

Mary Magdalene

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of John, chapter 20, and verses 1 through 18. Early 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.

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. So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

[1 : 13] Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, Woman, 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.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news.

[2 : 27] I have seen the Lord, and she told them that he had said these things to her. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So let's pray together.

Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for this moment, for the ways in which you have already moved among us today. As our hearts are open, Lord, please plant a seed in each of us. Let it grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So you heard Nancy say earlier that we're starting a new journey together during this Easter season. So over the next few weeks, we're going to start a series inspired by this book.

It's called The Third Day, Living the Resurrection. It's by Bishop Tom Berlin. We've done some work by him before. It's going to be the basis of our Bible study over these next few weeks.

And, of course, it has inspired these sermons. Now, for those of you who are in Bible study and want some of your books today, I do have a few with me. So you can pick those up. And others, if you're interested and want to find out more, you're welcome to talk to me after service.

[3 : 32] And as you have already surmised, we are focusing on the story of Mary Magdalene today. And what Mary's story can teach us about what it means to live as a person of resurrection.

Now, some of you who are more astute in the group may catch on. Didn't we just hear this? I mean, we just read this last week. And that's okay. One, because we can't talk about the resurrection enough.

So that's not a bad thing. And secondly, we want to take a different take on Mary's journey today. And so having that more detailed account from the Gospel of John is important.

So with that in mind, let's start with a little something that might be a little close to home. Now, let me offer one of my caveats.

We're going to be talking about some mental illness today. If that's a difficult conversation for you or a triggering conversation for you, you might need to take care of yourself. And that's okay if you do.

[4 : 31] So I just want to make sure those for whom that may be an issue are aware. So you ever heard somebody talk about I'm battling some demons? Anybody ever use that phrase?

Anybody heard that phrase? I have used it because I am battling demons. Right? In my own life. I certainly have my own. And that's okay. None of us is perfect.

And this is a real thing. Because there's stuff. We're not kidding about this. This is the real world. Everybody deals with some stuff.

Now, the thing is, those demons, things we call demons, can take different forms. Of course, as we read scripture, we want to be clear about a couple of things. First, I do believe in spiritual demons.

I think that they exist. The word tells us they exist. That the battle is against principalities and powers. So, I don't think we get our theology from horror movies and that sort of stuff.

[5 : 33] So let's be clear on that. But I do believe that there's evil out there that is at work and tries to influence our world. But a lot of what we also know is that stuff that was called demons in some parts of scripture is probably medical and psychological stuff that we understand now.

So things, medical conditions like epilepsy, for example. Psychological conditions like schizophrenia. These are things that people regularly ascribed to demons back in the day.

And so, no matter what we are dealing with, no matter what your journey may be with this, whatever sort of demons you may be fighting, whether they are spiritual, whether they are medical, whether they are psychological, the battle is real.

And we just want to make sure we name that. If you want to understand battling some demons if this is not your journey, I want to talk, I want to share with you three stories about people who have opened up about what their struggle is like.

This is from a woman named Catherine who suffers from panic attacks. And she says, A major panic attack feels like you're in immediate danger of dying.

[6 : 55] Sometimes it feels like you've been hit with a bucket of freezing water. Heart palpitations. Dizziness. Shortness of breath. It's honestly terrifying. And that only continues the vicious cycle of panic.

The worst is when they seem to come on for no reason. And you don't even realize what's happening is anxiety. I get anxious on public transport or in crowds of people.

And it feels realistically like I can't breathe. There's a woman named Zola who has been diagnosed with generalized anxiety. And she says this.

I had a full-on nervous breakdown leading up to my GCSE exams. When I have a bad anxiety attack, it feels like I'm drowning. I'll be gripped by sheer terror and can't move.

Sometimes there's so much adrenaline buzzing through my body that I feel like I must look like I'm vibrating. As a teenager, I'd also swing the other way into a depressive episode where I would feel utterly numb and flat.

[8 : 03] This flip-flopping between everything at once and nothing at all was terrifying. And I had to drop out of school. And lastly, this one's from a man named Patrick who's addicted to alcohol.

And he says there's a couple of different ways that obsession happens. Some obsessions are just unwarranted, repetitive thoughts.

They feel like a really intense craving. Then there's the type that happens but doesn't have any feeling behind it. It's just a thought. For me, I could be driving down the road completely sane thinking, oh, I'll just stop for a couple of beers.

And it could end up ruining my life. I got in a fight with a cop when I was 16 years old. My first rehab was at 17. Got kicked out of it after 10 days.

Then back in there three months later. I had six or seven months sober. Maybe even a little longer. Then I went back out and drank. I got sober again when I was 24.

[9 : 04] During that period of time, I had 11 years of sobriety. At 35, my wife and I went through a divorce and a lot of stuff happened. And I just drank. It would take me 10 years to get more than 30 days sober.

I was in and out of AA. That was constant. I would go to meetings and nothing would happen. I would still want to drink. Really bad obsessions.

That went on for about 10 years. I lost everything. I lost a really nice house. My car was repossessed. And my 401k was gone. Those are just three people's struggles.

So when we hear people talking about I'm battling my demons, this is not an abstract. There's very real stuff that's happening in people's lives.

Now, your journey may be different than these three. It may not be as severe. And it may come from a different place. But I want us to be clear that we are not talking about something light.

[10 : 07] That we are not talking about something that is just sort of superficial. That people are dealing with real stuff. And I have no doubt that there are people dealing with real stuff who are listening to me talking right now.

And that is okay. This is a safe place. But what I want you to hear is this. Because the person we are talking about at the center of our story today knows something about this journey.

And we don't talk about it in the same way. Because people go through things to learn to manage their situations. Sometimes you get real professional help.

That's beautiful if that's your journey. But many of these struggles are ongoing. And we know that. Some people have, in fact, experienced healing.

And that, too, is amazing if that is your journey. And one of the people that we know who had battled demons and had healing was Mary Magdalene.

[11 : 10] For those of you who don't know her story, if you have your Bibles with me, I want you to open to Luke chapter 8. Luke chapter 8. And we're going to start at verse 1. Okay?

Luke chapter 8, verse 1. And there you hear this. After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The twelve were with him. And also some women who have been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out.

Joanna, the wife of Chusa, the manager of Herod's household. Susanna, and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

This is where we meet Mary Magdalene in scripture. And it tells us her story. Not in detail, but it lets us know what she's been through.

[12 : 24] That it tells us that she had had seven demons cast out of her. Now, we don't know what those demons were. Spiritual, medical, psychological, it doesn't matter.

The point of the story is that if you think about what we heard in those struggles previously from those three individuals, you can imagine what Mary's life was like until she encountered Jesus.

And that's really the point. That whatever she was struggling with, whatever she was up against, it was very real. And it changed her life.

And her encounter with Christ is how she found healing and peace.

And that's critical to understand. And that's critical to understand. Because if we want to understand why Mary stays as loyal to Jesus as she does, then look at that journey.

[13 : 29] See, when the eleven scatter, because they're worried about getting arrested themselves. But we look at the story of the crucifixion.

One of the things that all four gospel writers tell us is that Mary was there. She had that kind of courage. She had that kind of faith.

She had that kind of love. And it's because of what Jesus had brought her from. Not only that, did she know that healing, that that chaos in her mind and in her life had been overcome and replaced with order, replaced with peace, replaced with a community.

Because what we see in those verses in Luke is that she's part of this greater community now. That she's part of that community of the disciples and the women who are moving with Jesus as he does his mission.

So there's safety. There's purpose. She's learning and she's understanding in a different way. And that person who she was, she can leave behind.

[14 : 44] And that's important for us to recognize. And that brings us to Resurrection Sunday.

So she's seen Jesus killed in all the torture and agony that crucifixion means. She walked with the group that followed Joseph as they took his dead body and put him in the tomb.

She felt the anguish, not only of the grief of that Friday, but also what it means to not be able to bury him properly. Because they hurried up.

They had to rush. They had to get it all done. And then when the Sabbath began, they had to stop. Because that's what it meant to be faithful. Which is why she's there on Sunday morning.

But now we got a new problem. This is what we were talking about last week. We got this new problem now.

[15 : 52] So think about all she is carrying. And you get to the cemetery. And you see that the grave is open. Now, this means one of two things, realistically.

It means one of two things. One is that we're dealing with grave robbers. Now, here's the thing about grave robbing. People who do grave robbing are looking for things they can steal and sell.

Right? But we know that Jesus didn't have any of that. Which gives rise to the second concern. Which is those who killed Jesus.

Jesus' enemies. Either are so upset that he received a proper burial. Or are still so angry at him. That they want to see him debased even further.

And if that's what's happened. What do you think that does to Mary's heart? That's where we are.

[17 : 11] But the deeper thing underneath it. Is that's the surface part. That's the brain part. That's the understanding how the world works part. The deeper thing for Mary is the heart part. And the soul part. Because she's still dealing with the reality. That he's gone. He's gone. That that community we were talking about. That that order we were talking about. That that peace we were talking about.

The one that gave that to me is gone. That's where Mary is. So she goes running to the guys.

And the guys don't have any answers. They're in the same space. And this is where we need to stop. And center for a minute. So Peter and John have left. And Mary's still there.

[18 : 15] And let's just read. That peace one more time. If you're following along. This is John chapter 20. Verse 11. Now Mary stood outside the tomb.

Crying. As she wept. She bent over to look into the tomb. And saw two angels in white. Seated where Jesus' body had been. One at the head.

And the other at the foot. They asked her. Woman. Why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away. She said.

And I don't know where they have put him. At this. She turned around. And saw Jesus standing there. But she did not realize. That it was Jesus. Okay.

Here's the thing. That we got to wrestle with. Now of course. We are dealing with. What Mary's up against. Right? We've talked about the weight. On her heart. We've talked about the weight. On her soul. And she.

[19 : 18] Is outside this tomb. Peter and John have left. And she. Is grief struck. She. Is letting it all fly. She's in what in my mind.

Sounds like an ugly cry. Right? We know what ugly cry means. Right? Because.

Of what we said. He's gone. Right? The person who gave me that peace. The person who taught me.

The person who healed me. He's gone. He's gone. I want you to hear the question.

Differently. Says. Woman. Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?

[20 : 18] Woman. Why are you crying? Who is it. You are looking for? That question is for you.

Why are you crying? Well you see. I got this pain. And is this pain in me. That Jesus dealt with.

But. It's back. Why are you crying? Well I did these things. You know. I thought I was better.

I thought I was walking. In the ways that Jesus wanted me to walk. But now I'm backslidden. I'm doing that stuff again. And I'm not in my best relationship. Why are you crying?

Well. I'm dealing. With this problem. That I can't seem to solve. It keeps showing up. Over and over again. No matter how hard I fight.

[21 : 22] I can't seem to get any better. Why. Are you. Crying. Who is it.

You're looking for. This. Is the part of the story. That really hit me. In a different way. This week. I want you to catch the language.

In those verses. Now it says. Mary's looked. She's standing outside the tomb. Crying. And it tells us. That she went. And she looked. Into the tomb. And that's where she saw the angels.

Right. She looked. Into the tomb. Now conceivably. Behind her. In the garden. Is Jesus. And she's looking.

In the tomb. Right. So. Here's your challenge. Are you looking. From the wrong place. Notice what I said. Not in the wrong place. But from. The wrong place.

[22 : 22] And what I mean by that. Is the same thing. That Mary is dealing with. Because Mary. Is thinking. Like the world. Thinks. She's thinking.

That this. Is what happens. To people. Who are crucified. They get put. In graves. She has not. Opened her mind.

To the possibility. That God. May be doing. Something else. That God. Might be capable. Of more.

Than what the world. Has taught us. So she's looking. In the tomb. Are you. Looking. In the tomb. And behind you.

Jesus is saying. Why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for? You see.

[23 : 23] Because it's when. She turns around. She sees. The risen. Christ. When she turns.

Around. That's. Maybe. What you have to do. That whatever.

Has got you thinking. That this is all there is. And from behind you. And this is the piece. That's. So. Heart wrenching.

And soul rocking. Right. Because. From behind her. Jesus. Asked the question. But then. He speaks.

Her name. And it's when. Jesus speaks. Her name. That she gets.

[24 : 20] Is Jesus. Calling. You. Today. Because.

You're. Here. And Jesus. Is trying to get you to say. Don't look in there. Who is it you're looking for? Because I'm standing over here.

If you would be free. If you want to understand. The difference. That a risen Christ makes. Because you're thinking.

In this small little place. When a risen Christ. Has so much more to offer you. A risen Christ. Can take care of whatever it is.

You are dealing with. A risen Christ. Has all your answers. In all of the power. But you got. To look at him.

[25 : 20] And not. Look in this little place. That's. What Jesus is calling us to today folks. If you want to understand.

The difference. A risen Christ makes. And no matter what it is. You are fighting. No matter what it is. You are dealing with. No matter what it is. That feels so overwhelming.

You can indeed. No community. No peace. No healing. No freedom. Because. We serve. A risen Savior.

Who's in the world. Today. That. Is the difference. A risen. Christ makes. So if you are feeling.

Trapped. Just like Mary. Was feeling trapped. If you are feeling. Alone. Alone. Like Mary. Was feeling alone. Remember. That there is.

[26 : 17] Nothing. That our Lord. Can't do. That. He conquered. Sin and death. Sin and death. Did not conquer him. And so.

Because you. Are a person. Of Christ. Sin and death. Don't have to be. The end of your story. Either. Let us.

Like Mary. Move from sorrow. To joy. That woman. That was crying. Bent over. Looking into the tomb. Immediately.

Turns around. And moves. To this place. Of unbelievable joy. When she realizes. That's. Who she's been looking for. Joy. And how do we know.

She felt that joy. She went. And told the other people. Right. You don't do that. Unless you have. Been changed.

[27 : 14] You don't do that. Unless you get it. Now. You don't do that. Because you don't go back. To them dudes. Who have just been with you. And saw the same empty tomb.

With this story. Unless you know. This story is true. Unless you know. It is your reality. That. Is who you are invited.

To be. Today. We serve. A risen savior. Let him. Make the difference. He wants to make. For you.

Amen. And amen. Loving God. Thank you. For the ways. In which you have moved. In our lives. Thank you. For the ways. That you bless us.

Thank you. For the ways. That you move outside. Of our understanding. You teach us. Time and time again. That your ways. Are not. Our ways. Lord.

[28 : 11] Help us. To believe. That you are capable. Of more. No matter what we see. No matter what it feels like. No matter how heavy.

It weighs. On our souls. No matter what. The world. The world is whispering. In our ears. Whether we are facing. The enemy. Or whether we're just buying.

Into the lies. Of the world. Let us hear you. Speaking. Our names. Reminding us. That you don't have to keep crying.

That what you are looking for. Is right here. In you. Amen. Amen. Indeed. Let us be what we just sang about.

All the earth. That sings and lives. The praises of this risen savior. Because he has transformed us. So let us go. And transform. The world. Three things to think about.

[29 : 09] As you put your faith. Into practice this week. First. We have started this bible study. That you've heard me talking about. And Nancy talking about. It is called the third day. Those of you who are regularly. Part of our Thursday group. If you want to pick up a book today.

You can. If not. They will be available for you on Thursday. For those of you who are interested in joining us. Feel free to do so at any time. You can ask me any questions about it. And of course. Be happy to welcome you to our group.

If you want to join online. We tend to do the online piece. Only during the evening session. But if you're interested in that. Feel free to contact me. We'll send you the information. To do that. The United Women in Faith.

Rummage and Bake Sale. That information is on the back of your bulletin. Of course. Set aside the day on the 27th. So that you can be here. To be a part of that. If you have things to donate. Or if you want to help out in any other way.

All of that's laid out for you. So please. Check that out. One thing that's also not been highlighted before. Is the idea of our inside out ministry. There's a really good write up on it. In your bulletin.

[30 : 07] The DJ is looking for someone. To perhaps lead that ministry. Going into the future. If you feel that's something. God might be calling you to. Feel free to see him or me about that. That said. Let's receive our benediction.

Loving God. We know that you lead us from sorrow to joy. Your greatest desire is to see us turn away from looking at death. To looking at you in your risen glory. By your spirit.

Make that so. And help us to help others. See what we have known and learned in you. Now in the name of God. Our King and Creator. In the name of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord and Redeemer. In the name of the Holy Spirit. Our advocate. 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.