



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter Vigil (B)

Bright Threads

[RCL] Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21; Psalm 114; Romans 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-8

A “dramatic” Easter sermon inspired by Mark 16:1-8, as told from the perspective of Mary Magdalene.

I want to tell you how I found new life in Jesus. I grew up in a small town called Magdala, a little village in Galilee. I didn't have any big dreams of being someone important in the scheme of history, but that was before I met him... Jesus. I know I am one of the privileged few to have actually known the rabbi personally while he walked the earth in the flesh. And, since that time, I have gained something of a reputation. I'm known now simply as “Mary Magdalene,” but people have often assumed I was a prostitute and the woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her own tears. It has also been assumed that I was the woman caught in adultery. I have been, for most of history, the example of the ultimate reformed sinner. Back then, I might have worried about my reputation, I might have wanted to correct the scholars, leaders, and theologians, but it's funny how little most things we now think are important really matter in the light of eternity.

Does it matter that people assume I was such a great sinner? No, it doesn't. Because we are all fallible and we all sin in some big ways in life, and that's why the Easter story is so powerful. That is why knowing Jesus is so powerful. Even back then, when I would look into his eyes, I knew it didn't matter what I had done or what sins I had committed, it didn't matter that I was a mere woman of lowly stature, it didn't matter that I needed to be healed from the demons that tormented me, it just didn't matter, none of it did. Jesus always looked at me, at every one of us, with eyes that saw beyond the things we judge ourselves on. He saw straight into my heart, knew everything about me, and loved me anyway.

How does one respond to such gracious and pure love? I think perhaps the songwriter in the musical “Jesus Christ Superstar” had it right in some sense when they put words into my mouth: “I don't know how to love him.” How can any of us, limited as we are, respond to such powerful, unconditional love? I couldn't. I didn't know how. He had healed me completely and saved me utterly; there was no way to repay that. And the fantastical imagination of certain authors and movies aside, I really was given a very special role. I am one of the many bright threads in the seamless garment of people who make up God's salvation history. Anyone can and is called to be a thread in that most holy, beautiful, festal garment. You can too! You can play a role in salvation history with me. You only need to heed his call to follow him. And that is what I did. I followed him and loved him as best I could.

My most memorable moment, of course, occurred that first Easter morning. We had been so alone, so full of sorrow, grief, and confusion as Mary, Salome, and I walked silently to the Lord's tomb. Nothing could have prepared us for what happened when we arrived. It was so dramatic. And the tomb was empty! Can you believe that

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it was the women who were the first to be given the message of the good news of the Resurrection? It wasn't one of the men or one of the twelve disciples. It wasn't even Peter. It was the women! And it was me! I was commissioned to be not just a disciple, and not just an apostle. I was commissioned to be an apostle to the apostles. Jesus, in his mercy and grace, deemed me worthy of this role, even as God had deemed Mary of Nazareth worthy of her role to be the God-bearer and mother to God's Son. The fact that this was my role, my great commission, to go and tell the disciples the Good News about the Resurrection, says nothing of *me* in an ultimate sense, but it says *everything* about God. God chooses us, no matter what we may have done, for God's glory. Perhaps we think our mistakes or sins are too great, too much, or too frequent to be of any use to God. But that's just our pride, thinking we can somehow *earn* our own place in salvation history based on how good we are. We are *given* the honor, simply because God is gracious and loves us.

Of course, fear and doubt were our first responses to this shocking event, even in the midst of our intense amazement. And perhaps it was self-doubt most of all: Could I have really witnessed this miracle and been commissioned to preach the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead? I didn't feel worthy of such a calling. But God was transforming me, just as God would transform the disciples and all of Jesus' followers, just as God transforms you. Soon my fear gave way to hope and faith, and then I was empowered for the next step of my calling as a follower of Jesus.

Easter is and will always be about new life. Death has been destroyed, the power of sin no longer enslaves us, and forgiveness is ours! The earth shook and God moved and raised up Jesus, the first fruits, the promise of our own resurrection.

The Resurrection is not only a promise to be redeemed after death, however. Resurrection and new life can happen here and now, today. Every time we struggle and manage to choose the good, or embrace healing rather than growing cold and bitter, every time we learn from our mistakes, forgive our enemies, forgive ourselves, seek out justice and mercy, and reach out to those in need, we are living out that promise of resurrection, of new beginnings, and of new life. Resurrection is ours!

I found new life the moment Jesus came into my life. I was never the same. I was a healed and changed woman. I found new life again when I was commissioned that Easter morning and realized that Jesus really was the One we had been waiting for, and that sin and death had been conquered in him. I found new life again when I passed from this life into the next. And I will find new life once more at the resurrection, when all God's saints, those bright threads of salvation history, arise together!

Blessed be God, the King of the Universe. May new life be yours this Easter because Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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