

***The Third Day* by Tom Berlin**

Chapter 1: *Mary Magdalene*

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We are going to spend this Easter season looking at the resurrection story, but from the perspective of the people who were there. What it was like for them to experience the resurrection, the difference it made in their own lives, and then how that new life propelled them into service through the church and into the world. And we are going to begin with a woman who is known as the Apostle to the Apostles: Mary Magdalene.

A little background on Mary Magdalene. We actually don't know all that much about Mary Magdalene other than she is called Mary Magdalene because she is Mary who lived in the town Magdala. Scripture says that she was healed by Jesus - that she had seven demons that came out of her. It seems from that point on that Mary traveled with Jesus and the disciples. We do not know the nature of her demons - they could have manifested in physical, mental, or spiritual ailments. But we can venture to guess that whatever relief Mary found in having them removed was significant if she devoted her life after the healing to following Jesus.

Mary Magdalene was one of the witnesses to the crucifixion. She would have witnessed first-hand his final words and his final breath. We also know that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who went to the tomb early on the morning of the third day. She had gone with the others to do the final preparations on Jesus' body in the tomb. They had brought along with them oils and spices, so we know that they were expecting to find a body.

But Mary carried with her other things besides the oil and the spices. She carried with her the grief of losing Jesus. Anyone who has lost someone understands the weight of grief, especially when it is new and fresh and overwhelming. The weight of grief makes it so a person can hardly function. The weight of grief makes a person want to be near to the one they have lost. The weight of grief makes a person want to do something in the face of death. Mary is driven to the tomb that morning more from the grief that she carries than anything else. A grief that demands she do something to stay connected to Jesus, even in his death.

Mary also carries something else that morning - something we may not have realized: anxiety. Remember, Mary was one of the people that Jesus healed - that is what prompted her to begin following Jesus in the first place. Have you ever considered that Jesus' betrayal and death threw into question for Mary and the others whether or not their healing would remain? If Jesus can be conquered in this way, if Jesus can be stopped by a betrayal and by death, can his healing remain? If Jesus wasn't who we thought he was, could those demons return? And if they return, where could Mary turn for help? The only one who had power over them was now gone. Her

very peace, her very healing was now in question and Mary carried the anxiety of her old life returning. However, for Mary to return to her old life was a devastating thought. It was not an option she wanted.

So Mary has gone to the tomb and the body is not there. Mary's first thought is not that Jesus has resurrected - her first thought is the same as you and I would have if we were in her shoes: someone stole the body. Not only was Jesus dead, but now his body is missing and she cannot honor him as she had hoped.

But then...

“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.’”

But here's where things change.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew ‘Rabbouni!’”

Just a moment ago she was filled with despair. She was dead inside. When she hears the resurrected Christ say her name, she is suddenly alive again. Just as she discovered new life in her first encounter with Christ, hearing Christ speak her name reawakens the hope and possibility she found in life with him. She is alive to hope, alive to discipleship and alive to the knowledge that the death she witnessed on the first day does not rule the third day.

The power of the Resurrection is demonstrated when Jesus remains present in our lives. Hearing her name, Mary is stunned by the reality of the Resurrection. The weight of trauma, grief, and anxiety can now be processed and released. Her grief can be entrusted to Christ to use, heal, and lead into a new life and possibilities where hope is secure. Anxiety over demons that once controlled her life begins to fall away. The Resurrection of Jesus demonstrates his power over death. If death cannot hold him in a tomb, there is no demon she ever struggled with that he would not be able to cast aside again.

In Mary's story of the resurrection, we encounter the truth that Jesus is able to pierce the darkness in our own lives and bring light. Whatever burdens that we might carry - whether we have our own demons like Mary did, or grief or anxieties... Whether we carry fear or emotional and spiritual wounds that keep us down - Jesus can lift the weight of those things and bring us new life. A new start. A new hope. A new way of being. This is all offered to us, just as it was offered to Mary Magdalene in this very moment.