

READ John 20:1-18. What would your story be, had you been there? Would you have done the same thing as Mary on that first Resurrection morning? She wasn't ready to be done after His crucifixion. No, Jesus was on her mind. She had to be near Him, even if that meant near His dead body. Maybe she went because nobody would pay attention to a woman; so she wasn't afraid to be there.

But perhaps it was dangerous to be there. Whichever way it was, something drove her. She wasn't just "going through the motions" of religious life. She felt a connection with Jesus. She had to be there. She was compelled, no matter what.

Now as we think of this Mary, we don't know which Mary it really was. Mary was a popular name. Everyone's name was Mary. Mary Magdalene means she was from Magdala, or "the Fish Tower," located one mile north of Tiberias on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. With a population of 40,000 it was important enough to have its own stadium. Mary Magdalene is mentioned in all four Gospels as the one who, along with a group of Galilean women, accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, and witnessed Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. So which Mary was she? Most all of the Mary's mentioned in the Bible had downright difficult life circumstances.

Perhaps she was the Mary who was looking for healing because she struggled with mental illness. At least I believe that's how we would describe someone today who had "seven evil spirits." The description indicates that her problems were serious, and Jesus himself most likely performed an exorcism on her. We don't know any more about it except that afterwards she followed Jesus, and she paid the living expenses for Him and the twelve disciples as they traveled from town to town preaching the good news, along with some other women. That was pretty deep commitment to take on during Jesus' three-year ministry.

Mary Magdalene was friends with Mary, the mother of James and John. That Mary also supported Jesus and the disciples. She was from the Zebedee family, a wealthy, prominent family, and she was ambitious for her sons. She was looking for a political king. So once she asked Jesus if he would give them the most important roles, on His right and left, when He came into His kingdom. Jesus had to set her straight, like everyone else.

Some traditions say that Mary Magdalene was the sinful woman who crashed Simon the Pharisee's dinner party; washing Jesus' feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, a scandalous act. She let down her hair before a man who was not her husband so she was a "loose woman." Jesus said she did it because she found great forgiveness. Also, only slaves washed people's feet, not respectable women. She also anointed Jesus with perfume, an extravagant gift that cost a year's wages. So she was sharply criticized by the men at the party, but Jesus defended her and praised her.

Others say Mary Magdalene was the same as Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha. This is the Mary who sat at Jesus' feet to listen to His teaching. She was looking for a spiritual master. To sit at someone's feet in those days meant she was a disciple; her own sister disapproved of her for neglecting household duties. But Jesus extols her discipleship.

So we may not know exactly which Mary went to the tomb that day. But there is a common thread among all these Mary's. They all sought Jesus. Whom are you looking for? The teacher, the forgiver, the healer, the one with authority over evil spirits, the king? Jesus is all of these.

Jesus asked the disciples that very question when he first saw them. John the Baptist saw Jesus one day and said to his own disciples, "There's the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." And they left John and followed Jesus. As they followed along, He said to them, "Whom are you looking for?"

And today I ask you that question.

All these Mary's were deeply touched by His life so much so that they changed their lives to seek Him, to be with Him, to learn from Him, as disciples.

One Mary diverted her wealth from herself to take on His complete support, along with His disciples. Another Mary abandoned the normal "taking care of the household" role of a woman to be a disciple, even though as a woman she would never be considered a leader. Still another Mary who had lived a sinful lifestyle was so extraordinarily touched by His forgiveness that, moved by the Holy Spirit, she expressed astonishing devotion in anointing Him for His burial.

Another Mary found mental health when she turned to Jesus. And Mary sought and gained Jesus' healing for her brother Lazarus when he became gravely ill.

Which Mary are you? How has Jesus touched your life; how has Jesus changed your focus in life?

Our Mary went to the tomb first thing – before sunlight. When His body wasn't there, her first intention was to find Jesus. To her surprise, as she continued to seek, she found Him. She was the only one who stayed there looking. She was the first to see Him. All the others went back home.

This has nothing to do with male or female, this has to do with seeking. Anybody can do this. Whom are you looking for? Mary didn't necessarily have lots of faith. She didn't understand, and thought His body had been stolen. So she had doubts and fear like everyone else, but she didn't give up. She hung in there trying to make sense of it all; looking for her Savior.

You have to be intentional about seeking and never giving up, and when you are, you will surely find Him. She did and He revealed Himself to her. He didn't say, "ta dah!" He wasn't racing around announcing His arrival. Jesus announced Himself by noticing her tears.

So when you suffer loss; when you are deeply disappointed, when bad things happen, the first thing Jesus notices are your tears. And then He sends you forth in joy to help others discover the joy of His resurrection too.

Whom are you looking for? No one takes away tears, gives a life direction and purpose like Jesus. Look for Him today. He is risen indeed.

Rev. Ginger Hertenstein
FPCD
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Whom Are You Looking For?
John 20:1-18

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AMEN