

# The Women

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. Scripture reading for today comes from Mark chapter 15 verses 33 through 41.

At noon darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, he's calling Elijah. Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last breath. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God.

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, the younger and of Joseph and Salome.

[ 1 : 2 2 ]     In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. So friends, let's pray together. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment and this time. And we have opened our hearts to you in prayer and praise.

Having heard your word, Lord, we ask that you would fall fresh on us. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on us. Light a fire on us so bright that others we encounter will see it and be drawn to it.

This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen. So we gather in week five. And we continue our Lenten journey. And this week, as we look at those witnesses at the cross, we're going to talk about some disciples whose story we don't spend a lot of time on.

And this is the women who were there at the crucifixion. So we've talked about the crowd. We've talked about the soldiers. We've talked about the other two who were crucified with him.

[ 2 : 2 8 ]     And we've talked about John, the beloved disciple. And today we focus on those women. And as we get into their story, we're focused on love.

Because it's love that motivates them. Love will make you do some crazy things, right? Yeah? Oh, I thought somebody would nod at least. I guess this is just a nice normal group of people.

Right? We're too cool for that sort of thing. Because other folks sometimes see these grand gestures of love happen in their life, right? Like you see these big things that happen at the end of movies.

Or we watch and people get marriage proposals at Bill's games and stuff like this that get on the news. These big grand gestures. Like everything happens like it does in Lifetime movies, right?

But for most of us, we don't see that. Now, some of us may have done some things. Hopefully, there have been some gestures like that. And you've received some love like that in your life.

[ 3 : 29 ] But the challenge when we see life played out like that, challenge when we see love portrayed like that, is we forget that that is not all that love is.

We kind of condition ourselves to expect these big grand gestures to show people how much we love them. When in fact, love actually is a whole lot more complicated than that.

In fact, we first got to get past the romantic part. That we all know that love in our lives is not just about that element of who we are. That love shows up in all different kinds of relationships and in all different kinds of ways.

And in fact, where we see love the most can be in the really hard, quiet times. I'm willing to bet anybody who's done any caregiving knows what we're talking about.

You get those calls in the middle of the night. You've got to deal with things that are not polite to talk about because somebody's struggling and needs help. And it's the people who are with you in moments like that that shows you what real love looks like.

[ 4 : 34 ] Because the rest of the world isn't interested in that. It's when you have those times when love just simply means you show up. Sometimes you sit with people in the midst of whatever they're going through.

Not so much because they need help. Not so much because they need advice. Not so much because they need anything except to realize that they are not alone on their journey. So we said that's often what love looks like.

And it's not about how many roses fill the room. It's not about how big you can write your sign. It's not about bringing in people to sing songs. Love shows up in these other ways.

And so when we think about love from that standpoint, that brings us back to the story that we're talking about today. Because these women who go to the crucifixion, what's the secret sauce that would make somebody do that?

I mean, of course, the 12 didn't do that, right? The 12 named male disciples that we have, they're not there. Certainly not. There's no record of them being there except maybe one.

[ 5 : 44 ] And so what is it that would encourage these? What is it that would motivate these disciples to show up? The answer has to be how much they love Jesus. And when we look at their story, that's the primary lesson.

Because if we were going to compare the two, I mean, we have this group of men who walk with Jesus, who are his students, who are his apprentices, who are learning what it means to love God the way Jesus teaches us to love God.

He commissions them. He sends them out to preach, teach, heal, cast out demons. He does all those things. And they walk with him. They spend all this time with him.

They literally live with him, even though it's not in a comfortable place, but they literally live with him. They know him so intimately and so personally, and they love him.

But when this moment hits, that love isn't enough. They run.

[ 6 : 53 ] They protect themselves. That love's not enough. Now let's be clear. These women, as Mark tells us in the story, we hear the verses.

These women are with Jesus too. They're with the group. And I'm one who believes that these women are not just there to take care of the others. They are disciples in their own right.

They're listening. They're learning. And they too bear witness to who Jesus is. So they're not just there to provide the meals.

They're actually there to receive and to give in terms of the spirit as well. And when the big moment hits, they're the ones who stay with him to the degree they can.

They follow behind the arrest. That they're nearby when he's taken into the praetorium. That they're in that crowd that listens to Pilate who's saying, well, what am I going to do with this man?

[ 8 : 00 ] What would you like me to do? Which one am I going to send to you? They're out there listening to that. We have those accounts in the other Gospels of the people who were along the route.

The women who were following behind Jesus. Who are crying and he turns and he speaks to them. And then we get to Calvary itself.

Now, we have accounts in the three synoptic Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That there was a group of women there.

There's some debate about who these women actually were. Now, let me read it to you again so you can hear it. So if you want to follow along, we're in Mark chapter 15.

We're looking at verses 40 and 41. Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene. Mary, the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph.

[ 9 : 02 ] And Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. As I said, there's some debate about who these women were.

Now, there's a school of thought that tells us that Mary, the mother of James the Younger and Joseph, is actually Mary, the mother of Jesus. Because we know that Jesus had brothers, one of whom was named James, and most likely one of whom was named Joseph because that was his earthly father.

That was the tradition at the time. So that would make sense. We also know that there's a school of thought that's emerging that believes that Salome is the mother of the disciples, James and John.

That she's, in other words, Zebedee's wife. Also a school of thought that says, because in other accounts, it talks about Mary and her sister being there. So that actually she's Mary's sister as well.

We can't prove any of that definitively, which is why there is division among the scholars. But the key here is not so much who they are as much as what they mean to the story.

[ 10 : 15 ] Because in John's account, it's clear that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is there. We talked about that last week. That Jesus is being crucified and he looks down and he sees his mother.

And he asks John to take care of her because he's dying. Both of these stories can be true. That you can have the idea that Mary is there and she's close to the cross, right?

Because that would have taken a close conversation. That would have been intimate. And maybe she's off with this other group and John brings her to the foot of the cross. Or maybe she's there first and then she joins the group later.

All things can be, both of those can be true. Now the reason why I want you to get that is because sometimes people will read across all four accounts and it'll be confusing because they don't say exactly the same thing.

But the critical piece is that there is especially one constant. And that one constant is Mary Magdalene.

[ 11 : 19 ] Now Mary has been the victim of some injustice in history. That when you read the Bible and you read it carefully, you'll recognize that of what's sprung up around Mary in popular culture is actually not scriptural at all.

And what I mean by that, that she's been turned into a sex worker. When in fact, there's nothing in the Bible that suggests that. It just suggests that she was healed by Christ.

That she becomes loyal to him and she stays with him. That she is the first sent person who bears witness to the resurrection. She's the first person he appears to.

She's that loyal. She means that much. And that's a powerful witness. And what compels someone to become that loyal, that dedicated, that courageous, that I don't care what the rest of the world thinks, I'm doing this anyway.

It has to be love. Not in that romantic sense, but authentic, pure, genuine love. And that's what brings them all there.

[ 12 : 34 ] Friends, our challenge is where is that for us? Can we learn from the courage of these disciples of Jesus and not fall into the trap that we see the other disciples of Jesus fall into?

Because I really don't want to disrespect the male disciples here. Because we got to be honest. As we live our own lives, we're probably a whole lot more like them than we are like these women.

Because something will show up in our circumstance. Who knows? Maybe it's a friend who needs something. Maybe we pass somebody who is poor in the street. Maybe there's a neighbor who ends up going to the hospital who has no grounding in faith.

And maybe we spot someone who is alone and confused somewhere as we're just going about the business of our day. And it may be time for us to bear witness to who we say our Lord is by how we behave.

Will we stay true to him even if other people are watching? Will we feel confident enough to speak up and be present for him even though it may put some things at risk?

[ 13 : 53 ] Because that's what love makes you do. You know, we hear these stories of people who go out and do these other sorts of crazy things like these parents who will run and get in front of a bear that's on their porch and things of this sort.

What does that? Love does that. Do we have that kind of love for Jesus? Or is our love just coming from a place that's convenient?

I think that's where we get challenged. We love Jesus to the point where it gets hard. We love Jesus to the point where it starts to ask us to do some stuff.

We love Jesus to the point where we get uncomfortable. And we still love him. We just don't act on that love the way we should. And the thing is the scriptures are full of examples of courageous, authentic love as opposed to simply convenient love.

Because convenient love is worried more about itself than the object that it loves. Convenient love cares more about say, oh, well, how much will this cost?

[ 15 : 12 ] But you see, courageous love in the scriptures because we can find it in the widow who goes to the temple and Jesus points out. She literally is giving all that she has as opposed to just giving out of here I can spare this.

We can see convenient love in the scriptures when we talk about, well, how far do I have to go? But we see real, authentic, courageous love in the scriptures when we see Ruth.

Because Ruth, when Naomi tells her, no, go back home where people will take care of you, she goes, no, I will go where you will go. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God.

That's real love. Convenient love gives up when it encounters resistance. All of a sudden, people say no. And convenient love is like, well, I guess I must be done.

But courageous love we see in the Syrophenician or Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus and says, you need to heal my daughter. And Jesus ignores her at first.

[ 16 : 15 ] And she cries out again, no, you need to heal my daughter. And all the disciples are telling her, no, leave him alone. She cries out some more and Jesus says, it's not right to take the children's food and give it to the dogs.

And she still keeps going because she loves her daughter that much. She believes in Jesus that much and she won't let him ignore her.

That's what real love makes you do. Friends, do we love Jesus like that? Because we know that there are people in our lives we love like that.

But do we love him like that? Because what we see in these disciples is they clearly do.

They're willing to show up even though there are soldiers who might say, hey, they were with him. they're willing to show up even though the religious leaders or others in the crowd were like, hey, we recognize them.

[ 17 : 22 ] They don't care because all they care about is the one who is suffering on the cross itself. He means that much to them.

that's the lesson we want to learn today. That's the lesson we need to embrace today. That our love for Jesus can't just come when it's convenient.

We have to love when it puts us at risk. We have to love when it's hard. So what does that mean in a practical sense?

Because people will say, well, okay, yeah, I get that. But what's the difference? How do I take a step? I want us to remember something very simple that we were talking about at the beginning.

We recognize big, grand gestures of love and we can smile at them at the end of movies and that sort of thing. Friends, I want you to remember the biggest, grandest gesture of love the world has ever seen.

[ 18 : 24 ] if you don't recognize how loved you are by Jesus himself, if you're looking for someone to show you how much you mean to them, if you need to be reminded of how valuable, how precious you really are, remember the one who is willing to put himself at risk, willing to do the very definition of inconvenient, the one who thinks you are so important that he's willing to step in between you and the consequence of your sin and take it for you.

you are loved like that. And if that truth doesn't well up inside you, if that truth doesn't push your love to a new level, if you have forgotten that simple fact, when it's time to honor him, when it's time to go into a world and be a difference maker for him, when the world shows up and says, will you choose the godly thing or the worldly thing, remember how loved you are because that will push you to a new place.

That will take you someplace that you're not willing to go because it's inconvenient. When you need that fuel in your tank, remember the blood of Christ, the difference it has made for you.

We are a changed people because of who he is. So, when you go into the world, bear witness to the one who loves you like that.

Tell the story of the one who loves you like that and remember the example of those who love him enough to be courageous, to be willing to put themselves at risk, to be willing to be inconvenienced because his love changed them.

[ 21 : 01 ] Amen and amen. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to know your truth like this, to know that your love has spoken to us, that your love has touched us, that your love has changed us this way.

Lord, let us learn from these courageous women. Let us learn from their example of love and loyalty, that we show up when it's hard, that we go to the places that aren't easy to go, that we don't care what the world will think or what the world might do because we are your loving people and we will not abandon you.

We will speak up. We will do the work. We will bear witness to the power of your love.

In the name of Christ we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Indeed, we raise our praise to the Lord of heaven and of earth. And as we go into the world this week to live our praise, to live our faith, a couple of things we want to highlight for you.

First, remember that DJ is still collecting hams for dinner in Niagara Falls. So if you are able to contribute to that, please do. Sandy is also looking for help for Feeding Hope this week. So if you're able to contribute to that on Wednesday, please do.

[ 22 : 28 ] It's all laid out in your bulletin in much greater detail. There are also more details on what's still necessary for the Easter celebration coming up next weekend. And if you're able to contribute to any of that, please do.

The Bible studies are all in effect. And so if you're interested in a great conversation about how to grow in your faith, how to go deeper into Scripture, you can find many examples for that as well.

Quick fish fry update. We are still being amazed by how God good is because we sold 551 on Friday and we still, and that's considerably higher for the middle of the season.

So we are really impressed by what's happening with what God is doing in our area. Where we need help this week is in the dishroom and of course on the cleanup cruise. The desserts are still going well, so thank you all for stepping into those needs.

And we already heard testimony today about what a joy it is to be able to help and be a part of the church community in this way. So if you are interested in that, make sure that you see that you are able to sign up in the back on your way out.

[ 23 : 31 ] So all that having been shared, let's receive our benediction today. Lord God, we thank you for the examples of courageous disciples, ones who put their love into practice in bold and authentic ways.

Help us to not just love when it's convenient, but to love courageously at all times. And now in the name of God, our King and Creator, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and our Sustainer.

May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. And all God's people said, Amen.