

Sermon: The Anointing One
Scripture: Passages on Mary Magdalene
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: March 26, 2017

The person of Mary Magdalene is a woman whose presence is of vital importance to the narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection but who for some reason has remained on the edges of Christian consciousness, a follower of Jesus we only note in passing for the most part, an apparent foil for the more highlighted disciples of Peter and James and John. And yet when we hear something like what Carrie just sang, of the yearning and broken-heartedness of this disciple, of whom it is said "she loved greatly" and the one who Jesus loved, she suddenly comes focus and we might sense that something has been lost by relegating her to the edges of our faith and devotion.

There are those who suggest it was men in power, who over the centuries kept the figure of Mary Magdalene in the margins and mostly out of the dominant Christian consciousness – can you imagine men in power manipulating the system for their gain?? I know, a novel notion! The Da Vinci Code book and movie back in the early 2000's, you might remember was a fictionalized and scandalous to some popular expression of the Mary Magdalene question. But the notion that she and Jesus had a special relationship that in certain ways superseded the other disciples has its roots deep in the Christian tradition in certain texts that didn't make it into our biblical canon. There's little evidence that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married but that there was a special relationship is hard to deny given that all 4 Gospels agree on the

fact that the first person the resurrected Jesus appeared to was Mary Magdalene.

In the book that a few of us read in preparation for this service called The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity, the author Cynthia Bourgeault makes the involved case using these other ancient texts in concert with the New Testament that Mary Magdalene through a special relationship of love with Jesus learned and taught a more esoteric path interior transformation and as a result was a spiritual master herself, known even among the early church father's as the Apostle to the Apostles. In Cynthia Bourgeault's estimation, Jesus and Mary's love was a central vehicle for her transformation as well as his and can be a model for a Christian spiritual path that places romantic love and the spousal relationship at the center, alongside the tradition of celibacy. Now whether you think she's reaching too far or whether you understand the more esoteric mystical aspects of the case she makes, what you come away with is a striking appreciation for the centrality, the power and the presence of this woman who was healed by Jesus, accompanied him as a disciple, stood by him through his passion and his death on the cross, sat in the garden across from his tomb and kept vigil at his death, and was there – as we'll hear in a few weeks - on Easter morning when he rose from the dead.

And so for our purposes this morning, we welcome her among us, the figure of Mary Magdalene here to the center of our worship of God and we hear through Carrie's song at first her anguished lover's cry – "I'm all broke up, I'm all broke down, got turned around somehow... who is my savior now." This cry is imagined on the lips of Mary prior to her healing, when, as the Gospels tell it, she was tormented by 7

demons. Possibly it was some kind of mental illness that she had, for depression can come upon a person with such weight that it feels like an outside force taking up residence within. And anxiety can rack a person so that all reason is gone and our free will seems overcome by effects of fear. And schizophrenia can cause the brain to see and hear and react to what is not there.... So maybe, it was mental illness that beset Mary or maybe it *was* darker forces of evil, of bad choices that unravel towards worse choices, so that she could no longer see good for bad, right for wrong. But whatever it was at one point Mary Magdalene was lost, broken, broke up and dead to the world. But then she met Jesus and he healed her. Listen to this beautiful moment of her healing as recounted in the gnostic text called the Gospel of Mary:

“What has bound me has been slain, what encompassed me has been vanquished...I am liberated from the chains of forgetfulness which have existed in time. From this moment onward, I go forward into the season of the Great Age, the Aeon, and there, where time rests in stillness in the Eternity of time, I will repose in silence.” And having said this Mary fell silent since it was to this point that the Savior had brought her. p. 67

And from then on, as attested by all the Gospels, Mary was one of the closest disciples of Jesus, not counted among the 12 in the traditional Christian narrative but clearly present throughout his earthly ministry and to the end. Even when the 12 disciples had long since abandoned him, she, along with his mother, was there.

Mary Magdalene is often portrayed in historical paintings as holding a jar of anointing oil. You remember the story of the woman who broke the alabaster jar and poured perfumed oil over Jesus to anoint him and Judas gets mad at her? While that woman is not named

as Mary Magdalene, there is a tradition that holds that it was in fact her, Mary Magdalene, the only one able to acknowledge and prepare Jesus for his death with a blessing of oil. There is a practice in certain basilicas in France who hold Mary Magdalene as their patron saint where people during Holy Week anoint feet as an expression of love, care, and healing for one another in the spirit of the love that Mary Magdalene had for Jesus. Remember, Christ is not Jesus' last name, but Christ means "the anointed one" and Jesus is the Anointed One because of whom? Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is the Anointing One who anointed Jesus to make him the Anointed One, the Christ. That's how significant this woman is to the Christian story.

And so we are going to do an anointing as a part of our healing prayer today, not of your feet but in the same spirit, of your hands. What heals is the power of love, as Mary Magdalene so beautiful exemplifies, and we invite you to receive an anointing of Christ's love for the healing of whatever demons haunt you or whatever illness besets you or whatever experience has wounded you. But also in the spirit of Mary Magdalene, we are not healed for our own sake but we are healed and sent out so that we can be a healing presence to others. If and when you receive the healing prayer consider how you might offer a word or touch or expression of love and healing to someone else later today or at some point this week.

We invite you to come to one of the 4 stations if you feel so moved, sit in the chair and receive a healing prayer and then return to your seat. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and in the love of Mary Magdalene, amen...