

Our Journey of Spiritual Transformation with Jesus & Mary Magdalene **Matthew 27:45-61**

From the men who followed and interacted with Jesus, we turn now to the woman whose story was also indispensable to Easter. History knows her as Mary Magdalene. Her name is perhaps familiar to us but we don't know a lot about her. But what we do know is that her given name was "Mary"; and that she was from the village of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Her only appearance in the Gospels before Holy Week is this reference by Luke: "The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out".

Luke labels her, along with others, a former Demoniac Luke 8:2 which should enlighten us to the fact that as sure as there is God in Heaven with angels there is also in the realm of evil Satan, or the devil and his unclean spirits of which seven of them had been commanded to leave by Jesus from Mary's being, her heart, soul and life, just as he had done for many, many people throughout his three year ministry. From this special moment in Mary's life she was set free from the burden of both sin and demonic possession. Spiritually, mentally and emotionally- Free to become a follower of Christ without any hangers on. Free to give herself in service of her Lord. Free along with the other women recorded in Luke 8:3 to help support Jesus and his disciples out of her own means. These women including Mary were such an important part of Jesus' ministry because Jesus didn't support his disciples with the miracle provision of food and resources throughout this time, such provision came through the service and the means of grateful people like these women.

Mary may not have figured much before Holy Week and been written much about in the Gospels but she had been a very integral and important part of his life. It was to be in her spiritual Journey of transformation with Jesus to his death on the cross, burial and then resurrection that she was to become a prominent figure in the story.

Meeting Jesus had changed her when she was healed and delivered, saved and set free to be the beautiful person God had created her to be.

Free to serve Jesus and follow him all the way to the cross.
 Free and able to stand near to Jesus at the crucifixion with the others [John 19:25] and then free as a follower to be able to stand back as Mathew 27:55 tells us, to let God be God and look after Jesus in his final moments. At this point we could ask ourselves just how able are we to step back and 'Let God be God' when it is required in a difficult situation in life? But then also ask at the same time just, where am I comfortable in relation to standing near to the cross?

In these last hours of Jesus' life, watching Jesus crucified and then hanging there on the cross, at first being able to speak with him and then standing back she with her own eyes was witnessing, and in her own heart experiencing, just how much her salvation and her redemption from sin, death and evil was costing Jesus. The spiritual work of transformation was continuing and God was not yet finished. Sure she had experienced both salvation and deliverance, but that was just the beginning of her journey of transformation with Jesus. God in Jesus had not just snapped his fingers in a single instance to complete the transformation. It is not that easy. It cost God everything that even God has to give to make it possible for you and me to be redeemed from our sins. And Mary Magdalene at the cross stands as an eternal testimony to the love of God and His willingness to forgive us today so that we might continue on our journey of spiritual transformation- just like Mary!

Mary Present at Jesus' burial Mt 27:61 She does not stop following Jesus at his death on the cross because, literally she keeps following him. In death she could not bear to be separated because she follows Joseph along with the other Mary, who takes Jesus' body to the tomb where he's buried. And then she had to go back to where she was staying because the Sabbath had arrived. The Sabbath extended from 6 PM Friday to 6 PM Saturday; this occurred on Saturday evening, as we measure time. Then, very early on the first day of the week or Easter Sunday as we call it, just after sunrise, she along with the other Mary, not the men/the apostles, went to look at the tomb Matthew 28:1-10.

There they experienced an earthquake and found the very large stone rolled away with an angel sitting on it and the tomb unguarded .

Understandably they were alarmed by this turn of events and the appearance of this gleaming like lightening angel. To calm them the angel speaks to them vv5-7, "Do not be afraid". Literally, "fear not" or "stop being afraid." Why? "He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'". Nonetheless they respond by fleeing from the tomb, hurrying away in fear and trembling and still somewhat bewildered, and who should they then bump into? None other than the Resurrected Jesus himself!

They worshiped him, clasping his feet, and were sent to his disciples again (vv9-10). Mary Magdalene then is also supposed to have met "two angels in white" (John 20:11-13), and encountered the risen Christ for herself on her own (vs. 14-17). She then told the disciples about the One she met (v. 18). Which is why she became the first evangelist of Easter. Of all Jesus' first followers, who would have expected Mary Magdalene to be the first to bear witness to his resurrection? And, would some be surprised at Jesus' same call on your and my own life today?

I think that we can all learn from Mary Magdalene's experience of continued spiritual transformation on Easter Sunday. Once she realised to whom she was speaking, once she recognised the gardener as her precious teacher ("Rabboni"), once Jesus told her to go share the news of his resurrection, nothing could stop her from telling others. Bernard of Clairvaux called Mary Magdalene the "Apostle to the Apostles", because of her role in telling Jesus' disciples about the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene brought the news to the disciples: "You'll never believe it, but I have seen the Lord!" Then she told them what she had seen and experienced. She was the only one who stayed at the tomb, and she was the only one who saw Jesus. But Mary was so excited she could not keep her enthusiasm to herself. She was bursting at the seams to share the best news she had ever heard. Mary through this journey of spiritual transformation with Jesus to the cross and beyond was definitely nothing less than extremely enthusiastic about her faith experience.

And this is where Mary's journey of spiritual transformation crosses with ours. Have you ever been overflowing with enthusiasm for some good

news that you just had to share it with everyone you met? I mean, you're walking through the supermarket or the hardware store, and you wish you could scream out that the most incredible thing that just happened to you! Maybe it's a grandchild born, a great trip you had, or holiday you went on or a powerful movie or show you saw or a fabulous restaurant you ate at or something else big that happened in your family. But whatever it is, you just feel like sharing it with everybody you see? That's the kind of enthusiasm that Mary Magdalene had about Jesus' resurrection. Seeing Jesus risen from the dead was the best thing that ever happened to her because the journey with Jesus did not finish at the cross.

Why is it that we can easily share news of a great game of semi-final World Cup cricket, a family event or a trip or a movie or restaurant, but we shrink back from sharing the best news of all - the news of Jesus' resurrection? What matters more - a movie with a good plot or Jesus overcoming death once and for all? What matters more - really good dining or the Son of God coming back to life? We have witnessed the same event that Mary Magdalene did. We know that Jesus was raised from the dead. We know we are freed because he broke the bonds of death once and for all. It is preposterous that we will not share the good news of Jesus with the same joy and enthusiasm that Mary Magdalene expressed when she told the disciples about Jesus' resurrection appearance. Mary Magdalene was nothing less than extremely enthusiastic.

So it is then that Mary Magdalene holds a unique place in the history of Jesus. She was the first one to find the empty tomb on Easter and the first one, in the gospel of John, to meet Jesus face to face. We can learn a lot from her, but especially, we can learn from her persistence in following, helping, supporting and then waiting for Jesus, her sincerity in searching for Jesus, and her enthusiasm in telling others about him.

A Closing Story: A mother told this story about her 4 year old daughter who got nicely dressed and went to see her very first Easter play. As the play started, the girl little saw the actors come on stage and screamed with excitement, "THERE'S JESUS!" He was playing with the

children on the stage and she wanted to know why she couldn't go up and play with Jesus too. Her mother told her, "Honey, this is only a play. He's only an actor. This isn't real." "Okay," she said, "but will you lift me up so that Jesus can see my hat?"

During a scene of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, soldiers came barging in yelling and screaming. The little girl became so frightened that she turned her face away, buried it into mum's chest and began to cry. Again her mother told her, "It's okay, honey. This is only a play. Those are only actors. It's not real." So she agreed to watch some more. Then down the aisle of the church came Jesus dragging His cross – people yelling and cursing him. This was too much. She could not bear to watch. Her mother held her tightly and tried to comfort her. "It's okay, honey. This is only a play. Those are only actors. It isn't real."

Next, the soldiers grabbed Jesus, threw him against the cross, picked up their hammers and BAM! She screamed at the top of her lungs, "NOOOOO! THEY'RE KILLING MY JESUS!" She cried so loud and so long that mother rushed her out of the auditorium and into a room with a large TV screen where we could finish watching the play, assuring her that Jesus would come back to life. But she would not be consoled until she could see Him herself.

Many people were in the Church that day. They had all gone to see a play – only actors – it wasn't real. But when they saw the Gospel through the eyes and reactions of a child, the Gospel became real once again. Has the Gospel become just another story to you? Has it lost its appeal? If so then maybe you and I need a good dose of child-like faith this Easter, the type of new born and found faith that I believe Mary Magdalene displayed. If you need a kick start then how about going all the way on this Lenten journey to the cross with Jesus, being near to him as you see him dying there for you in your place, for your sin at great cost. Stand there close enough to the cross and it will change you as it did Mary, but don't get too comfortable and think that as a follower of Christ you can remain there because Sunday's a coming and your journey of spiritual transformation with Jesus and sharing the good news that 'He has Risen' has only just begun!