

“They’re Real People! — Mary”

By Pastor Jim Ayars

13 January 2018

John 20:11-18

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

¹³ 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.”

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for 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.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. [ESV]

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Last Sabbath, we met Theophilus, the mysterious person to whom Dr. Luke dedicated his two-volume histories — *The Gospel According to Luke*, and *The Acts of the Apostles*. We learned that Theophilus was well-known to the Apostles, especially to the Apostle Paul. He was the High Priest, son of Annas, brother-in-law to Caiaphas. His granddaughter Joanna was a faithful follower of Jesus. We learned that Luke was his teacher. He was one of the authorities in Jerusalem, who, according to the Apostle John, secretly believed in Jesus.

Today, we meet one of the women who, along with Joanna, daughter of Theophilus the High Priest, accompanied Jesus and His disciples in their ministry. Her story appears several times in the Gospels. As you may see from our text for today, she was the first to see the risen Christ. However, let’s trace glimpses of her story.

She first appears by name in Luke 8:1-3 —

“Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.”

The first clue that we have about her in this passage is that she had been demon-possessed, and Jesus had set her free — “from whom seven demons had gone out...”

This is not the first time that we see her, however; she also appears in a beautiful story immediately before this. All four of the Gospels tell it; each of the four stories adds additional details to the whole. The most famous of her appearances in the Gospels involves a very expensive love gift. We also learn that Mary of Magdala was also Mary of Bethany. Let’s look

at Matthew's version first.

"Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.'

"But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.'" [Matthew 26:6-13 ESV]

Mark tells the same basic story.

"And while He was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they scolded her.

"But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'" [Mark 14:3-9 ESV]

Luke's version adds some more details.

"One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with Him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'

"And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.'

"And he answered, 'Say it, Teacher.'

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

"Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.'

"And He said to him, 'You have judged rightly.'

"Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.'

"And He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

"Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?'

"And He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

John told it in even more detail.

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

"But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

"He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Jesus said, 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.'" [John 12:1-8 ESV]

What do we learn from all of this?

First, we learn that Simon was a *former* leper. We know this because Jesus was eating with him in his house. This would be impossible if he was still leprous. The *unclean leper* had been *cleansed* and *healed!* The only one who could do that was his guest of honor — Jesus.

Second, we learn that Simon was a Pharisee, a religious *elitist* who thought of himself as righteous, and looked down on others not like himself. [see also the parable of *the Pharisee and the Publican*, Luke 18:10]

Third, from the parable Jesus told in Simon's house, we know that it was Simon who had led this lady into sin! In the parable, Simon was the debtor who had been forgiven little. (See below)

What do we know about Mary?

First, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are the same person.

Second, we learn that she was a great sinner who had been forgiven much. Jesus had rescued her at least twice — First, from demons; second, from stoning for adultery [John 8:1-11].

Third, she understood what Jesus had been predicting — that He was about to be arrested, tortured, crucified, and buried. She was already preparing Him for burial. Jesus predicted that this loving act would be told whenever the Gospel was preached. He was correct!

Fourth, she loved Jesus with her whole being. She had spent a year's wages to buy that alabaster vial with the priceless ointment.

What did Jesus do in response to her loving act? He showed Himself alive to her *first* after His crucifixion, death and burial. In the dewy dampness of that springtime morning, she had recognized His voice, and buried her face in His shoulder as she hugged Him. Her tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy. Jesus peeled away her embracing arms and told her to go and tell the others, while He went to His Father.

Do you see her dancing through the streets of Jerusalem, singing, laughing — “He's alive! He's alive!”? She was the first witness to the power of His resurrection. Her life would never be the same again.

For Further Contemplation:

As did Nathan with David, Christ concealed His home thrust under the veil of a parable. He threw upon His host the burden of pronouncing sentence upon himself. This way of presenting the matter made Simon feel very uncomfortable. He himself had led into sin the woman he now despised. She had been deeply wronged by him. By the two debtors of the parable Simon and the woman are represented. Simon's sin is shown to be tenfold greater than that of the woman, as much greater as the debt of five hundred pence is greater than a debt of fifty pence. Simon now began to see himself in a new light. He saw how Mary was regarded by One who was indeed a prophet in every sense of the word... Simon's sin is shown to be tenfold greater than that of the woman... Simon was ashamed... He had doubted that Christ was a prophet, but in His very knowledge of this woman, Christ gave evidence of His prophetic character. [Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, Appendix A, p. 238.]