



The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior

Sabbath Survival Kit



ST. MARY MAGDALENE SUNDAY, JULY 22, 2007

Bernard of Clairvaux affectionately called Mary of Magdala "the apostle to the apostles," because she was sent on Easter to bring them good news from Jesus' open tomb. Today we remember her with thanksgiving and recall other women of faith who by their actions and words gave witness to God's powerful new life.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, your Son first entrusted the apostle Mary Magdalene with the joyful news of his resurrection. Following the example of her witness, may we proclaim Christ as our living Lord and one day see him in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

FIRST LESSON - RUTH 1:6-18

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

SECOND LESSON - ACTS 13:26-33A

"My brothers, you descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

HOLY GOSPEL - JOHN 20:1-2, 11-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This Sunday we celebrate St. Mary Magdalene; she is more correctly referred to as Mary of Magdala. Where we come from, our background, can say a lot about who we are. In my own personal case for instance my bio would read: made in Japan, born in Georgia, three years as a child in Germany (my family heritage), raised in NJ, and theologically educated in SC. In Mary's case the background seems a little less confusing.

The city called Magdala was on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was an important fish-curing, agricultural, shipbuilding, and trading center, a city of considerable wealth. The population was mainly Gentile, as evidenced by the presence of a hippodrome. Rabbis later attributed the fall of the city to licentiousness, especially sexual immorality, so bad was its reputation. Was Mary caught up in some of her hometown's favorite pastimes? Some would say yes: the movie The Last Temptation of Christ. There is no solid reason for assuming that Mary had been a harlot and therefore is to be identified with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36-50. Luke surely didn't intend this identification, because he introduces Mary in a formal way in 8:2, with no suggestion that she has been presented in the previous chapter. It is also doubtful whether Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, would have traveled around Galilee with a notorious adulteress.

We don't understand Mary's condition when she first met Jesus. It is said in Luke 8 that seven demons had gone out of her. Since demon possession was at that time associated with both physical and moral spiritual sickness, Luke's statement doesn't offer us much help. The reference to seven demons probably emphasizes either the seriousness of her condition or the recurrent nature of it. To say that Mary's seven demons were demons of unchastity is an unprovable assumption. Again, the unsavory reputation of Magdala may have helped to blacken her character.

We are left with the question, who is she? In Dan Brown's book, The DaVinci Code, it is strongly inferred that Mary was Jesus' mate. Once again, no real evidence supports that idea. Mary's devotion to Jesus and his cause is underscored by her practical service. She participated in his mission in Galilee and contributed financially to the venture. She went with him and his followers to Jerusalem for his final appeal to the nation in its capital city. She was present at the Crucifixion, came to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, reported the fact of the empty tomb and the message of the angels to the eleven disciples; and Mary was the recipient of a personal appearance by Jesus after the resurrection. In today's Gospel lesson she announces "I have seen the Lord." Can you and I say that? If not, why not?

Where might you see the Lord?

- In the promise of a friend who is willing to stop, be interrupted, listen, and devote her full attention to your needs.
- In goldfinches (little yellow birds with black wings), NJ's state bird, who are working their way in and out of sunflowers, doing what God programmed them to do.
- In the laughter of a baby, who isn't responding to a joke or someone's comic antics, but simply enjoying the world around her.
- In a moment when you say NO to a questionable temptation; or to yet another plea for adding one more activity to your already busy schedule.
- Following a severe storm, when fear has subsided and calmness has returned.
- In the midst of a failure, where you are to blame, your support system is unsympathetic, and you're not sure you can correct the problem.
- On a family vacation, when the weather is lousy, but you're all together, and tomorrow the sun just might put in an appearance.
- As you enjoy the activity of VBS week.
- Spending most of a weekend with family, including cousins, celebrating and remembering the blessed and long life God has given your Mother.

If you haven't seen the Lord, then Houston, we have a problem. But if you don't see and hear the risen Lord in your daily life, don't feel alone. According to Luke's Gospel, Mary's words seemed to the disciples an idle tale, and they didn't initially believe them.

Mary goes to the tomb of Jesus while it is still dark. Darkness in John's Gospel hints at the distortion of God's creation. For Mary death still prevails; she is also gripped with fear. Faith is born from the gift of a certain kind of perception. Mary's recognition is triggered only by Jesus calling her by name (just as the Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name). And the darkness is lifted. Now her seeing has yielded faith and transformed her situation.

Mary was given eyes to see by the calling of her name. In the same way, the calling of our personal names in our baptisms implant the seeds of faith, the gift of seeing so that faith may blossom. Mary's story is our own in still another way. The risen Christ approaches us in our experiences of fear and loss. Feeling helpless and defeated in our sorrow, he speaks our names again. The experience of the risen Christ, wherever he may encounter us, transforms our conditions and propels us on a mission to witness to others what we have come to see. The experience may be personal in nature but it always than becomes communal in its results.

Have you seen the risen Lord in your daily activities, your weekly experiences? If not, I truly wonder whether you see him here on Sunday mornings. Amen.

BLESSING

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.