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Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that [Jesus] had said these things to her.
John 20:18

Mary Magdalene has become one of the most misunderstood characters in the Bible. This is probably why she might be my favorite, besides Jesus of course.

Growing up I would hear that Mary Magdalene was bad- she was a prostitute. But why would someone like her fascinate me so? I knew in my gut there was something more about her; that the label placed on her by others was not her true identity. It wasn't until an undergrad class that I learned something new (college has a way of doing that). Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute.

Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. (Luke 8: 1-3)

While we don't hear much, if anything, about Joanna and Susanna beyond that point, Mary Magdalene went on to be important to Jesus' ministry and to spreading the Good News after his death. And let me add this... If the Bible mentions someone by name, the writers want us to take note as they have value/importance. Truth is, she is mentioned more in the Bible than most of the Disciples. Now add to it that she is a woman (women tend to be of little value in that context) and we now have someone so important that three of the four gospels mention her as the first to encounter the risen Christ, not Peter. (And Peter is known to be the foundation of the church?)

Whereas we tend to remember the actions of Peter and the other disciples on that glorious resurrection morning, we usually forget about Mary Magdalene. For those who like to say that female pastors have no right being in the pulpit, I say this: Mary was the first to encounter a risen Christ and it is Mary that was the first to spread the news. We notice that the male disciples seemed not to believe her as they went to see for themselves. And if Jesus trusted her to share the news, why not other women? Besides, in many places Mary Magdalene is referred to the "Apostle to the Apostles".

I think of Mary Magdalene this month as the 22nd of July is set aside as her feast day. Even the Roman Catholics, who have yet to ordain women, lift her up as an important figure in the church. I was excited the day that I realized that Mary Magdalene's feast day lands on my birthday; another reason I feel a connection to her.

For so long, it was hard to see that sexual identity is not important in sharing the Good News. St Paul was quick to write that women were to stay away from preaching... but in other places he actually praises some women for their leadership? But Mary Magdalene was different. Jesus trusted her for her abilities and her faithfulness to Jesus and God's mission in the world. God gave her a special voice and she used it in the best way ever- to preach the Gospel to those she encountered.

If I had a personal patron saint (Lutherans generally don't have them), it would be Mary Magdalene. As a pastor, I desire to use my voice as she did. I want to be strong in the face of people telling me I'm not important. I hope to rise up in the wake of hurtful words said to and about me because God's voice needs to be heard by many, not just a few. It then should come as no surprise that if I find myself in the chair of a tattoo artist, I might just come away with a tat of Mary Magdalene- and you will know why.

I encourage you to look for the people that are speaking God's message of love and mercy in a world; a world that is trying to minimize those words. Mary Magdalene taught the disciples how to spread the Good News and we are here because of her.

God's peace be with you always.

P. Sara