

## John 20:1-2, 11-18 Feast of Mary Magdalene

There are moments that occur in all of our lives that define who we are. For most people these moments include their day of birth, choice of life's work, the choice of marrying or staying single, the birth of children and of course death.

As Christians our lives are also made up of moments or events that define our Christian lives. These moments mark for us God's gracious action in our lives. July 22nd, today, has been dedicated as the day that we remember St. Mary Magdalene.

### **So who was Mary Magdalene - Moments that Define Her Life?**

We first meet Mary in the Gospel of Luke. Luke tells us that she was one of several women who followed Jesus as He preached the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. Luke tells us that Mary Magdalene was delivered from seven demons. In the Bible the number seven was often used to denote totality and completeness. In other words, when Mary first met Jesus she was completely and totally enslaved by Satan and his kingdom of darkness. She was a slave to sin, so much so that she could no longer help herself.

We don't know for certain how this demon possession manifested itself in Mary. We would be wrong to assume that her possession manifested itself as prostitution which seems to be a popular misconception.

Whatever it was Jesus set her free. His very word was enough to command the demons to flee. No wonder these women and especially Mary followed our Lord. He had given them unimaginable freedom and God's unconditional

love. Is it any wonder why they loved Him so much and wanted to follow Him.

In some of the world's cultures when a person saves another person's life the person whose life is saved becomes the other person's servant. They do this by choice and out of gratitude. From the time of her deliverance Mary Magdalene followed our Lord. She went where He went. She listened, learned and believed in Jesus. Mary through God's grace desired nothing else but to serve her Lord who had saved her life. The scriptures tell us that she and the other women that followed the Lord supported Him and the disciples out of their own means. Whatever her support was, it was given out of love. Mary's deliverance from evil and her call to follow our Lord were defining moments in Mary's life.

The next time we meet Mary she is at the foot of the cross. She stands with Jesus' mother and other women. What an unusual place for women to gather. This is not a women's place. This is a place of blood and death. Mary looks up at the three crosses standing before her. She watches Jesus die. It must have seemed so meaningless. How could this have happened. Jesus who gave freedom - bound to a cross. Jesus who gave life - now dead. Mary must have felt deserted. This was a moment that defined Mary's life.

Mary accompanies Joseph of Arimathea as Jesus' lifeless body is taken down from the cross. She watches Joseph wrap Jesus' body in a linen cloth and goes with them to the tomb. As they go quickly preparing Jesus' body for burial, honouring and loving Him in death - the one who had loved her so much in life. She would try to complete the burial preparation on Sunday morning after the Sabbath. Finally she sees the stone rolled into place, sealing Jesus' lifeless

body in the grave. These were moments that defined Mary's life.

On Easter morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She saw the stone had been rolled away. Jesus' body gone. All she could think of was that somebody had stolen His body. She ran to tell the disciples. Peter and John run to the grave and see that all that she has said was true. Jesus was not there. The disciples leave and left Mary at the tomb.

Mary stood outside of the tomb, weeping, then she went inside. There in that place of death she was greeted by two angels shining with the glory of God. "Why are you crying", they said. "They have taken away my Lord", she replied. In despair she turned away from the angels. As she turned away she saw another man, the gardener she thought. He too asked her why she is crying. She didn't recognize that it was her Lord. Then it happens. Jesus softly and lovingly calls her name, "Mary". Mary's ears are opened and then her eyes. Then her heart is overwhelmed by joy knowing that her Redeemer lived and to hear him call her name.

The resurrection of Jesus changed Mary forever. All the fear that she had was washed away in a flood of joy. Everything that Jesus said was true. She believed. Her hope was restored. Her Lord was Lord and death was dead. Jesus had come to save the world by sharing in its curse. By taking the curse of death upon himself He took it away from her and from the world. The curse of death could not contain the Lord of Life. Jesus tells Mary to go to His disciples. Mary ran to the disciples. She had good news. Jesus was alive! They had not been deserted. Jesus was with them and always would be...as He had promised.

Mary Magdalene wasn't a prostitute. She wasn't the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears. She was a sinner in need of God's grace and love and forgiveness. What is so special about Mary, and the reason we remember her today, is that the moments that define her life and make it special are the moments that define our lives too - as the children of God.

Like Mary Magdalene, we too have been delivered from the kingdom of Satan, His possession, chained in sin and sentenced to eternal death, unable to help ourselves. At our baptism Jesus met us and called us His own. In baptism the Lord freed us from Satan's power. In baptism our Lord called us to follow Him all the days of our lives and be His disciples

As His disciples we have followed Him. Through the hearing of God's word we have joined Mary at the foot of the cross. We have seen our dying saviour and we know why He is dying. He is dying for Mary and He dying for us. He is dying because of our sins, taking our place, taking our guilt and taking our punishment. At the cross we see Him dying our death, once and for all. For His sake we have received forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

Again with Mary because of her testimony recorded in scripture, we visit the empty tomb. With the eyes of faith we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead for our justification, proclaiming our innocence before God. We share in Mary's joy and hope in a Saviour that will never leave us nor forsake us. In Jesus we have the hope of eternal life.

In the book of Hebrews we are told about the heroes of the faith. They are the great cloud of witnesses whose lives

have been showered by God's grace. Their testimony is recorded for one purpose. They are witnesses of God's long suffering, His grace, and love. They are witnesses for us so that we might believe. Mary Magdalene is a witness to us of the great things that God has done. The first time Mary met Jesus, Jesus proclaimed His victory over Satan by casting out her demons. At the empty tomb Jesus proclaimed His victory over Satan's curse on this world - death. Then Jesus told Mary to go and tell the disciples the good news.

After meeting Jesus, life would never be the same for us. In our baptism, in our lives lived at the foot of the cross, knowing what Jesus has done for us, having faith in Christ's resurrection we too join that great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us that proclaims God's grace in Jesus Christ to the world. **These are the moments that define our lives.**

From victory to victory.

Victory over Satan, Victory on the cross, victory over death, victory in the resurrection.

AMEN