

March 20 11 Lent 2 Luke 8:1-3; Mark 16:9-11

## WERE YOU THERE?

### MARY MAGDALENE

It's amazing the things that God does. Every day we don't know what He is going to do for us, what blessings will come our way nor the comfort and compassion that he has for us. One person who felt that compassion was Mary Magdalene who we heard from this morning. And you just listened to the choir sing "Holy love, so pure and divine, God's heart reached to mine to show me grace." That's her story and I can tell you this...she's sticking to it.

Those are powerful words my friends. "Amazing love how can it be that thou my God didst die for me" are words from 'And Can it Be' that reminds us of a love that goes beyond our understanding. A holy love so pure and divine, God's heart reaching to our hearts to show us his grace, a grace so amazing so divine, it deserves our souls, our hearts, are all. That is what Lent is all about. Not just Lent but the cross of Lent.

She a woman filled with 7 demons healed, restored to new life by Jesus. That's who they say Mary Magdalene was. Listen as I read Luke's introduction of her. Luke 8:1-3

*(Jesus) traveled to town after town, village after village, preaching God's kingdom, spreading the Message. The Twelve were with him. [2] There were also some women in their company who had been healed of various evil afflictions and illnesses: Mary, the one called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; [3] Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's manager; and Susanna—along with many others who used their considerable means to provide for the company.*

Then we hear from Mark as he records the resurrection. Mark 16:9-11

*[After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared early on Sunday morning to Mary Magdalene, whom he had delivered from seven demons.*

Mary's life was a miracle. Many people had shunned her because they didn't know what to expect from her. They thought at times she was a monster. It doesn't say much about that in Scriptures. She is just mentioned as one who Jesus cast 7 demons from. There are all kinds of stories of who she might have been. One story I read said she might have been the sister of Martha, you know the ones whose brother was Lazarus. Another, especially a painting from Di Vinci says she was the woman healed of the continuous flow of blood. No matter who she was he rescued her from a life of pain and gave her a life of hope and purpose. Her thought at the foot of the cross was why did such a man who did so much for me have to suffer like this? Why did such a man who touched others she knew have to be nailed to this cross? "Why, God, why?" might have been her question as she watched Jesus suffer.

Some of us today might have once asked that same question. Why didn't God do it a different way? After all he could have. But he didn't. It was all a part of his holy love plan from the beginning of time when he gave his creations a heart to choose for themselves the road they would take.

Mary had become a follower following her healing. She became a witness of the power Jesus had over demons. She felt the love and compassion he had. He was like no other man she had ever known. He was a good man with a warm touch and a gentle smile. No wonder people that followed him loved him. He did so much for them.

But where were they now? The disciples had scattered. Why had they fled? One word comes to mind...F-E-A-R...fear they would be next. Some might have been considered fair weather friends, you know the kind, and they will be with you when things

are going well, but sometimes in your struggles they get to be too busy. Maybe she pondered such thoughts as she held Jesus' mother's hand, wrapped her arms around her shoulders to ease the pain of watching her beloved son dying on the cross of shame and humility. It wasn't a pretty sight. Though she didn't understand, she knew one thing; he did it out of love. He offered himself freely. And she was there.

Maybe among the other woman that was standing there was someone who felt his touch too. Her story goes like this. One day Jesus was giving one of his teaching sessions with some who were curious. While this was going on a group of religious leaders came dragging a scantily-clad lady through the streets as her neighbors peered out their windows. "Ooo she's going to get it now" some of the voices whispered. "Look they dragged her out of her bed. Why she doesn't have much to cover her up.", some snickered. It seems these religious leaders burst into this woman's house and found her in bed... with someone who wasn't her husband. Quickly they dragged her kicking and screaming trying to get away. But their grip upon her was strong. Through the streets they came as if on a mission. Quickly they walked as the girl stumbled, fell, was pulled up, stumbled again, and pulled up all the way through town trying to cover what modesty she had left. When they got to Jesus they threw the scantily-clad girl toward him interrupting his teaching saying, "*We found this woman in bed with a man not her husband. The law says she should be stoned. What do you say?*" All eyes and ears are upon Jesus wondering what he is going to say. Even the girl looks at him. She kneels next to him, her back to the crowd trying her best to cover her body. Jesus surveys the new crowd and notices one thing...each religious leader had already condemned her because they already had stones in their hands. Fingers were pointed toward the woman as some yelled out to stone her. The leader tries to keep the crowd back who already has their stones at the ready to let them fling in the direction of this woman. She cowers for fear of losing her life. Then looks up toward Jesus, sees his loving eyes, then moves a little closer to him, almost trying

to hide behind him for protection. He begins to write in the ground and all those eyes that were on this scantily-clad girl begin to watch what the teacher is writing. Is it the word ‘guilty?’ Does it say, ‘stone her?’ Maybe it’s just a simple picture of a cross. No one knows. But for that brief moment, the girl was not the center of attention, Jesus was. Those cold, stony hearts of the religious leaders had got this crowd all riled up to condemn her. “Doesn’t it take two to tangle?” Jesus might have thought to himself. “Where is her partner? Why isn’t he here?” The noise of the crowd brings him back to what is happening. On one side he could see the curiosity seekers wondering what he was going to do. Then the religious leaders at the ready to dole out punishment without any feelings what so ever for this girl. The girl glances at the crowd as chills run up and down her spine as she sees those rocks in the hands being twisted as if to get a better grip to throw at their target, rocks of righteousness intended to stone the lust and life out of her at any moment. The men squeeze the stones like a baseball pitcher does when he gets ready to throw his finest fast ball.

Max Lucado uses this story in his book that I have read for Lent, “Six Hours One Friday.” He writes, “In the despair she looks at the Teacher. His eyes don’t glare. “Don’t worry,” they whisper, “its okay.” The religious leaders saw in this girl a way to get to Jesus. Jesus saw this girl as one who deserved another chance.” Her accuses yell again, “Tell us what to do. Should we stone her for her crime?” No compassion. No grace. Jesus had seen this scene over and over again on his journey. People cast aside like they didn’t matter. Lepers sent away from family. Blind people left to fend for themselves. Lame people begging on the streets just to try and have something to eat. Widows who had lost not only husbands but friends. They all seemed so lost and no one seemed to care. Religious leaders just passed them by or cast them out without feeling a thing. Now they bring this poor girl who yes, did sin, no doubt about it. She broke the law. But death? They didn’t even know her name. And what was worse, they didn’t care. She was a prop.

Finally, Jesus stops his doodling and glances at the girl then searches the crowd. He peers into every eye that is ready to cast their stone and he begins to speak. “How many of you have never made a mistake in your lives? How many of you ready to condemn this woman have ever sinned? So here is my verdict on this case. If you have never made a mistake, you’ve never done something wrong, something contrary to God’s way, and then you have my blessings... go ahead and stone her.” Arms were cocked to the ready as if to heave their stones in one quick movement. Someone from the back begins to clear his throat. The sounds of “let’s get this over with” begin to be fade. All of a sudden there is quietness that you could have heard a pin drop. No one spoke. Max records, “Feet shuffled. Eyes dropped. Then thud...thud....thud...rocks fell to the ground....and they all walked away....” And I would add, mumbling to them.

Jesus told the woman to look up, “Is there no one to condemn you?” He smiled as she raised her head and covered her body. She saw no one, only rocks. “Is there no one to condemn you?” Jesus asked again. She doesn’t know what to say or what to expect. She just looks at the stones on the ground, the empty street and into his eyes, those eyes that show compassion and love. Finally he begins to speak as he offers her a promise and a commission.

The promise: “Then neither do I condemn you.” The commission: “Go and sin no more.” The woman turns and walks into her new life, her new day. She’s never heard of again. But I wonder, I really wonder if perhaps she became a follower of his. Remember when I read today’s scripture of the women that followed Jesus? Besides Mary there were others who were women who followed him. Could her name have been Susanna? Or maybe Joanna who got her life straightened out and is now the wife of Chuza. I wonder, I really wonder if she didn’t run into Mary Magdalene some place at a coffee shop or a

Jewish Women's Breakfast celebration and hearing her story said to her and her friends, "Let me tell you about my encounter with Jesus. You won't believe it."

Think of it. A woman who had demons rebuked from her body made whole now testifying to others of that holy love that produced grace that gave her hope. Add another woman who could have been a prostitute now humbly living a different life, maybe even having a family all because of the love and grace of the holy one, sharing their faith with others testifying in the transforming love of Jesus. Their theme song would include this line, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

The stories are different but the results are the same. Both saved by the grace of God. And both, yes, both are there at the foot of the cross that Friday looking up wondering why this had to happen, but giving thanks to a man who turned their lives around and gave them another chance knowing that through this cross, through his death he continues to offer others, even we today, another chance to be his followers. While they looked at him they knew what he would say. He would say to others there is room at the cross for you. Mary received and so did the unnamed scantily-clad lady. That's what the man on the cross offers everyone.

Amazing love, how can it be that thou my God didst die for me.

To receive that love, that grace of forgiveness for any sin, all it takes I a humble walk to this altar to meet the man who gave it all.