

Mary of Magdala

What do we know about Mary Magdalene? What are some of the common perceptions we have of her? This is a congregational participation moment, so don't be afraid to speak aloud.

Here is what we do know. We know that her profile is "high," as almost everyone has heard about her. She only speaks 61 words in the Bible, most of them at the Resurrection event and when she speaks to the Apostles thereafter. She came from the region of Galilee in a town called Magdala. Much like today, "Mary" or "Miriam" was a common name. As people didn't have last names, they were sometimes associated with their hometown or place of birth, like how they referred to "Jesus of Nazareth." Hence, Mary of Magdala became "Mary Magdalene."

We learn in Luke's Gospel that she was possessed by seven demons that Jesus cast out. After that, she became a follower of Jesus. She was a witness to both the Crucifixion and Resurrection as the first person to whom the Risen Christ appeared. In the Gospels of Matthew and John, she is the first to proclaim the Resurrection. And, contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence in the Gospels that she was a prostitute.

We can ascertain that Mary was not only a follower but a financial supporter of Jesus. Mary did not have a husband but was a woman of certain wealth (a rare woman merchant?) with financial means. Some Scripture scholars believe that she was married to Jesus. Other people tend to confuse her with the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who would rightfully be named "Mary of Bethany." However, remember the commonness of the name in the time of Jesus. The fact that these women were chosen to accompany the disciples (someone had to cook?) in a time when women didn't travel was astounding. It spoke of the love that Jesus had for *everyone*.

We can also figure that Mary of Magdala encountered some spiritual battles in her life, especially in the three years she spent with Jesus of Nazareth. This warfare, if you will, perhaps made her more aware of Jesus' power and more loyal to him for healing her. When our brokenness is alleviated, we are more likely to increase our faith, aren't we? Wouldn't that cause her to increase her love as well?

If she had that love for Jesus, even a deep fraternal love, imagine the heartache at his crucifixion and death. On the other hand, imagine how she must have felt when she encountered Jesus outside of the tomb! Think about how we have sometimes even dreamed that we can see someone who has gone before us. Truly, Mary Magdalene must have been thrilled.

What she would NOT have been thrilled about is the misconception that she was a prostitute. Even though there is no reference to this in the Gospels, this story has stuck to her like glue. We are unable to ascertain if the stories were around at the time she was alive, but religious leaders did nothing to change them until recently. How many of us have been the subject of unfounded rumors, especially the unflattering kind? Given the time and place, those types of rumors may very well have been prevalent in her life. If they were, she rose above it and kept her love for Jesus very much alive. If he appeared to her, his love for her must have been parallel.

It is this love and faith in Jesus, as well as his message and way of life, that Mary Magdalene possessed, which we can emulate today is our takeaway. We can also learn from Mary of Magdala:

- Jesus calls surprising people into a relationship with Him.
- Give all you have to Jesus (but to what extent? Only you can decide.)
- True healing gathers and integrates the whole self.

- Real ministry comes from deep love, not obligation.
- Communicating God's presence with others, from what we know, is essential.

Because we are believers, we should not be surprised to be called into a relationship with Jesus! The nature and depth of the relationship can certainly throw any of us for a loop, myself included. While we are in that relationship, we have to determine what it means to be "all in" as to what and how much we are willing to give. Sometimes, this is a conversation that happens every day. We can be healed once, twice, or even daily. Healing takes on many forms and really does allow us to become whole again.

As believers who have the propensity to be healed, whole, and even holy, we recognize that our love for God and God's love for us is very deep, very real, and very far from obligatory. We can communicate love with others in word and deed. Others can see that we simply do not pay lip-service and we practice what we preach. Sometimes, the practice or our actions serves as the preaching. Despite what disparaging remarks others may make, we continue to practice our faith because of the deep love we have for God and Jesus, and not to fulfill an obligation.

My prayer for all of us is that we can love God, Jesus, and each other with the same fiery love that Mary of Magdala taught us and continues to teach us this very day. Amen.