

## WHAT ABOUT THIS MARY MAGDALENE

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*When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

Last month we heard how the hemorrhaging woman was healed by touching the fringe of Jesus cloak. Today we hear again how the sick reached out to Jesus for healing. Wherever Jesus traveled, people brought the sick to him for healing. When Jesus sent his disciples out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God he told them to teach and to heal. Many of Jesus' followers were those who had been healed and then told to stay in their village and proclaim what God had done for them.

This coming Wednesday, July 22, is the Feast Day of Mary Magdalene, this is the day that legend claims that she died in Ephesus. Since Mary Magdalene is considered the Apostle to the Apostles and the first person to meet the Risen Lord, I think it is important that we take some time this morning to recognize her faith and devotion to Jesus Christ. Luke tells us that Jesus had healed her when he writes, *Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.* (Luke 8:1-3). Notice that Mary is not the only woman that Jesus has healed. *The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities.* Luke then proceeds to name Joanna and Susanna as two other women who were healed of their infirmities and became disciples of Jesus. Later, at the crucifixion when the disciples are mentioned at the foot of the cross, Mary Magdalene is the only disciple who constantly appears staying with Jesus as he is crucified. Jesus' mother only appears at the cross in the Gospel of John. Mary is the model of faithfulness that every follower of Jesus is called to be. In all four Gospels, Mary Magdalene is the only person that appears in each of the stories of the women at the tomb. She is named 12 times in the Gospels, and yet we know very little about her.

Mary Magdalene is portrayed as standing by the cross, witnessing Jesus' burial, discovering the empty tomb and announcing the resurrection of Christ to his disciples. Her name is always mentioned first in the various lists of women disciples, as in Matthew chapter 27: 56, *Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.* According to Karen King, professor of Ecclesiastical History at Harvard University, all of the earliest Christian writings, including the Gospels, portray Mary Magdalene as a prominent Jewish disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. She is the first person that Jesus, as the Risen Christ, chose to speak with on

the morning of the resurrection. In the midst of her grief she was open to having her Lord and Savior, the person she loved appear to her and she believed. Jesus entrusted her with the message to go and tell the other disciples. In John 20: 17, *Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*” *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciple, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.* Her faith enabled her to perceive the Risen Lord, while Peter, in the Gospel of John, sees only an empty tomb.

What happened to Mary Magdalene after her proclamation of Christ’s resurrection to the other disciples? She does not appear in Acts or the rest of the New Testament. She does, however, appear in many other early Christian writings that were not included in our scriptures. In these writings she is a teacher of the faith that Jesus’ gave his disciples. One is the Gospel of Mary. This early second century composition, hints at the controversy between those who followed Peter, and what became orthodoxy, and the followers of Mary Magdalene or a more prophetic free form of Christianity, that included women in leadership roles. Early Christianity of the first and second centuries did not have creeds or standardized scriptures. The New Testament was not formed until Constantine requested and paid for it in the fourth century. The first Christians were still trying to figure out if they were still part of Judaism or something else entirely. Mary Magdalene was known in the early church as a spiritual leader and apostle. The Eastern Churches have always seen her as an apostle, not a prostitute. To them she has always been the Apostle to the Apostles. So how did Mary, one of the early leaders of the Christian church become known as a repentant prostitute?

The long ending of Mark and Luke chapter 8:2 are the only references to Mary Magdalene being cured of seven demons. *The Twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.*” This passage is given sexual connotations by Pope Gregory in 591.

In Luke 8:27 *As Jesus stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him.* Jesus then heals the man by commanding the demons to come out of him. There is no sexual connotation to the healing of the man or in regards to the demons. Only with Mary Magdalene did the early church fathers and Pope Gregory associate the demons with prostitution. Nowhere in scripture is Mary Magdalene referred to as a prostitute. According to Karen King, “the portrait of Mary as a repentant prostitute is pure fiction with no historical foundation whatsoever. The historical Mary Magdalene was a prominent Jewish follower of Jesus, a visionary, and a leading apostle.”

So how did she become known as a prostitute? When Constantine issued his Edict of Milan in 313 legalizing Christianity in the Roman Empire, he gave the empire’s approval to a group of male bishops as the leaders of the church. The role of women leaders in the church was suppressed and a patriarchal hierarchy became the norm for the Christian Church.

If you would like more details maybe we can offer a class on the women in the New Testament or you could take EfM, which looks at the history of the early church. Finally on Sept. 14, 591 Pope Gregory the Great gave a sermon that announced that “this woman whom Luke called the sinful woman, whom John called Mary, we believe to be that Mary of whom Mark affirms she was delivered of seven demons.” He then continues to describe how the demons are sexual. By combining three Marys into one, Mary

Magdalene becomes the repentant prostitute for future generations of Christians. It was not until the 20th century with the emergence of feminist biblical scholars and theology that Gregory's description of Mary Magdalene was questioned and found to be wrong. Mary Magdalene is only now being recognized in the Western Church as a spiritual teacher and leader of the early Christian Church, an apostle equal to Peter. Jesus healed her and she became the good seed, along with her fellow women disciples that bore fruit in the early church.

On Wednesday this week please take a moment to thank God for the life of Mary Magdalene, for her faith in proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom. Take a moment also to examine your own life to see where God has brought healing and transformation so that you too can join Mary in declaring to the world, "I have seen the Lord!"