

The Text: John 20:1-18

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, **Mary Magdalene went to the tomb** and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²**So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"**

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹but **Mary stood outside the tomb crying**. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "**Rabboni!**" (which means Teacher).

¹⁷Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "**I have seen the Lord!**" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Introduction

Mary Magdalene is a great woman. How many people do we have here today named Mary? I do not know if you named for Mary Magdalene, but you can be proud to share her name. Mary Magdalene is sometimes confused with other Mary's in the Bible.

- There is Mary the mother of Jesus.
- There is woman in Luke 7 who was a former prostitute who washes Jesus feet with her tears who sometimes is called Mary by later commentators.
- There is Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, who listened at the feet of Jesus and later poured expensive perfume on his feet and wiped them with her hair.
- This Mary is mentioned in all four of the gospel accounts and was a leader among the disciples. We know from Luke 8 that Mary Magdalene had been healed by Jesus from seven demons or severe illness and became an early follower of Jesus.

From the life of Mary Magdalene we are going to see how you and I can grow and mature as followers of Jesus Christ.

The Steps of a Disciple

Mary Magdalene was a person who stuck close to Jesus. Her name, Magdala, is said to mean "tower" or "elevated, great, magnificent." She is believed to have been wealthy woman and a key supporter of Jesus and his ministry. While we do not have first century financial giving statements to back this up, we have something even more important. We have eyewitness accounts of her life. What we observe and learn from Mary Magdalene?

First Step – Question (to encounter, be transformed, and commit to follow)

Mary came to follow Jesus after being healed by him. In Luke 8 we read that: *“Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;³ Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”*

Allow me to read between the lines. Mary may have tried many cures and doctors to heal her sickness, but none worked. Mary was not healed until she encountered Jesus. She did not just hear about Jesus. Mary did not read about him in the Jerusalem Times. Mary brought her concerns, hurts, and questions to Jesus. Mary met Jesus face to face and in that experience Jesus healed her. Mary was transformed. She was cured of her illness and freed her to follow Jesus as one of his disciples. **Mary Magdalene was a person who stuck close to Jesus.**

Our Step One - Jesus is here today to encounter you and me. The Jesus we proclaim as resurrected and risen is present here today in His Holy Spirit. Jesus comes to meet us wherever we are on our journey. Mary was greatly ill and in desperate need of help and healing. Jesus met her at her point of need. Where are you today in your journey? What are your questions? Are you hurting? I read that “In the United States, there are already 18 million alcoholics, 4 million drug addicts, 16 million sex addicts, and 4 million addicted to food (*John Baker Founder and Pastor of Celebrate Recovery*).”

Is there pain or grief too much for you to bear? Come to Jesus. Invite Jesus the Christ, the Risen Messiah to touch that area of your life. How? Offer just a quiet, sincere prayer. Tell him where you hurt and why. Ask him to heal and change you. Then decide to follow him today and each day of your life.

Step Two – Learn

We know from scripture that Mary Magdalene became an intentional follower of Jesus Christ. She travelled with Jesus and his disciples. She heard him teach in the synagogues and on the hillsides. She watched him heal person after person that came to him. She watched his interactions with others. She noted the way he treated women, and especially her. He was different. Jesus valued each person and called them to become all God designed them to be. Mary watched, learned, studied, and absorbed what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus and she practiced it herself. **Mary Magdalene was a person who stuck close to Jesus.**

Our calling, our process, our step two is the same. We are followers of Jesus in the 21st century. We learn by studying the life of Jesus. We listen, read, discuss, and mediate on the Bible. We reflect on his teachings, observe his actions, and then practice what we have learned. We surround our lives with people who can mentor and guide us in becoming like Jesus. We involve ourselves in Bible Studies, classes, small groups, spiritual directors, Stephen Ministers, and reading of good books so we can grow as wise disciples. This summer we hope to offer more adult spiritual growth opportunities. We also encourage you to start small groups that would meet through the summer for reflection and prayer. We will be studying the book of Ephesians and will have study materials and questions to guide you. We grow by learning and the learning never stops.

Step Three – Serve

As Mary Magdalene follower Jesus, she served. She and the other woman probably managed many of the daily logistics of life for this band of disciples: meals, laundry, cleaning, attending the young and old, and working behind the scenes to make sure Jesus was free to do his ministry. As we noted before, Mary was among the venture capitalists that supported Jesus and his disciples.

Where Mary's service is most noticeable is at the cross and the empty tomb. When most of the men disciples had scattered, she was at foot of cross. When the long, torturous afternoon had scattered almost all of the onlookers, Mary was there as the body of Jesus was taken down and buried in an empty tomb. When the city was still sleeping after the Sabbath, Mary was up early before light to be at the tomb. **Mary Magdalene was a person who stuck close to Jesus.**

We were made to serve others. Like Mary, each of us is gifted to play an important role in the continuing work of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus we take our cues from our Master.

Our time is not longer our own. Our money is no longer our own. Our gifts, skills, and talents are not our own. Even our children and families are not our own. They all belong to Jesus. We dedicate all we have and are each day to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. This is radical discipleship. This is what every follower of Christ does, every day. When you and I allow Jesus to work in and through us to serve others, we become alive! Our lives have purpose, meaning and depth.

- Ask those who sing in the choir. They glow when they are singing and praising together.
- Ask those who serve meals to the homeless or visit the homebound. They are the ones blessed by the encounter.
- Ask those friends of Christ who build houses, dispense medicines, care for the hurting in the name of Jesus, they are all changed in the process.
- It is not just in the “Christian” activities we find meaning as we serve, it is in every moment of our lives. When we serve in Jesus’ Name and by his power and wisdom at work, in the office, in the school, in the home and neighborhood we fulfill our calling in life. When we stick close to Jesus in each conversation and experience, then we see Jesus show up.

Step Four – Multiply

Mary Magdalene was tenacious. She wanted her Lord back! Where is he? They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him! What did you do with the body? Show me and I will get him! I would not cross this lady. She is a force to be reckoned with. A holy anger was filling her and she was on a mission. She was not afraid of soldiers, big stones, angels, or anyone. Mary the tower, Mary the Great, was a person who stuck by Jesus and she was going to get her master back. Mary had a surprise coming. Jesus was already sticking by her. He quietly comes up to her, speaks to her, and in saying her name, “Mary”, her eyes are opened and she recognizes Jesus. What a sweet reunion. Her faithfulness and tenacity are rewarded. Jesus sends her back to the disciples with the good news that he is alive. **She becomes the one who brings good news to the ones who will bring good news to others.** She will forever be remember and honored as a follower of Jesus.

We each have a surprise waiting for us. Jesus wants to use us to train others. Whatever you do well, Jesus is calling you and me to mentor others in the same ministry. If you are great at hospitality, recruit others who show an interest in making others feel welcomed here at church or in your home. If you have financial wisdom, take a few young adults under your wing and guide them in how to multiply wealth in order to support the work of God here and around the world. Maybe you are a small group leader or teacher - teach a class and recruit an apprentice. We are all responsible to spreading the good news and that entails mentoring the next generations. I assure you, as we pour our lives into the lives of others, Jesus will show up!