

Easter Sunday: Life - Mary Magdalene

Welcome to worship on this Easter morning. For those who may not be aware, our Lenten series has focused on the theme: At the Crossroads as we focused on different individuals who found themselves at decision-making moments in their lives. Today, we continue our series as we focus on yet another crossroad event, the resurrection, and another crossroad individual, Mary Magdalene, a follower of Jesus, but a different Mary than Mary, the mother of Jesus. We turn our focus now to our message.

P: Crossroads. We all face them regardless of the day of the week. They can occur in the early morning hours, in the afternoon, or while lying in bed awake at night. When they will occur, we never know, but, what we do know is that we will face them. Sometimes, those crossroad moments are among our most difficult moments, our most taxing mental moments as we do our best to determine which way is the best way, which way is the way our God wants us to go. Yet, there are crossroads that bring us moments of great joy, that change our lives for the better and forever. Although they may still require thought, the outcome is one of great joy, sometimes marked by a joy that is almost beyond our explanation.

Today we have with us an expert on crossroads. She faced many in her life. Some were heart-breaking and created intense heartache, but the crossroad we want to discuss with her today is the crossroad that became her most important crossroad, the crossroad where she personally met the risen Christ. I know what some of you are thinking right now. How I wish I could have been in her shoes at that moment? How great it would have been to be her. Yet, even though you weren't there, much can be learned and connected to our personal lives as we welcome Mary Magdalene, follower of Jesus, famous in her own right.

(Mary enters. She is dressed very well or in biblical costume. She is smiling, joyful)

P: Welcome, Mary. You look rather excited this morning. We know a fair amount of information about you, but can you tell us a little more about yourself? Perhaps in doing so, some of your excitement and joy can rub off on us.

R: I was, I guess you might say, an early follower of Jesus. I came from a difficult life. My husband had died early in our marriage. He left me what some people call "well off," but my life as a widow was difficult. Many people were jealous of me. Even my so-called friends turned against me. They spread stories that I was living an immoral life. And the stories not only ruined my reputation, but made me an outcast. No one wanted to associate with me. I felt so alone, almost abandoned.

P: And yet you followed Jesus.

R: I heard him teach and saw his miracles. I thought he might be the answer to my questions about life and help heal my pain, the way he did for those with physical complaints.

P: And didn't he do that?

R: Well, he gave me hope. But it was a kind of wishful hope. In some ways, he disappointed me. He didn't correct the evil stories that went around about me. And he didn't seem to do anything about the evil that surrounded us. The Romans still oppressed us. The religious leaders still cheated and troubled us. I had hoped he would somehow make all the evil in our world go away, that he would bring about a peace that would remain for the rest of life, but it didn't work that way.

P: You were with the others when he was crucified, weren't you? You were at the foot of the cross when Jesus spoke to you, weren't you? Didn't you see him put to death? Didn't you watch him die that painful death?

R: Yes, and at that point, my life really did come apart. I had followed him, trusted him, and there he was at the mercy of the hated Romans, mocked by the religious leaders. I had so hope that it would be the other way, that he would bring peace to our land and peace to my soul. It was a very difficult and disturbing time for me. I had heard him speak about his crucifixion, but, I guess, I didn't believe it would actually occur. I wanted peace and I kept telling myself that he would make it possible.

P: And did that peace for you ever come?

R: Yes. I did discover that peace. But it was after I had nearly given up on him. Look at things from my perspective. I was there. I saw him die. I knew he was dead and I saw them lay him in a tomb. I can see it all so clearly every time I close my eyes.

P: So how did you discover peace at such a difficult time in your life?

R: Early Sunday morning, I went to the tomb. I wanted to do what was right. I wanted to complete his burial in the proper manner. I was there in the garden looking for his body. I was crushed. My heart was so broken. You can't know how broken my spirit was at that time. I was desperate.

P: And yet you are here and it's obvious you are filled with excitement and joy.

R: Here is the miracle, the miracle I would like you to share on this Easter morning. I did not find him although I was looking, looking for a different reason. Instead, he found me. He knew I needed to know he was alive, that he had risen. So he came to me, even while I was so broken I could not recognize him. He came to me, spoke my name, healed my spirit and changed my life. It all happened so quickly that it's difficult to explain, but it all happened as he spoke my name.

P: All with the speaking of your name?

R: Don't you see? He knew what I needed. He knew where I was. Today, at this very moment, he knows what you need better than you know what you need. He knows your pain, your disappointments, your confusion, your heartache. Whatever you are carrying, he knows all about it and best of all, he cares about you.

P: Cares about me? Why would he bother with me?

R: Because you are no different than I. Words weren't enough. We needed more. We needed proof. I found my proof as he spoke my name. You can find that same proof that he cares just as much about you and that his resurrection was for you. You can find that same proof by believing what you read and what you already know. Jesus rose from the dead. By speaking my name, I knew he was alive. By faith, he speaks to your heart this morning. He calls you by name, by the same name he called you into his family at your Baptism.

P: At Baptism? Aren't you getting a bit off the topic?

R: Not at all! I heard him speak my name. But you were welcomed into his family by name. As your name was spoken at your Baptism, Jesus spoke to your heart as

he did to mine. Everything changed for you at that moment. But so often, even for me, we forget those incredible moments and, as we forget, the significance begins to disappear... until we're re-reminded, until someone or something reconnects us

P: Reconnects?

R: The excitement of Easter morning will not remain the same as time passes. I already know that. Yet, when someone mentions the event, it will all come back to me. It's the same for you. You know the facts. You know more facts than I know, but those facts only come to life when someone or something brings them back to life.

P: But how do we bring facts to life?

R: By speaking, by listening, by taking to heart the message that we have heard so many times in the past. The resurrection isn't new news to you, but it will become new news, exciting new when you reconnect, when you take the facts of the event and connect them to your personal life, to your current situations. When you allow Easter Sunday to speak to you where you are, wherever your mind is at in this moment, it can and it will bring you excitement and joy because the same Jesus who spoke my name is the one who speaks to your heart giving you a new sense of direction, a new sense of hope, a new sense of peace that goes beyond your understanding.

P: And it will happen for us even though we can't hear Jesus speak our name?

R: Don't you see? Easter, the resurrection is not just a miraculous event, it is a life-changing crossroad for all of us, whether we hear our name spoken or not. The Risen Christ finds us at all of our stopping places of life, all of our dead ends, all of our heart-breaking, heart-aching moments, and he calls us to a new life, to a new focus, a new vision, a new direction that is filled with joy, excitement, and peace.

P: And because he calls us, even though he may not speak our name out loud, it's no different than if we could hear our name spoken, no different than if Jesus were standing beside us.

R: Precisely. You know the words. You simply need to attach them to your life at this moment and in all your future moments - I am with you always.

P: When life doesn't make sense?

R: Always.

P: When I'm struggling to understand?

R: Always.

P: When life isn't going as I expected?

R: Always.

P: With us always. What a great Easter reminder. What a great reminder for every day that lies ahead, especially our most challenging days. At Baptism, he spoke our name and now, because of the resurrection, he is with us.

R: Always.

P: And forever.