

Session 6—Proclaim

Following Christ by offering our time, treasures and our talents.

Principal Text: John 20:1-18

Supportive Texts: Luke 7: 36-50, 8:1-3, 8:2; Mark 16: 9-11; John 20:1-18; Matthew 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

We will consider:

- What it means to transcend biases against persons living non-traditional lifestyles.
- Allowing God's sanctification to operate in our lives.
- How to be the bearers of good news to a doubting audience.

Hymn: (*Found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) “What Wondrous Love is This?” 666

Prayer (*Spoken by the leader*)

Risen Christ and reigning Lord, we thank you and praise you for the salvation you bought for us on the cross, removing the sting of death, fear, sickness and curses. We praise you for your promise of power, hope and eternal life. Enable us to reach out to you as you reach out to us and to receive these gifts as graciously as you have freely given. You are our light dispelling the wrong understandings we have of you and of one another. You are the wisdom that leads us to all truth. You are our savior and the lord of us all. Reign in our hearts resurrected God, and sanctify us for your glory. In Jesus most Holy Name we pray! Amen.

Introduction

Church history is full of sermon illustrations, paintings and stained glassed windows depicting Mary Magdalene as one marked as an undeserving sinner. This, in spite of the fact that she was singularly devoted to Jesus, and there is no clear evidence of her impropriety. One could argue that we should be challenged and inspired by her unwavering devotion to Christ, but many still choose to remember her as a sinner. Why? In today's study we will explore this question further.

Read: John 20:1-18

The New Testament uses the term ‘sinner’ or ‘sinful’ more than 40 times. But only once it is used to refer to the woman who anointed Jesus. (Luke 7: 36-50.) The woman's name is not mentioned. Luke 8:2 makes reference to Mary Magdalene, along with other women who had ministered to Jesus. Women theologians opine that the proximity of these two references have led to the misconception that Mary was the sinner woman mentioned in Chapter 7. This alone however, did not garner her being branded as a sinner.

How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

Chapter 8 mentions seven demons that had been cast out from Mary. People later connected this to the seven deadly sins and branded her as the sinner woman, further extrapolating that since she had a multitude of devils in her, the spirit of sexual immorality must have been in her also. Though modern thinking tends to consider demon possession as mental disorders, we must accept that those who are possessed of demonic power are its victims and not its accomplices. Mary was a victim, made whole by our Lord Jesus. That is why she loved him with devotion beyond measure.

Mary is also misunderstood by association. Mary came from the place called Magdala which is a town near Galilee famous for trade but also infamous for sexual promiscuity. A single woman from a town of such a reputation would inevitably be looked upon during those times with suspicion.

It is said that Mary's reputation as a 'reformed sinner' gained prominence only in the 6th century.

She was one of the women disciples and seemed to be a fairly well-to-do woman, who followed Jesus and helped and supported him with all that she had. Mary Magdalene did not desert Jesus when he was condemned by the masses; rejected by his own followers; denied by his closest disciple; betrayed by one of his chosen; beaten and mocked by the soldiers and by all those around him. She was among those who stood in solidarity with the suffering and betrayed Jesus, and risked death by being associated with him.

Even when the finality of Jesus' death made his followers to lose hope in him being the Messiah, Mary Magdalene's love for him drives her to the grave early in the morning to anoint his body with spices. In her action there is no selfish expectation or ulterior motive—unlike two of the other disciples. It is therefore no wonder that Jesus makes his resurrected appearance to her first. Hers is the first Pascal proclamation "I have seen the Lord!" Jesus commissions her to "Go and tell" the disciples the good news of his resurrection. This is why Augustine called her the "apostle to the apostles."

It is remarkable that a woman whose witness would never have been accepted is asked to bear witness by Jesus. Despite this, Mary Magdalene is too quickly forgotten in the pages of history, as is the case in I Cor: 15; 3-8 which fails to mention her while listing the others to whom Jesus had appeared after resurrection. It is rather ironic that even today, in some churches, women are denied the honour of announcing the gospel—the good news that Christ first gave the women to share.

Church tradition names Peter as the "rock" on which the Church was built. But history insists that Mary Magdalene was known for her preaching, having even gone as a missionary to France. The rediscovery of Mary Magdalene, the preacher can be seen in the stained-glass windows of French cathedrals of the 13th century. In Chartres Cathedral dating from 1230 for example, she is depicted as a saint with a halo. In Auxerre Cathedral she is depicted as a preacher. In the 16th century Chalons-sur-Marne, we find Mary Magdalene baptizing.

Some could argue that it is merely coincidental that the women were first at the empty tomb. But it is difficult to argue that the appearances of angels and of Christ himself were not deliberate acts of God.

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Women were the first to receive the central message of the gospel and the first to be instructed to tell it abroad. Since that day, the church has struggled, at times unenthusiastically and unsuccessfully, to emulate the one who promised to both men *and* women, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed!”

Discussion

1. What words or phrases come to mind when you describe Mary Magdalene and why?
2. How do you think she might be a role model for young women in the Church today?
3. Why do you think there is no mention of her in the New Testament Church?
4. If Jesus asked her to be the “apostle to the apostles” why do you think the early church was silent about her leadership?
5. What do we cling to like Mary that we should ‘let go’ of to bear witness?

Closing Activity

Form a circle and like in a Greek tragedy, let a few volunteers, one after the other, assume to be the *protagonist* or the ‘first actor,’ Mary Magdalene. Let each tell the story of Magdalene as she herself would narrate: of the experience of her healing, her reasons to follow Christ, her presence at the cross, her presence at the sepulcher, and her witness to the Jesus’ resurrection.

Closing Prayer (*Individually, in silence.*)

Memory verse: 1 John 4: 18–19.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”