

# The Feast of Mary Magdalene

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Last week I attended a conference called “healing the violence.” During one session, we explored the connection between storytelling and healing. As Pastor Rebecca Anderson spoke, she emphasized that storytelling builds intimacy and vulnerability. When done in truth, she said, stories have the ability to disrupt and provide space for transformation. Today, we remember Mary Magdalene’s story. But, before we allow her story to disrupt us and transform us, we must uncover her real story. To do so, let’s explore some Mary Magdalene trivia with some true or false statements for you to vote on.

1. Mary Magdalene knew Jesus – true.
2. Mary Magdalene is the second most commonly mentioned woman in the Christian Scriptures – true. (By the way, the most mentioned woman is Mary, mother of Jesus.)
3. According to the Bible, Mary Magdalene was a prostitute – false. Luke 8 mentions that she had seven demons cast out of her, but prostitution was never mentioned. It was Pope Gregory the Great in 591 who labeled her as a prostitute.
4. Mary Magdalene likely financially supported Jesus’ ministry – true.
5. Mary Magdalene witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion – true. Even though many of the twelve disciples fled or betrayed Jesus, Mary was there.
6. Mary was the first to witness Jesus’s resurrection – true. All four gospels agree on this.

7. Mary Magdalene was an apostle – true. What is an apostle? It means “one who is sent” – and in today’s gospel we heard that she was sent from the tomb to tell Jesus’ brothers (John 20:17).

Alright, if this is the real Mary Magdalene, then why are we confused about her legacy? Instead of seeing Mary as the first apostle, or as the “apostle to the apostles” as she’s sometimes called, we often think of her as a prostitute and a sinner. Why don’t we see her as someone who faithfully watched Jesus’ crucifixion? Why don’t we see her as a strong, bold witness? Why is she misunderstood?

One glance in the mirror and we will understand why. For there, in the mirror, we see humanity. As flawed humans, truth is frequently modified for personal, professional, and profitable gain. We do this more often than we realize. We embellish a resume. We lie about our weight on our license. We over-promise and under-deliver. And, as a society, we allow truth to be rewritten to concentrate power with a specific skin color, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, ability, and educational background. So, sure, we could blame the biblical authors and patriarchal society of Mary’s time for the misunderstanding. But, we must recognize our role as well. For our actions and inactions help create a culture of mistruth and misunderstanding.

Today, however, we have an opportunity for redemption. We can reclaim the truth of Mary's story and liberate her. We can acknowledge that she was the apostle to the disciples, the first witness to the resurrection, and the first one to share God's newest story. We can place an icon in this space to reclaim her true witness. Those actions are the beginnings of transformation. You see, transformation happens when we reclaim, reinvent, and discover new stories. In fact, that's what Mary Magdalene did. Mary told a new story to the disciples. After all, she had seen Jesus in the garden. She had witnessed God's presence among the dead. She had seen the God of her ancestors do something entirely new. So, she ran. She sprinted. She shared her story of our resurrected God. Much like her ancestors found resurrection after fleeing from the Egyptians and walking on dry ground through a parted sea, Mary experienced resurrection. Much like when Jonah was barfed up on the shore after being in the dark belly of a whale, Mary experienced resurrection. Much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were resurrected from the fire, so too Mary experienced resurrection. When she burst into that room and told the disciples that first Easter Sunday, she disrupted reality. She disturbed them. She opened them to transformation. She shared God's story by reclaiming, reinventing, and discovering resurrection.

We too discover resurrection in our baptism. Like Briggs's baptism today, we are reminded that our story is not one of death and dead ends. Our story is not one of dishonesty and drudgery. Rather, in baptism, we look in the mirror and see God's beloved child. Our story is one where we have been liberated from the stench of the same-old and where we have been sent to run and share our unfolding story. But, before we can share like Mary Magdalene, we need to reclaim our story. So, what's your story? How have you used the story of the scriptures to interpret God's activity in your life? Where have you experienced new life and resurrection? (Anyone want to share?)

For me, I have found resurrection and new life in a faith community that welcomes all. You see, in a world filled with fear and division, finding a place where I can explore without judgment is transformational. I discovered that God calls me just as I am and, at the same time, God has called me to be more than I've ever been. Then, I am sent to share this good news – to share God's message that life overcomes death, that all are welcome, and that love wins.

Friends, there it is. Today we are reminded that we are sent share that “good news” story, for it's God's story, it's our story, and it is the same story that Mary shared with those disciples that first Easter day. May we be like Mary Magdalene, and share God's unfolding story. Amen.