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Mary Magdalene and Jesus

(Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40, 41, 47; Matthew 28:1-10)

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing 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

“There were also women looking on from a distance, among them were **Mary Magdalene**, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These **used to follow him and** provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. **Mary Magdalene** and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.” (Mark 15:40-41, 47).

“After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, **Mary Magdalene** and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, **“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’**”
This is my message for you.”

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, *“Greetings!”*

And they came to him, took hold of his feet, **and worshiped him.** Then Jesus said to them, **“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”** Matthew 28:1-10

With the release this weekend of the film *The DaVinci Code* based on Dan Brown’s best-selling novel, it seemed timely as I continue with the series of interesting people in the Bible to talk about **Mary Magdalene**. Today I am not going to specifically correct historical mistakes in the novel or film; we can talk about those at the discussion

Dr. Cathie Kroeger will be leading for us on May 31. I will say there is a part of me that is a little disappointed to see some Christians acting so defensively as if the truth about Jesus or the mission of the church could be threatened by a three year old murder mystery novel. Please. Jesus can withstand questions and scrutiny so we should relish the publicity around *The DaVinci Code* which has given us a wonderful opportunity to engage our culture in a discussion about who Jesus is, what he taught about living, what he did for us, and what God did through him. It is a chance to tell stories about men and women of faith whose courage, generosity, and compassion has enabled the movement Jesus began to spread all around the world and touch the lives of over a billion people in the last 2,000 years. One such person is Mary Magdalene, who is a key person in Dan Brown's fictional story, and, much more importantly, a very significant figure in the Gospels.

Today I would like to share with you several things we learn about Mary Magdalene from three snapshots of her in the Gospels.

The importance, prominence, and respect for Mary Magdalene (or 'of Magdala,') among the early church, is reflected in the fact that she is mentioned first in every listing of Jesus' female disciples (Mark 15:40-41, 47; 16:1; Matt. 27:55-56, 61; 28:1; Luke 8:2-3; 24:10). She therefore seems to have been the leader of a group of women who 'followed' and 'served' Jesus constantly from the outset of his ministry in Galilee to his death and beyond. Matthew and Mark acknowledge these women around Jesus' death, but Luke mentions their presence with the Twelve in Jesus' ministry in Galilee (8:1-3). Here Mary is included among the many women who provided for Jesus' ministry from their own means and among a smaller number 'healed of evil spirits and infirmities.' That she was healed of some serious affliction is expressed by describing her as one *'from whom seven demons had gone out'* (v. 2). No where does the Bible state that Mary was a prostitute as some people have erroneously assumed or stated. She experienced deliverance and freedom as a result of being healed by Jesus. In return, she dedicates herself to following and serving him and became an example to others. Perhaps because the group of women mentioned in Luke 8:1-3 were *"cured of evil spirits and infirmities,"* they may have had less family responsibilities or constraints than most women because of the issues or challenges they faced in life. Like many of us, Mary had in some way been banged up by life and as a result she had her struggles.

Yesterday was the Preakness, the second race in horse racing's triple crown. Barbaro, the winner of the Kentucky Derby, fractured his leg, ending his racing career and his life was in jeopardy. While I am not much of a horse racing fan, the horse's injury reminded me of a scene from the film version of Laura Hillenbrand's book, *Seabiscuit*. One of the main characters is a broken-down, unemployed cowboy named Tom Smith. Millionaire Charles Howard, who is about to engage in a horse racing enterprise, has a campfire interview with Smith, and asks why he bothered rescuing an old, lame horse that was sentenced to death because of a broken leg.

Tom, speaking indirectly about himself as well as the horse, replies, "**You don't throw a whole life away just 'cause it's banged up a bit.**" Every horse is good for something, Tom claims. This devotion to horses convinces the millionaire that Tom should be his trainer.

Together they find and purchase Seabiscuit, a horse whose physical shortcomings and temperament make it an unlikely prospect for racing success. Tom's method of training, while unorthodox, is tailored toward curing the horse of its inner demons—a byproduct of the neglect shown by its previous owners.

Tom hires a second-rate jockey named John "Red" Pollard to ride Seabiscuit. At 5'7", Red is considered too tall to be anything but a bush-league jockey and a bad match for this undersized horse. But Tom notices a mystical connection between Red and Seabiscuit.

Red has another handicap. He is blind in one eye, and he has concealed the handicap fearing that track officials would no longer allow him to race.

During a crucial race at Santa Anita, Red's limited vision allows a competing horse, Rosemont, to overtake Seabiscuit on Red's blind side, costing them the victory. Tom, the trainer, is outraged that the jockey failed to urge Seabiscuit to keep the winning pace. He presses the jockey to explain how he could let this happen. Finally, in a burst of emotion, Red shouts, "*Because I'm blind!*"

Stung by the loss and a sense of betrayal, Tom scornfully urges Mr. Howard to fire Red. To Tom's surprise, Mr. Howard requests that Red remain as his jockey. Dumbfounded, Tom demands a reason. Mr. Howard states,

"You don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a bit."¹

Jesus taught and lived that you don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a bit. Unfortunately, at times this is something the church struggles to remember and practice. Christians can be like Tom the trainer who is grateful for another chance in his own life, but less patient with the shortcomings of others. We have new members joining BBC today and as wonderful as they are, none of them and none of us follow Jesus or join a church because we're like Mary Poppins, "*practically perfect in every way*," we follow Jesus and join a church because we are like Mary Magdalene, whose life was profoundly changed because of what Jesus did for her when her life was banged up a bit.

The second thing to note about Mary is that having been helped and healed by Jesus, she in return was committed to following him, serving him, and supporting the work the Lord was doing. Mary generously shared her resources with Jesus and as his followers today we do the same thing. Having been touched and blessed by Jesus, we share what we have with others to help them and as a witness to God's love in Christ. Last week when BBC's Women's Fellowship gathered for their luncheon – everyone was asked to bring something to give to The Baby Center in Hyannis. The women who came brought 101 outfits ; 37 blankets and towels ; 3 handmade patchwork quilts; 49 bibs, hats, socks, washcloths, and sweaters ; 38 lotions, ointments, and powders; 8 cereals and formula; 7 toys; 8 bottles; 3 booster seats; 3 high chairs; 1 crib; 1 playpen; and 2182 diapers and 2530 wipes. That's the sort of thing I think Mary Magdalene would do.

Mary's commitment to Jesus is also shown by her following him from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem and even to his death on the cross. Symbolically this is a way of saying she followed him when everything was going well, growing and building as well as through the moments of greatest adversity and hardship.

In Mark 15:40 we see that Mary and other women are present at a distance when Jesus is dying on the cross which tells us **they have courage to risk being publicly associated with Christ**. Sometimes we may feel like we don't necessarily want other people to know we're followers of Jesus because we're afraid of what they'll think of us, or that they will associate us with folks we wouldn't want to be lumped in with as

¹ *Seabiscuit* (Universal Studios, 2003), rated PG-13, written and directed by Gary Ross, based on the book by Laura Hillenbrand

believers. Mary and many other women have the courage to let their devotion to Jesus be seen even when it might be dangerous. Mark 15:41 again states that the women, followed Jesus and provided for his needs when he was in Galilee. They have not just been casual observers in the crowd. They have **committed themselves to following Jesus, serving him, and providing resources to support his ministry.**

In Mark 15:47 we discover Mary and other women stayed long enough after Jesus died to see Joseph of Arimathea take down the body of Christ and they went to see the tomb where Joseph placed the body. Mary was not a “consumer Christian” who just looked for what she could get from Jesus and then walked away complaining and angry about not having her needs met when the going got tough or things didn’t go the way she wanted.

The final picture of Mary comes on the first Easter Sunday morning. When one looks at the stories of Easter morning in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20 they are somewhat difficult to harmonize. We’ll never know how many women went to the tomb in what order to see it or to do something, at what point two or more male disciples went, how many angels they all saw, where or in what order the appearances of Jesus took place. These discrepancies do not mean that nothing happened; it does mean that there was not collusion among the early witnesses. **One thing all four Gospels agree on is that Mary Magdalene is foremost as a witness to Jesus’ death** (Mark 15:40-41, 47; Matt. 27:55-56, 61; Luke 23:49, 55-56; John 19:25), **to the empty tomb** (Mark 16:1-6; Matt. 28:1, 6; Luke 24:1-3, 10; John 20:1-2), **and in receiving the news or appearance of the risen Christ to tell the other disciples** (Mark 16:6-7; Matt. 28:5-9; Luke 24:4-10).

Give Mary Magdalene and the other women their due. Mary is among the last at the cross, the first at the tomb, and she is always looking for ways to serve Jesus when things were going well in Galilee and in the horror and heartache of Jerusalem. Mary and other women are not portrayed as hiding in a room or going fishing to forget their troubles. The women had the courage to go to the tomb
After Mary receives the message from the angel, she sets out obediently to go to tell the disciples. In the act of faithfully and joyfully running to share the good news of the resurrection, Jesus meets them and greets them. They in return worship him. Like the angel, Jesus tells the women not to be afraid and to go quickly and tell the disciples that he will meet them in Galilee.

However, Jesus doesn't use the word disciples, he calls them "*brothers.*" Even though they deserted and denied Jesus, the Lord heals the break in their relationship restoring them, reassuring them they are still part of the family of believers, even though they are "banged up a bit."

Like the disciples, there may be times when we may have denied or deserted Jesus in some way in our lives. Through courage that failed, commitment that lagged, love that grew cold, compassion that was replaced with contention, or adoration that was replaced by anger – we too may have deserted or denied the Lord.

We may find ourselves like Mary and the disciples on the day of Jesus' resurrection desperately in need of good news in the face of all the bad,
In need of some word of hope in the midst of so much pain,
In need of a spiritual and heavenly perspective instead of just the earthly and physical one that seeks to dominate our vision,
In need of life in the face of death,
In need of believing that God will have the final word.

Into our midst across the centuries, comes Mary Magdalene with a breathless story about an angel with a message, and a crucified and risen Lord who calls us brothers and sisters regardless of our past failures and invites us to meet him, if not in Galilee, at least where we live, with his reassuring presence and with a mission to carry out in our time that asks us like Mary, to follow, serve, support, worship, and stay with Jesus through good times and bad.

Prayer, Awaken Me by Joyce Rupp

Risen One,
Come, meet me
In the garden of my life.

Lure me into elation.
Revive my silent hope.
Coax my dormant dreams.
Raise up my neglected gratitude.
Entice my tired enthusiasm.
Give life to my faltering relationships.
Roll back the stone of my indifference.

Unwrap the deadness in my spiritual life.
Impart heartiness in my work.

Risen One, Send us forth, like Mary Magdalene,
as a disciple of your unwavering love,
A messenger of your unlimited joy.

Resurrected One, May I become Ever more convinced
That your presence lives on, and on, and on. Awaken me!

Blessing:

**Like Mary Magdalene, may we commit our selves to following Jesus, serving him,
and providing resources to support his ministry.**

**Like Mary Magdalene, may we have courage to risk being publicly associated with
Christ.**

Like Mary Magdalene, may we joyfully tell others about Jesus.