

WOMEN RISE UP

Chapter 10, “Proclaim: Mary Magdalene”

Opening

Welcome & reminder about group dynamics.

- Listen first.
- Pay attention to who is speaking and who is not – make space for all.
- Remember confidential info is shared only in your group.
- Respect everyone’s perspective and beliefs.

Tech instructions Beth.

Thanks, Beth.

Centering Breath and Prayer

Breathe deeply as we lay aside the cares of the day.

“Be still and know that I am God.”

Richard Rohr describes prayer this way:

Prayer is sitting in the silence until it silences us.

Prayer is choosing gratitude until we are grateful.

Prayer is praising God until we ourselves are an act of praise.

Our God of the journey to Bethlehem:

We come to you today, closer to our destination of the manger.

You have continued to gently guide us toward knowing and accepting the wonder of your Son’s birth story.

As we study and discuss Mary Magdalene, teach us Your ways of acceptance and advocacy, of repentance and resilience, of forgiveness and fulfillment, of praise and pro-activism. As you did for the psalmist so long ago, “Enlarge our path under us so our feet do not slip.” Bless us as we read, think, listen, and discuss. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. **(5)**

Introduction

Through the ages, Mary Magdalene has been described in many ways: a fallen woman, prostitute, demon-possessed, disciple, financial supporter, first apostle, saint, visionary, wife or lover of Jesus, mother of His child, wife of John, and the list goes on. Mary Magdalene's name means "tower of strength." She may have come from the town of Magdala (Migdal in Hebrew; Taricheae, in Greek meaning salted fish]), on the northwest side of the lake Galilee.

Perhaps you are familiar with Dan Brown's *The Da'Vinci Code*. There are French traditions that Mary Magdalene landed on the southern shore of France in a rudderless boat (sent away by a jealous Peter) with her daughter, Sarah (which means 'princess'), and several disciples. After settling down, Sarah's ancestors became the French royal bloodline for a time. There are relics, one reportedly being Mary's skull with a place where the risen Christ touched her forehead near the tomb, skin still preserved! Dan Brown built a novel around this unproven legend of Christ's bloodline living in France.

As Katey has mentioned, for hundreds of years perceptions of Mary Magdalene were influenced by Pope Gregory, who meshed her story together with other Marys and un-named women, to make it seem that she was a former prostitute. The name Mary was very common since Herod the Great's wife had a form of the name, Mariamne. The Pope and Catholic hierarchy wanted Mary, the mother of Christ, to stand out above all others, so making others seem impure suited their purpose.

Even in the musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Mary Magdalene is presented as a reformed prostitute in the famous song, "I Don't Know How to Love Him."

In 1945 an ancient jar containing Coptic Gnostic gospels was unearthed by farmers in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt. Additional Gospels written by Philip, Mary Magdalene, James and others gave

more insight into Mary's place in the disciple hierarchy. Let me share just bit about the *Gospel of Mary*, (from *Mary Magdalen, Myth and Metaphor* by Susan Haskins:

“In the *Gospel of Mary*, written sometime during the second century, the risen Christ has been conversing with the disciples, encouraging them to continue his work of preaching the kingdom of heaven. He then departs, leaving the grieving disciples fearing for their lives, for if the Gentiles have not spared their leader, how can they then expect to escape death when they go out to preach. Mary then takes the initiative. She consoles them, and tells them not to waver from their purpose as Christ's spirit is still with them, protecting them, or, she says, ‘he has prepared us”

Peter acknowledges that Mary Magdalene was a favorite of Jesus. He trusted her above the other women who traveled with them. There was definitely some jealousy from Peter and Andrew that Christ would share information with a woman and not with them. Sound familiar? Peter represents the orthodox way of thinking which rejected inner visions (from the risen Christ) which Mary shared the disciples. Mary is chastised by most of the group for sharing these different messages from Jesus. But Levi comes to her defense, supporting her and saying they must preach as Jesus commanded them. Again, this is from the *Gospel of Mary* but supported by other Gnostic gospels. From the beginning, it seems Christ's followers had disagreements on how to go about continuing the ministry of Jesus.

What we know biblically about Mary Magdalene is really quite a bit since she is mentioned 12 times in the Bible, more than any other

of Jesus' followers. She was always mentioned first when there was a series of followers included, showing her importance. In Luke 8, we learn that she was exorcised of seven demons. These might have included private or mental type problems and may have taken several tries to heal, hence the term "seven" demons. We will be concentrating on the John passage in chapter 20. I've asked Brenda Coleman to read that for us now. You can follow along in your book or just listen. (10)

Scripture Lesson: The Resurrection of Jesus

Scripture, John 20:1-18, Brenda Coleman (5)

Thanks, Brenda!

I would like you to listen to this music video titled, "I Was There – the Testimony of Mary Magdalene," which tells her story in song. Try to put yourself into the story of being a follower. What did you see? What did you hear? Can you understand why men through the years have wanted Mary Magdalene to have a different identity other than an important follower of Jesus? How do we work to change this mistaken perception even in today's world?

Video (5)

Another music video I found related that when Jesus said Mary's name near the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene's "stone" was rolled away.

What might that mean? How can you relate to this? When we are called by the Savior, is there a "stone" rolled away?

Let's go into our groups and discuss some of your feelings

about the video and the questions.

See you in about 20 minutes.

(20)

(Several groups share.)

(5)

Would several of you share some of what you discussed in your group.

Social Action in Today's World: PROCLAIM

The key word for this chapter title is **PROCLAIM**. Mary Magdalene was chosen to spread the word to the other disciples that Jesus had risen as He said and the prophets foretold would happen. A woman actually spoke with Him and relayed his message to the others. The disciples were afraid that Jesus' followers would be the next to be murdered so they were laying low. She shared her encounter with the Savior and urged them to get out of their self-imposed isolation and fear.

Another quote I want to share is from the book, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala, Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* by Karen L. King:

"Throughout the *Gospel [of Mary]*, Mary is clearly portrayed as an exemplary disciple. She doesn't falter when the Savior departs. She steps into his place after his departure, comforting, strengthening, and instructing the others. Her spiritual comprehension and maturity are demonstrated in her calm behavior and especially in her visionary experience. These at once provide evidence of her spiritual maturity and form the basis for her legitimate exercise of authority in instructing the other disciples. She does not teach in her own name, but passes on the words of the Savior, calming the disciples and turning their hearts toward the Good. Her character proves the truth of her revelation and by extension, authorizes the teaching ...

and it does so by opposing those apostles who reject women's authority and preach another gospel, laying down laws beyond those which the Savior determined."

As Christians and United Methodist Women, we want to PROCLAIM what we have seen and experienced in our walk with Jesus.

As Katey stated:

"Like Mary Magdalene, each of us is called be a witness to ways that God brings forth life from death. In our sharing of these resurrection moments, we become the bearers of hope through which community is formed, truth is revealed, and lives are redeemed. Jesus chooses Mary Magdalene to be the first witness of the resurrection. As his beloved friend, he knows that she is both trustworthy and qualified to speak the truth of what she has seen and heard. *Go proclaim the Gospel.*" (p. 185)

Let's go into our groups for about 10 minutes and share some ideas about how we can fearlessly proclaim the Gospel where we live to make a difference in the working lives of those who are struggling in our communities.

(10)

.....Would you share a few of the ideas from your groups?..... (5)

Mission Emphasis

For our mission emphasis this week, we would like to remind you of our Deaconess and Home Missioner program.

Deaconesses and Home Missioners are laywomen and laymen who are called by God to be in a lifetime relationship in The United Methodist Church for engagement with a full-time

vocation in ministries of love, justice, and service. Their work can be tailored to their interests and talents. Together they form a covenant community that is rooted in Scripture, informed by history, driven by mission, ecumenical in scope, and global in outreach. Deaconesses and home missionaries function through diverse forms of service directed toward the world to make Jesus Christ known in the fullness of his ministry and mission, which mandate that his followers:

- a. Alleviate suffering;
- b. Eradicate causes of injustice and all that robs life of dignity and worth;
- c. Facilitate the development of full human potential; and
- d. Share in building global community through the church universal.

We are privileged to have a number of Deaconesses or retired Deaconesses with us in this Advent study: Marcia Florkey, Beth Vanoli, Cheryl Fox-Bender, -----

Our district recently did a program about the Deaconess and Home Missioner program. We used the UMW website to get information and a video. We also had a deaconess speak and share what she is doing. These folks are great assets and give local units and districts real insight into how we all can serve.

Closing

Thanks so much for your attention and shared ideas today. I hope we can take something back to our units and churches that might make a difference in our communities!

I would like to close with a poem, "My Christmas Prayer," by Ralph Spaulding Cushman, taken from *A Pocket Prayer Book*, published in 1941:

Let not our hearts be busy inns,
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ
And His nativity.

Still driven by a thousand cares,
The pilgrims come and go;
The hurried caravans press on,
The inns are crowded so!

Here are the rich and busy ones,
With things that must be sold;
No room for helpless hands within
This hostelry of gold.

Yet hunger dwells within these walls,
These shining walls and bright,
And blindness groping here and there
Without a ray of light.

Oh, lest we starve, and lest we die
In our stupidity,
Come, Holy Child, within and share
Our hospitality.

Let not our hearts be busy inns,
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ
And His nativity.

(3)

Bibliography

(Note: I selected portions of the following books to read and share with you.)

The Gospel of Mary Magdala, Jesus and the First Woman Apostle, Karen L. King, Polebridge Press, 2003.

Mary Magdalen, Myth and Metaphor, Susan Haskins, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1993.

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Women in Scripture, a Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament, Ed. Carol Meyers, Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000.

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