



Midweek Lenten Reflections – March 25, 2020

“Welcome to Midweek Lenten Reflections! Though we are physically apart as a congregation, we gather in Spirit! I invite you and others in your home to explore Mary Magdalene, a woman very close to and beloved by Jesus. As are YOU, his follower!”

Gospel Reading: Luke 8:1-3 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Some Women Accompany Jesus

8 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, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and many others, who provided for them^(a) out of their resources.

Song: ‘I Don't Know How to Love Him’ *from Jesus Christ, Superstar*

I don't know how to love him,
What to do, how to move him
I've been changed, really changed
In these past few day when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else

I don't know how to take this
I don't know why he moves me
He's a man he's just a man
And I've known many men before
In many ways he's just one more

Should I bring him down? Should I scream and shout?
Should I speak of love? Let my feelings out?
I never thought I'd come to this
What's it all about?

Yet if he said he loved me, I'd be lost, I'd be frightened
I couldn't cope, just couldn't cope
I'd turn my head, I'd back away
I wouldn't want to know He scares me so,
I want him so, I love him so.....

Monologue: “Mary Magdalene: Called to Proclaim”

I was seventeen that summer, and I wished I had never been born! Every other girl my age in Magdala was married and most had several children. I was still living at home, and I saw no way of leaving my father’s house. Everyday he reminded me that he had been unable to find a husband for me. No one wanted me at any price, he said.

You see, from time to time, a demon seemed to possess me! My muscles would suddenly contract and I would lose consciousness and fall to the ground, thrashing wildly. In a little while, I would come to myself. No one ever helped me get up off the ground. Adults avoided me. Children would point at me and call me, “devil’s child.” Sometimes they imitated me. Only my mother would hold me in her lap, comforting me.

I was angry at the rest of them. I was even angry at myself, because no matter how long I tried, I could not stop these seizures. I felt rage at my father, because he blamed me for something I couldn’t help. I was afraid to be angry with God, but it was there in me.

The older I grew, the more the seizures seemed to happen. I had to go to the well everyday to collect water, and I would grow afraid as people turned away from me and children eyed me. I asked my mother if I could do another chore, but she felt this would help me overcome my demon. Life didn’t seem worth living. I saw no hope for a future. None of the physicians had been able to help me.

Magdala is a village on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. My father fished for a living, in business with my two older brothers. Much of the year, they fish at night when the catch is larger. Except when it was really cold, I liked to sleep on the roof. When I woke in the morning, I could look out and see my father’s boat. When I saw it coming to shore, I went down to help my mother fix breakfast.

Sometimes, Father would share news that he heard on his way home.

As he ate breakfast, he would tell us what was going on in Magdala.

One morning he said that a new rabbi had come to Capernaum and went out to preach and teach and heal in the neighboring villages. A new hope began to grow in me. He could heal! I wondered how I could meet him.

Some morning later, I looked down at the shore and saw a group around a fire.

There were half a dozen men and a woman or two. To my surprise, one of the men looked up and saw me and waved! Before I could think about it, I waved back. Then I felt ashamed. What kind of a man would wave to a woman he didn’t know, and what kind of a woman was I to wave back?!

I returned home, and so did my father and brothers. Soon it was time for me to go for water, so I took my jug and left. At the well, I found the same group as before, having breakfast on the beach. The women stood together a little apart from the others. I looked at them curiously. They were not what I expected! They were neatly dressed, and to my small-town eyes, full of dignity. They seemed to have a sense of themselves that I did not understand.

The men were sitting on the edge of the well and their leader looked up as I came. I stared at him. I had never seen anyone like him. He seemed full of grace. Standing up to greet me, he told me that his name is Jesus. They had broken their jug, asked if they could have a drink when I pulled mine up.

It was the first time a man I didn't know had spoken to me, but I nodded and let my jug down. I pulled it up and turned to him.

And then, of course, it happened! I spilled the water, lost consciousness and fell down. I heard that Jesus stooped down, touched me on the shoulder and I came to. I heard him say to the demon, "Come out of her and never trouble her again."

While they all drank, Jesus said to me, "Would you like to be whole?" "Oh," I said, "more than anything else in the world." He told me to have faith in my wholeness. He added that I had other demons that only I could exorcise.

He explained that I carried anger and bitterness within me, as well as self-pity and rejection of other people, hopelessness and lack of joy. This Jesus sure did describe me accurately, I had to admit!

Looking at him and the two women, I began to see what wholeness might mean. Without thinking, I blurted out, "Will you help me get rid of these demons? Will you be my teacher?"

Then I realized that I had asked for something that women are forbidden to have. He was quiet for so long that I began to think I had broken some rule. Then he said, "WILL YOU FOLLOW ME?"

So my real life began. Up until now, I'd been absorbed with the problem of the demon. Now that was over. It was as if I were seeing everything for the first time. Everything was a joy to me. My own perception of God grew, too. I lost the unknowable and punishing God who had punished me with a demon. I remembered that my mother was the only one who had compassion for me.

Psalm 131:2 kept running through my head: "My soul is like a weaned child with its mother." Was God like a mother's lap? Was God's arms holding us tenderly? Later, I heard Jesus speak of wanting to gather people together "Like a mother hen."

The days fell into a pleasant rhythm. Jesus talked to many people of all ages. Often a crowd gathered to hear him. I came to love him, utterly. Yet I never wanted more than what I had: to be with him, to share his life, to help him in little ways and to listen and speak with him. Jesus treated women as human beings whose friendship was as important to him as the men's comradeship.

Jesus began to speak of returning to Jerusalem, and I was filled with fear. I guess I had hoped that our present life would never end. But he felt that God called him to this, and he set his face return to Jerusalem. After some time, we all arrived in Judea. Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem, became our center. There was open land for camping and his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus were welcoming in their home.

We celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem, but it was a sad meal that year, for now we knew that Jesus might be arrested at any time. Even now, I cannot talk about what happened. We women and John clung to each other.

But don't worry...this story has an unbelievably awesome ending, which you'll celebrate on EASTER, PRAISING GOD! Good bye for now.....

Guided Imagery Meditation

Find a comfortable and alert posture.

Inhale and exhale slowly...one...two...three.

Let old and new confusions fall away.

Imagine that you are outside.....It is very early in the morning.

The day is just beginning....feel the morning air....cool and refreshing...

A gentle breeze blows around you.

You are walking along a path....

You are on this path because you are searching.....

Maybe you know what you are searching for.....

Maybe you are only aware of a restless or frightened feeling in your life.

Walk along the path aware of a sense of looking for something....

It is getting lighter...suddenly the air feels full of light.....

And you hear your name called.....listen....Pay attention.

Then it is quiet...wait and listen once more...

A message comes about your search.....listen.....

What are you called to do?

***Prayer**

Dear God,

We confess our confusion, busyness, aloneness, fears, which cause us to mistake your presence in our lives. Or we can't feel your presence at all. Be with us as we search.

Give us patience, courage and trust to listen for the calling of our names and to follow you. Amen.

***Sung Response: "Hold Us In Your Grace, O God"**

Hold us in your grace, O God, hold us in your grace.

Hold us in your grace, O God, hold us in your grace.

Hold us, hold us in your grace. Hold us, hold us in your grace.

***Benediction (Romans 15:13)**

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
So that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

To think about:

- * There is no evidence in the Gospels that Mary Magdelene was ever a prostitute.
What could be the reason some people still think that she was?

- *What do you think the “seven demons” that possessed Mary were?
How did Jesus cast them out?

- *Do people still avoid those who are different?
Do children still make fun of those who are different? Why?

- *Later, Jesus trusted his message and the news of his resurrection to Mary
To share with his other followers. Do you think we owe the survival of Christianity to her?