from defilement, which is the character of the inhabitants of heaven. It will be the garment of the saved souls in glory (Rev. 3:4, 7:9).

The attitude in which the angels were seen by Mary deserves attention. "Sitting one at the head and the other at the feet" where our Lord's body had lain, they would seem to have been placed there by God as watchmen and guards over the sacred body of our Lord during the time He was in the grave. It is written, "He shall give His angels charge over Thee" (Psa. 91:11).

Some have thought that the position of the angels points to that of the cherubim who sat on the two ends of the mercy seat over the ark, with their faces toward each other. (Exod. 25:20, 2 Chr. 3:13.)

Bengel thinks that this sitting was meant to intimate that their work was done. This seems to me doubtful, because angels need no rest.

Cyril thinks that the attitude of the two angels was meant to show Mary that our Lord's body had been safely guarded by them, and that no one could have stolen it away against their consent. If one angel could slay 180,000 of Sennacherib's army, what could two do?

Andrews observes: "We learn that between the angels there was no striving for places. He who sat at the feet was as well content with his place as he who sat at the head. We should learn from their example. With us, both angels would have been at the head and never a one at the feet. With us, none would be at the feet by his good will; we must be head-angels all!"

13.--[*And they said to her, Woman, etc.*] The address of the angels to Mary is that of gentle and kind inquiry. We cannot doubt that they knew well why she wept. They ask the question in order to stir up in her mind self-inquiry as to whether she had cause to weep or not. "What is the reason of this excessive lamentation? Search your own heart. Are you quite sure that this empty tomb does not show that you ought to be rejoicing?"

Mary's reply to the angels is almost word for word what she had told Peter and John, only in the singular number. It shows plainly that the one thing that weighed on her mind was the disappearance of our Lord's body and her ignorance as to what had become of it. Of His resurrection she evidently had no idea at present. Her only thought was that his body was dead, that

it had been taken away, and that she wanted to know where it was. To this one notion she sticks, and not even the appearance of angels can make her give it up. And yet the good woman must have often heard our Lord foretell His death and resurrection. How slow we are to give up long-standing prejudices! How backward to receive truths that contradict our little private systems of religion!

It should be observed that Mary told Peter and John that "the Lord" was taken away. When she speaks to the angels here, she says "My Lord." In both cases she speaks indefinitely of "they," without indicating whom she means.

The calmness of manner with which Mary speaks to these two angels can hardly fail to strike us. She cannot have supposed that they were two men only, whether enemies or friends. The mere fact that Peter and John had not seen them in the tomb must surely have shown her that they were angels. Yet she answers their question without hesitation, like one who feared nothing in her anxiety about her Lord. May we not, however, consider that a belief in the reality and ministry of angels was far more common among Jews than it is among Christians? They perhaps believed too much about them. It may be feared that we go into the opposite extreme and believe too little.

Andrews remarks on Mary's needless weeping: "All was in error; tears of grief, but false grief--imagining that to be which was not, and Him to be dead who was alive. She weeps because she finds the grave empty, which, God forbid, she should have found full. For then Christ must have been dead still, and there would be no resurrection. And this case of Mary Magdalene is our case oftentimes. It is the error of our conceit to weep when we have no cause, and to rejoice when we have as little. False joys and false sorrows, false hopes and false fears this life of ours is full of. God help us!"

14.--[*Now when...Jesus standing.*] Why Mary turned around at this moment we are not told. I feel no doubt there was some reason. The Greek words are very emphatic: "She turned to the things or places behind her." (a) It may be that she turned away from the questioners as not caring to continue conversation with them. (b) It may be that she heard a footstep behind her and turned to see who it was. (c) It may be that the shadow of someone behind her fell on the entrance to the tomb. The sun would be in the east, and if the tomb faced that way, its horizontal rays would throw the shadow of any person behind her onto the tomb. (d) It may be that she observed some gesture or motion on the part of the angels with whom she was talking, which told her that someone was behind her. Who can tell but these holy spirits, who doubtless recognized the Lord, rose respectfully from their sitting position as soon as they saw Jesus appear. I like this last solution best, for my own part. I cannot for a moment suppose that the angels would remain sitting motionless when Jesus appeared. And I believe that Mary, as she talked with them, detected at once by their altered manner that there was someone behind her. This it was that made her turn around. Such little touches give a wonderful life and reality to the whole narrative, in my judgment.

Chrysostom observes: "While Mary was speaking, Christ suddenly appearing behind her struck the angels with awe; and they, beholding their Ruler, showed immediately by their bearing, their look, their movements, that they saw the Lord. This drew the woman's attention and caused her to turn."

The same view is taken by Athanasius, Theophylact, Brentius, Gerhard, and Andrews.

[*And did not know that it was Jesus.*] There are but three ways in which we can explain Mary not recognizing Christ at once. (a) She was weeping bitterly, and her eyes were dim with tears. This, however, seems very improbable. (b) It was not broad daylight yet, and it was too dusky to distinguish anyone. This is Cyril's view; but it can hardly be correct considering all that had already occurred this Sunday morning. (c) Her eyes were held supernaturally, like those of the disciples walking to Emmaus, so that she did not distinguish the figure before her to be that of our Lord. This appears to me by far the most likely solution, miraculous as the circumstance certainly was. But the condition of our Lord's risen body was altogether different from that of His body before crucifixion. We cannot pretend to explain in the least where He was and what He was doing in the intervals between His various appearances during the forty days before His ascension. We need not, therefore, hesitate to believe that He could assume such an appearance that even a disciple like Mary did not recognize Him at first, or that He could cause her eyes to be unable to distinguish Him even when close to her.

After all, what a striking emblem this little incident supplies of the spiritual experience of hundreds of Christ's believing people even at this very day. How many are ever mourning and sorrowing, and have no comfort in their religion, while Christ is close to them. But they do not know it and, like Mary, go on weeping.

15.--[*Jesus said...Why...seeking?*] The first question that Jesus asked Mary was precisely the same that the angels had asked. "Woman, why are you weeping? Are you quite sure that you're right to weep over this empty grave and ought not rather to rejoice?" The second question was even more searching than the first. "Whom are you seeking? Who is this person that you are seeking among the dead? Have you not forgotten that He whom you seek is one who has power to take life again, and who predicted that He would rise?" I must think that in both these questions there was a gentle latent reproof intended for this holy woman. Faithful and loving as she was, she had too much forgotten her Master's teaching about His death and resurrection. These questions were meant to rouse her to a recollection of things often said in her hearing. Of course, our Lord knew perfectly well why she was weeping and whom she was seeking. He did not need to ask her. He asked for her benefit rather than His own information. But excessive grief has an absorbing and stupefying effect on the mind and memory. Mary could think of nothing but that her Lord's body was gone, and this swallowed up all her thoughts.

[*She, supposing Him to be, etc.*] Here we see what Mary's first thought was when she heard a strange voice and saw a strange figure. She catches at the idea that this person may be the keeper of the garden in which Joseph's

tomb was, and that, having probably been keeping watch over the garden all night, he may know what had become of her Master's body, or may even have removed it himself. "Sir," she says, "if you are the person who has taken away my Lord out of the tomb, only tell me where you have carried His body and I will take Him away." Once more we see that this holy woman could only think of her Master as one dead, and that her one absorbing idea was how she could recover His corpse and do it honor. As for His resurrection and victory over death, she seems utterly unable to get hold of it at present. Amazing is it to see how much of Christ's teaching was apparently thrown away on His disciples and clean forgotten! Ministers who complain of the ignorance of their hearers should learn patience, when they mark the imperfect knowledge of Christ's own followers.

The Greek word rendered "Sir" in this verse might have been equally correctly rendered "Lord." But it is rendered "Sir" in like manner as in the conversation between our Lord and the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of this Gospel. In both cases it is a term of respect, such as a Jewish woman would address to a man.

It is noteworthy that Mary does not name her Master to the supposed gardener. She simply says "Him". "If you have carried *Him* hence, I will take *Him* away." It is the language of one so absorbed in the thought of our Lord that she thinks it needless to name Him, and assumes, as a matter of course, that the gardener will understand whom she means.

It is noteworthy that Mary talks of taking Him away. How one weak woman like her could suppose that she was able to lift and carry away the dead body of a man we cannot, of course, understand. It is clear that she either meant (a) that she would soon find friends who would remove the body, or else (b) that she spoke hurriedly, fervently, impulsively, and passionately without reflecting on what she was saying. I incline to think the latter view is the correct one.

Luther, quoted by Besser, remarks on this verse: "Mary's heart was so filled up with Christ and thoughts about Christ, that besides Him she neither hears nor sees anything. She is not frightened at the sight of angels. She addresses Christ abruptly, supposing Him to be the gardener; and if he has taken Him away, she is ready to carry Him back to the tomb."

Andrews observes: "*Him* is enough with love. Who knows not who it is, though we never tell His name, nor say a word more?"

16.--[*Jesus said to her, Mary, etc.*] We are here told how our Lord at last revealed Himself to this faithful disciple, after her patience, love, and boldness had been fully proved. Little as she had shown herself able to understand the great truth of her Savior's resurrection, she had at any rate shown that none loved Him more or clung to Him more tenaciously than she did. And she had her reward. One single word was enough to open her eyes, to let the whole truth shine in upon her mind, and to reveal the great fact that her Savior was not dead but alive, and that He had won a victory over the grave. Speaking in His usual well known voice, our Lord addressed her by her name--the name by which, no doubt, He had often addressed her before. That single word touched a spring, as it were, and

opened her eyes in a moment. Need we doubt that at once the whole world seemed turned upside down to the astonished woman, and that under the influence of such an amazing revulsion [response] of feeling as that much-loved voice must have caused, her mind could only find expression in one passionate word--"Rabboni," or Master.

The expression "turned herself" in this verse is rather curious. We know, from the fourteenth verse, that Mary had already turned once from the grave when Jesus appeared behind her. Here again we are told that she "turned herself." The simplest explanation seems to be that when she did not recognize the person who spoke to her and thought He had been the gardener, she partially turned away, as a woman naturally would from a strange man, and hardly looked at Him while she spoke of taking the body away. But the moment the voice of Jesus sounded in her ears, she turned again directly to Him, and made some movement toward Him as she uttered the cry "Rabboni!" Thus there were three movements: first, a turning round to see who was behind her; second, a partial turning away when she heard a voice she did not recognize; and finally, a quick, passionate turning round entirely when the well known voice of her Master said "Mary." So at least it appears to me.

Chrysostom says: "It seems to me that after having said 'Where have you laid Him,' she turned to the angels to ask why they were astonished; and that then Christ, by calling her by name, turned her back to Himself from them and revealed Himself by His voice."

The boundless compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ to His believing people comes out wonderfully in this verse. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows how weak our bodily frame is, and how excessive sorrow can so unnerve and stupefy our minds. He can pass over much darkness of understanding and much slowness of comprehension when He sees real, genuine, hearty, bold, persevering, thorough love to Himself and His Person. We see this prominently brought out in His dealing with Mary Magdalene, when He revealed Himself to her. He graciously pardons her forgetfulness of His oft-repeated declaration that He would rise again after His death, pities her deep sorrow, and abundantly rewards her love. These things are written for our learning. Jesus never changes. What He was when He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene, He is at this day.

"Rabboni," according to Parkhurst, is nearly of the same import as Rabbi. St. John explains both by the same word--teacher. But Lightfoot and others say it was a term of higher respect. Parkhurst thinks it is formed from the Chaldee and includes the idea of "MY Master."

17.--[*Jesus said...not touch...my Father.*] This saying of our Lord is undeniably a very "deep thing," and the real meaning of it is a point that has greatly perplexed commentators. I suspect it is one of those things that will never be fully settled until the Lord comes. In the meantime, we must be content to make humble conjectures. It will clear our way to remember that our Lord could not possibly mean, by saying "Do not touch Me," that there was anything sinful or wrong in Mary touching His risen body. The mere fact that a few minutes after this interview with Mary he allowed the other women who had been to the grave to "hold Him by the feet"

(Matt. 28:9), completely settles that point. Moreover, within a week after this very day He says to Thomas, "Reach forth your hand and thrust it into my side" (John 20:27). This alone entirely contradicts the notion that our Lord's body might not be touched before His ascension. But having cleared the way negatively, the question yet remains, "What did our Lord mean positively?"

In order to understand the meaning of "Do not touch me," we must try to realize the state of mind in which Mary Magdalene was when our Lord revealed Himself to her. A very slight knowledge of human nature, and especially of woman's nature, will tell us that the sudden discovery that Jesus was alive and standing before her would throw her into a violent state of excitement and produce an immense revulsion [response] of feeling--from deep despondency to extravagant joy. May we not well believe that under the influence of this excitement this holy woman might be more demonstrative than was seemly, and might exhibit her feelings by actions and gestures that our Lord saw it absolutely needful to repress? Can we not understand that a warm-hearted, impulsive Jewish woman, holy and pure-minded as she certainly was, would be likely to cast herself at our Lord's feet, to say the least, in a passionate ecstasy of delight and to hold them fast, kissing and embracing them (like the woman in Simon's house) as if she would never let them go? And can we not well understand that our wise Master, who knew all hearts, thought it good to check and repress her and, therefore, for her soul's benefit kindly said, "Do not touch Me." Nothing would be more likely to calm the good woman's mind and to recall her to a reverent sense of what was due to herself and to her Lord than this prohibition to "touch." Such is my view of this wonderful expression. It is to my mind a very suggestive one and deserves especially the attention of ministers in carrying on their private pastoral work. But I forbear. Let it however never be forgotten (and I desire to speak with the utmost reverence and delicacy) that when our Lord allowed the women mentioned by St. Matthew (28:9) to "hold Him by the feet," there were several women present together, and some of them mothers and not young. When on the contrary He said to Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch Me," He spoke to one who in all probability was a young woman, and He and she were alone!

The Greek word we render "touch," according to Liddell and Scott's Lexicon, frequently means "fasten oneself to, cling to, hang on by, lay hold of, or grasp." Homer constantly uses the word in this sense. This deserves special notice. Schleusner and Parkhurst agree with Liddell and Scott.

The words "for I am not yet ascended to my Father" are even more difficult than "Do not touch Me," and the connection between the two sayings is the hardest knot of all the sentence.

(a) Some think that the sense is: "I have not yet ascended to my Father. Till I have ascended and taken my seat at His right hand, my work as your Savior is not perfect and complete. Do not therefore touch Me and fasten upon Me, as if you would fain [gladly, willingly] keep Me upon earth forever now that I have risen again. Remember that my ascension is as much a part of my great work of redemption as my crucifixion and resurrection. I have not yet ascended. Do not, therefore, behave as though you wished to detain Me here below and never to part with Me again."

(b) Some think that the sense is: "I am not yet ascending to my Father. I shall not ascend for forty days. There will, therefore, be abundant time for seeing, touching, hearing, and conferring with Me. Do not, therefore, waste precious time now on this eventful morning by embracing my feet and demonstrating your affection to my person. Rather rise and lose no time in going to my brethren and telling them that I am risen. Think of others and do not occupy yourself, as you are disposed to do, in touching my feet and gratifying your own feelings. Natural as it is, there is other work to do now. Go and do it and do not linger here. Do not touch Me." This is the view of Beza, Brentius, and Bishop Hall.

(c) Some think, as Melancthon, that our Lord had in view His second advent and kingdom, when all who have known and loved Him on earth shall at length dwell with Him in holy familiarity and go out from His presence no more. Melancthon says: "It is as if Christ would say, Then shall you touch Me, when I have ascended to my Father; that is, when I shall bring you and all my Church to the Father at the last day. Another kingdom and another life remains yet to be given, in which you shall enjoy fellowship with Me and my Father."

I honestly confess that I find it almost impossible to say which of the three opinions I have here described deserves most attention. If I must decide, I incline to prefer the second one, and I think it is more in keeping with the latter part of the verse. The weakest point of this view is the future sense which it puts on the words "I am not ascended." The Greek word is in the perfect tense, and the perfect is undoubtedly used sometimes in the sense of a future. (Compare Rom. 14:23, John 17:10; also see Telf's Greek Grammar, vol. ii., p. 65, and Winer's Grammar p. 288, Clark's edition.) But it is rather awkward that "I ascend" comes immediately after in the present tense. The reader must decide for himself which view he prefers.

Chrysostom says: "I think Mary still wished to converse with Jesus as before, and in her joy perceived nothing great [different] in Him, although He had become far more excellent in the flesh. To lead her therefore from this idea, and that she might speak to Him with awe (for neither with the disciples does He thereafter appear so familiar as before), He raises her thoughts that she should give more reverent heed to Him. To have said, 'Do not approach Me as you did before, because matters are not in the same state; nor shall I from now on be with you in the same way,' would have been harsh and high-sounding. But the saying 'I am not yet ascended to my Father' accomplished the same thing and was not painful to hear. For by saying 'I am not yet ascended,' He shows that He hastens and passes there, and that it was not meet [suitable] that one about to depart there--and no longer to converse with men--should be looked on with the same feelings as before."

Augustine says: "There is a spiritual meaning latent here. Either this is spoken, "Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended," that the woman is a figure of the Church of the Gentiles, which did not believe in Christ until He was ascended to the Father; or else Jesus would have men so believe in Him, or touch Him spiritually, as knowing that Himself and the Father are

one. Mary might believe in such a way as if she thought Him unequal to the Father, which thought is forbidden to her. 'Do not touch Me,' *i.e.*, 'Do not believe in Me in such a way as you are yet minded in your thoughts of Me. Do not let your perception reach only to the thing I was made for you without passing beyond to that by which you were made. I am not yet ascended to my Father. Then shall you touch Me when you believe Me to be God not unequal to the Father.'

Calvin says: "The meaning of these words is that Christ's state of resurrection would not be full and complete until He should sit down in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Therefore Mary did wrong in satisfying herself with having nothing more than the half of His resurrection, and desiring only to enjoy His presence in the world."

Lightfoot says: "These words relate to what Christ had spoken formerly about sending the Comforter, and that He would not leave them comfortless but would come to them. Christ says to Mary, 'I must first ascend to my Father before I can bestow those things upon you which I have promised. Do not therefore touch Me and *detain* Me upon any expectation of that kind. Rather wait for my ascension, and go and tell the same thing to my brethren for their encouragement."

Poole says: "The best opinion seems to be the opinion of those who think our Savior saw Mary [being] too fond, as if she thought He had been raised up to such a converse [familiar association] with them as He had before His death. This error is all that He takes her to task for--not forbidding any kind of touching so as to satisfy herself that He was truly risen, but restraining any gross conception. He reminded Mary that He was about to ascend to His Father, though He had not yet ascended, and was therefore not to be enjoyed by them with so much freedom and familiarity as before."

Bishop Hall says: "There may be a kind of carnality in spiritual notions. If I have known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth I know Him no more. That You live here, my Savior, in this shape, that color, this stature, that habit, I should be glad to know; nothing that concerns You can be unuseful. Could I say, 'Here You sat, here You lay, here You were crucified, here You were buried,' I should with much contentment see and recount those ceremonials of Your presence. But if I shall so fasten my thoughts on them so as not to look higher to the spiritual part of these achievements--to the power and issue of Your resurrection--I am none the better."

Rollock says: "The meaning in effect is this. It is not time for you to touch Me now, till that time I be in glory, and then touch Me by the arm of faith as much as you can or may. You must consider that she was too much addicted to His bodily presence. She thought He should have remained and dwelt on earth as He did before. Therefore, He would not let her come near Him until He instructed her of a spiritual touching, and that He was not to stay here but to dwell with His Father in heaven.

"Mark this lesson. Some men love the Lord entirely, and yet when they come to His service they fail; for such is the grossness of our nature that we cannot incline to that spiritual service which He chiefly requires. Popery

is full of this grossness. They can do nothing if they have not His carnal presence--either in Himself or in a stock or stone or in a piece of bread--and therefore they draw a bodily presence of Him in the sacrament. All their religion is earthly--no grace, no spirit in it. But did the Lord accept that gross service that Mary offered? I am certain He loved Mary better than the Pope and all his priests; yet well as He liked Mary, He liked not her service. He says to her, 'Do not touch me!' The Lord keep us from gross service and make us touch Him by faith."

Andrews says: "The most we can make is that here Mary failed in somewhat. Not that she did it in any immodest or indecent manner. God forbid! Never think of that. But she was only a little too forward, it may be; not with the due respect that was meet." "I tell you plainly, I do not like her Rabboni. It was no Easter-day salutation; it should have been some better term, expressing more reverence." "The touch was not the right touch, and all for lack of expressing more regard; not for lack of reverence at all, but of reverence enough." "It is no excuse to say it was all out of love. Never lay it upon that. Love, Christ loves well. But love, if it be right, does nothing uncomely, keeps decorum, forgets not what belongs to duty and decency, carries itself accordingly." "A strange kind of love, when for very love to Christ we care not how we use Him, or carry ourselves toward Him. Which, being Mary's case, she heard and heard quickly. Do not touch me. You are not now in case till you shall have learned to touch after a more regardful manner."

Sibbes says: "Mary was too much addicted to Christ's bodily presence. It is this that men have labored for from the beginning of the world--to be too much addicted to present things and to sense. They will worship Christ, but they must have a picture before them. They will adore Christ, but they must bring His body down to a piece of bread--they must have a presence. And so instead of raising their hearts to God and Christ in a heavenly manner, they pull down God and Christ to them. And, therefore, Christ says, 'Do not touch Me in that manner; it is not with Me as it was before.' We must take heed of mean and base conceits of Christ."

Sherlock, in his "Trial of the Witnesses," says: "The natural sense of this passage is this: Mary Magdalene, upon seeing Jesus, fell at His feet and laid hold on them, and held them as if she never meant to let them go. Then Christ said to her, "Touch Me not, or hang not about Me now. You will have other opportunities of seeing Me, for I go not yet to my Father. Lose no time then, but go quickly with my message to my brethren."

West, on the Resurrection, says: "I take Christ's forbidding Mary to touch Him to have been meant as a signification of His intention to see her and the disciples again. Just as in ordinary life, when one friend says to another 'Do not take leave for I am not going yet,' he means to let him know that he purposes to see him again before he sets out on his journey."

Lampe mentions a strange view of "Touch Me not," maintained by Bauldry, a German professor. He would put a full stop at "not" and place it first in the sentence, rendering it thus: "No! I am not the gardener. Touch Me, and see that I am your Savior risen." He also mentions a view, held by many, that it means, "Do not try whether I am risen by touching Me. It is I

myself." Both views, however, seem very improbable.

Paulus, the German theologian, maintains the monstrous notion that our Lord meant, "Do not lay a finger on Me, because my wounds still smart." This is simply ridiculous, to say the least.

Hengstenberg says: "The reason of the prohibition must be sought in the personal character of Mary and in the passionate nature of the touch which sprang from that character. She thought that the limits which had formerly existed between herself and the Lord (*the old style of confidence is a very incorrect idea*) were, now that the Savior had passed into another form of existence, removed and she might now give free course to her feelings without fearing the admixture of anything human in her sentiment toward her Lord. But her Lord repelled her: Touch Me not."

Wordsworth says: "The term (in the Greek) indicates not only a prohibition of a particular act, but forbids a habit: *i.e.* of clinging to Him with a bodily touch. And the words 'I have not ascended' contain a precept concerning the time when the habit of touching Christ may be exercised. He is to be touched after He has ascended--that is, He is then to be truly touched, when He is beyond the reach of the bodily touch. And one of the purposes of His absence and His ascension into heaven was to elicit and exercise that touch, the touch of faith."

Burgon remarks what a strange thing it is that "both the old world and the new should have begun with the same prohibition, *Touch not.*"

[*But go...say to them.*] This sentence is strikingly full of wisdom, tender thoughtfulness, and kindness. Wisely our Lord summons Mary Magdalene to an act of duty to others. He bids her not spend time in demonstrations of affection, but to arise and be useful. Thoughtfully our Lord's first consideration is for His poor scattered disciples. Weak and erring as they had been, He still loved them and at once sends them a message. He did not mean to cast them off or forget them. Kindly He calls them "my brethren." All was pardoned and forgiven. He still regarded them as His dear brethren (risen conqueror over the grave as He was), and would have them look on Him as an elder brother. This is the first time our Lord ever called the disciples "brethren."

Bucer thinks that "my brethren" in this place really means "my brethren according to the flesh," *i.e.* James and others, whose faith was weaker perhaps than that of the other Apostles. But the vast majority of commentators see in the expression nothing of the kind and regard it only as a term of affection applied to all the Apostles. Calvin properly refers us to Psalm 22:22: "I will declare thy name to my brethren." See also Heb. 2:11.

Andrews remarks that the words "my brethren" was "a word to be touched and taken hold of. It was so once when Benhadad's servant laid hold on the word of the King of Israel, 'He is my brother'" (1 Kings 20:32,33). He adds that it implied identity of nature and identity of love and affection after the resurrection, and no change.

Let us mark what a strong proof we have here of the duty of telling others the good news of the Gospel. The very first work that a risen Christ proposes to the first disciple to whom He revealed Himself is the work of telling others. It was a deep saying of the four leprous men: "This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us" (2 Kings 7:9).

Cyril remarks what an honor was put on woman when a woman was commissioned to be the first person to proclaim the tidings of the resurrection.

[*I ascend...your God.*] The message that our Lord desires Mary to carry to His disciples is remarkable. He does not bid her say "I have risen," but "I ascend." He would evidently have them understand that His resurrection was only a step toward His ascension. He did not rise again in order to tarry with them upon earth, but in order to go up to heaven as a conqueror and sit down at God's right hand as their forerunner, representative, priest, advocate, and friend. The message is clearly elliptical. It is as though our Lord said, "Say to them that I have risen from the dead, and that I am soon about to ascend into heaven to Him who is my Father and my God, and their Father and their God also."

When our Lord dwells on His ascension more than His resurrection, it seems to me that He names it as the great conclusion and accomplishment of the work He came to do and the necessary consequence of His rising again. It is as though He said, "My work is finished, my battle is won, and I shall not be much longer with you in the world. Get ready to receive my last instructions."

Calvin says: "Christ forbids the Apostles to fix their whole attention on His resurrection viewed simply in itself, but exhorts them to proceed further until they come to the spiritual kingdom, the heavenly glory, and God Himself."

Andrews remarks: "It would be better for us to lie still in our graves and never rise, than to rise and not ascend."

Flavel remarks: "If Christ had not ascended He could not have interceded, as He now does in heaven for us. And but take away Christ's intercession, and you starve the hope of the saints."

When our Lord speaks of God as "my Father and my God," He seems, as usual, to point to the close and intimate union that He always declared to exist between Himself and the First Person in the Trinity. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:8) is a kindred expression. He does not, we should observe, say that He ascends to "our Father," but "my Father and your Father." He thus shows that there is a certain distinction between His relation to the Father and ours. Believers are not naturally sons of God; they only become so by grace, by adoption, and by virtue of union with Christ. Christ, on the contrary, is in His nature the Son of God by an eternal generation.

When our Lord speaks of "your Father and your God," He seems to me to speak with a special view to the consolation of His disciples. It is as though

He said, "Do not be troubled because I go away. He to whom I go is *your* Father and *your* God as well as mine. All that He is to me the Head, He is also to you the members."

It may well be doubted, when we read this verse, whether Christians as a rule assign sufficient importance to the great truth of Christ's ascension into heaven. Let us never forget that if our Lord had not ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, His resurrection would have been but of little value. It is His going into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us, that is the great secret of Christian comfort. It is not for nothing that St. Paul answers the question "Who is he who condemns?" by saying, "Christ has died, yea, rather has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). The death, the resurrection, the ascension, the intercession of Christ, are four great facts that should never be separated.

It ought not to be forgotten that there seems to be a close connection between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This, at least, seems to be the meaning of the text in the Psalms, quoted by St. Paul: "When He had ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men" (Ps. 68:18, Eph. 4:8).

18.--[*Mary Magdalene came, etc.*] In this verse we see the effect that our Lord's words had on the loving disciple to whom He first appeared. She meekly accepts the reproof of her over-forward zeal to touch Him, without gainsaying [disputing] or answering again. Like a good servant, she proceeds at once to do what she is told. The use of the present tense shows the promptness of her obedience. The Greek words would be more literally rendered, "Mary Magdalene comes, telling or declaring to the disciples that she has seen the Lord, and that He has said these things to her"--that He has given her this message to carry to them, and that He calls them His brethren. The use of the participle makes the words sound as if she went open mouthed, telling every disciple as she went, and hardly stopping to sit down till she had told everyone whom she could find in Jerusalem. We need not doubt that the first house she went to was that where Peter and John lodged, and one of the first persons to whom she told the joyful news was the mother of our Lord. A few minutes after she departed on her joyful errand (running, we need not doubt, as she had run before), our Lord appeared to the other women, as is recorded by St. Matthew (Matt. 28:9).

Brentius remarks what honor this passage puts on women. Sin came into the world by Eve, a woman. Yet God in mercy ordered things so that of a woman Christ was born, to a woman Christ first appeared after He rose from the dead, and a woman was the first to carry the news of His resurrection. He quaintly says, "Jesus made Mary Magdalene an Apostle to the Apostles."

Cecil remarks: "Singular honor is reserved for solitary faith. Mary has the first personal manifestation of Christ after His resurrection. She is the first witness of this most important and illustrious fact, and the first messenger of it to His disciples."