

Can you place yourselves in the shoes of these women of Luke 24? Can you imagine for a moment that you are Mary Magdalene, the first of the women Luke mentions, who stood at the empty tomb that very first Easter morning?

In Luke's Gospel we find that Jesus had exorcised Mary Magdalene of seven demons (see Lk.8:2). Some scholars believe it was Mary Magdalene who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (see Lk.7:36-38). An ancient Church tradition claims that Mary Magdalene at one point in her life was a prostitute. But whatever else we can suppose about Mary Magdalene, we know that early on during His earthly ministry, this wayward woman became a disciple and follower of The Christ.



Mary Magdalene by Guido Reni

Can you imagine her anguish at the events of these days? Mary Magdalene had found this group of strangely loving people who had gathered around this wonderful, beautiful man. A group of every possible kind of person – fishermen, and tax collectors, and doctors, and revolutionaries – and they had all attached themselves to Jesus. And they had opened their arms to Mary Magdalene too. Despite her past, despite her personal history of anguish, and debasement Mary Magdalene had been embraced by this wonderful man, accepted as a full and welcome member of His loving family.

She had finally found her place in the world, had Mary Magdalene, a real family to which she could truly belong. And then... and then... in the course of a single 24-hour period, she had seen all this amazing acceptance come crashing down around her head. This wonderful man whom Mary Magdalene knew loved her despite everything; this wonderful man had been betrayed, and arrested, and sentenced, and condemned, and nailed to a cross where he had bled out his lovely life. And this beautiful, loving family had scattered to the four winds, some running naked into the night, others cursing and denying the very one who had come to save them and gather them to Him.

Mary Magdalene had lost everything that meant anything to her in just 24 hours. Why, it almost sounds like something they could make a hit TV series about! Can you put yourself in her shoes? Can you, just for a moment, can you try to imagine Mary Magdalene's desperate anguish?

So, what must it have been that had made her to go with the other women to this stranger's tomb where her lovely Lord had been shrouded and laid out after His horrible death? How their hearts must have wrenched within them, these women! And yet, that first Easter morning, they got up even in their anguish, their eyes sore with weeping, and these women went out to the market place and spent money they probably couldn't afford to buy some costly spices and balms in order to bathe the body of Jesus one final time. What gave these women the strength to do something like that?

And they had to know there was no way they were going to be able to roll back that boulder at the entrance to the tomb. There's a note about this bolder in the Bezae Codex, one of the most ancient manuscripts of the Four Gospels that exists, transcribed in around the year 500 AD. There's a note in the margin of Chapter 16 of Mark's Gospel in the Bezae Codex that reads, "'And when He [that is, Jesus] was laid there, [Joseph of Arimathea had] put against the tomb a stone which 20 men could not roll away.'"

A recent study by the engineering faculty at Georgia Tech concluded that the stone which closed off Jesus' tomb must have weighed between 1 ½ and 2 tons. And once that boulder was tipped over and lodged down there in the groove that those tombs had carved at their entrance, once that boulder was nudged into the niche of its resting place at the mouth of the cave, well, that big millstone of a boulder wasn't going anywhere!

And these two anguished women must have known that – they must have known that it would have been clearly impossible to get into that tomb where Jesus lay and tenderly bathe him one last time. But they went anyway. What was it that gave them that kind of resolve?



Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene
by Pietro da Cortona

Well, it must have been something strong, to give them the courage and conviction to go to that tomb on Easter morning. It must have been something stronger even than death to make these women go to that awful place of death. It must have been something born of great patience, that gave these women the strength to go to that awful place and just wait, if need be, wait for The Lord to act. It must have been something that is not proud, to cause these women to take on this humble role of bathing and dressing the body of this dear man, even three days after his death, knowing how wretched, how humiliating even this was going to be for them. It must have been something that was founded in a bedrock of truth that made these women go to that tomb on Easter Sunday, an absolute certainty that their Lord always spoke to them in words of truth, and that this truth, His truth was important above all else. It must have been something that always protects. It must have been something that always hopes. It must have been something that always perseveres. Why, you know, the thing that enabled these two women to go to that place of awful death and defeat, and face up to the situation at hand, hopeless thought it seemed, why the thing that led these women to that place on Easter Morning, why it must have been love.

And, there's this wonderful encounter in the Gospel of John where Mary Magdalene is standing there at the empty tomb, weeping. And then the risen Christ appears fresh from his Resurrection, and He looks at her and He says just one word: "Mary." And with that single word, she knows – she knows that her Lord has been returned to her. Mary's life of love and belonging and family, all of that is given back to her in that one glorious moment when she realizes, "Yes! He is risen." Can you imagine the joy? Can you imagine the victory?

Brothers and sisters, for thousands of years the whole world has been holding its breath in anticipation of this morning. As we gaze upon the Resurrection this Easter, let us remember that, yes, it is the Victory of Jesus. It is a Victory of life over death. It is a Victory of Grace over sin. It is a victory of freedom over bondage. But let us never forget that this day is a Victory of love. A victory of love over everything that is wrong in this world. And just as you and I have been Baptized into the death of sin in Christ, so we are also raised with him in the Victory of that Resurrection. You see, we all share in the Victory of Love. In Jesus, in His Resurrection this Easter morning, you and I have become the people of God's love. And that love will never die. Christ is risen, Blessed Easter! In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

jwb† 3/27/13