

in the big love living liturgies

Easter Sunday "Women Series I" • Liturgical Year A • John 20:1-18

prepared by Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber

Scripture Text

John 20:1-18 "Tomb Encounters"

This Week's Lenten Women and Theme

"The Magdalene: Endless Love"

Sermon is a first-person monologue by Mary of Magdala who recounts the many forms of love she experienced with Jesus Christ.

Additional Easter Content

See "Mary Magdalene Red Egg" handout, Document L, which features two stories about Mary Magdalene and the giving of eggs at Easter. The front/back color document (prints 2-up) makes a wonderful "take home gift." Actual red eggs could be made available, too.

Sanctuary Decorations

Easter is a celebration of God's faithfulness and the power of the Eternal Christ to transcend death. Any decoration which is joyful, life-filled, hopeful is appropriate. Invite artistic members of the community to coordinate decorations; ask them far in advance. Easter Flowers: In addition to Easter lilies, some communities create a floral cross decorated with fresh flowers. The ritual of creating the floral cross is usually done right before the service. Designate someone to help with decoration. Be sure to have sharp pruners and containers for collecting green waste at hand. Also, consider asking folks to bring pots of blooming and lush plants from their homes and gardens, instead of buying new plants and cut flowers.

Celebration Holy Communion on Easter

As many people only attend church services during the holidays, please consider offering Holy Communion during this holiday service, if you don't already. Pre-designate teams of communion servers asking any clergy (staff, members, retired) or natural caregivers to serve. Set up multiple teams around the sanctuary to keep the service flowing. Communion plates and cups do not need to match. Consider using organic elements, to honor all creatures, and to use exclusively gluten-free and alcohol-free elements so that all may participate.

Suggested Hymns/Songs

"Hallelujah" (*introit or processional chant*)

Words: Traditional Caribbean; TUNE: HALLELUJA

"Jesus Christ is Risen Today"

Words: Lyra Davidica; Tune: LLANFAIR

"Now the Green Blade Rises"

Words: John MC Crum; Tune: NOEL NOUVELET

"The Day of Resurrection"

Words: John of Damascus; Tune: LANCASHIRE

"O Sing a Song of Bethlehem" (*after sermon or as solo*)

Words: Louis Benson; Tune: KINGSFORD (*cont'd*)

"All Creatures of Our God, Now Sing"

Words: St Francis of Assis; Tune: LASST UNS ERFREUEN

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Words: Matthew Bridges; Tune: DIADEMATA

"Christ the Lord is Risen Today!" (*wonderful closing hymn*)

Words: Charles Wesley; Tune: EASTER HYMN

Meditation Quote about Christ's Love

"Place me as a seal upon your heart, for love is as strong as death." - Song of Songs 8:6

Easter Acclamation (*responsive*)

Liturgist: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

People: Indeed, Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Invocation (*responsive*)

Liturgist: With Mary the Magdalene we proclaim our faith:

People: Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With Mary the Mother of Jesus we proclaim our faith:

People: God's Holy Son is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With the Samaritan Woman we proclaim our faith:

People: The Messiah is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With the Blind Man's Mother we proclaim our faith:

People: The Son of Man is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With Martha and Mary of Bethany we proclaim our faith:

People: Our Beloved Friend is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With the Women at the Cross we proclaim our faith:

People: Jesus from Galilee is Risen! Alleluia!

Liturgist: With Christians of all times and places we proclaim our faith:

People: Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Amen. ✠ (*kms*)

Affirmation of Faith (*unison*)

Beloved Resurrected One,

We believe in the Creator's eternal presence
made known to us in various places, in various ways.

We believe in You, O Jesus of Nazareth,
flesh and blood revelation of God's incarnate love.

We believe in the Holy Spirit
dwelling among us as inspiration, wisdom, and hope.

We believe in the endless pulse of Divine Love
forever coursing through all beings in heaven and on earth.

We believe that nothing can separate us from Your Love
for each moment is truly a new Easter morn. Amen! ✠ (*kms*)

Living Word for Children

"Red Eggs"

Show the children a basket of regular Easter Eggs. Talk with them about Easter Egg hunts, the fun of looking for and finding something special. Tell the children about Mary Magdala's great affection for Jesus and how she went to his tomb after He died. When she arrived His body was gone! Wondering who had hidden Jesus' body, (cont'd)

she spoke with angels and with something she thought was a gardener - but turned out to be Jesus. He told her He was on His way to heaven. That He would return. This is what we celebrate on Easter - that death did not kill Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues to live in our hearts. Once upon a time He lived on earth and loved people in person, now He loves us spiritually. His love has changed form, but it continues. We exchange eggs on Easter morning as a reminder that living things change form. An egg is the form a chicken takes before it is born. Easter eggs remind us that we will change form, but love will never die. Just like Jesus, after our bodies die, our souls live on. (Pass out red eggs and special handouts.) † (kms)

Prayer with Children (*all repeat)

Dear Jesus * We love You! * You make us happy * living in our hearts. * Happy Easter! * Alleluia! * Amen! * † (kms)

Living Word for Adults

“The Magdalene: His Love” (first-person sermon script)

Loves

Love is no easy thing.
It is not even one thing - it is many things.
And if we are blessed in this life
we will know first-hand different types of love.

He was so many things to me.
We walked together through so many doorways
entering so many different forms of love.

I have always found it interesting
the ways others speculate about us.
The hours and hours spent pondering
about the nature of the love we shared.

Truth be told, these ruminations will always fall short
if not considered by one who has been loved well,
and who has loved others well.

This love He and I shared,
or rather I would say it this way -
this love which I inherited from Him,
it was, and it is,
a big love which always grows.
Always changes.

It is not a wild animal to be caged,
nor is it a body of water
conformed to a singular form or shape.
This love I met in Him, and with Him, and through Him
is a living, growing thing. It is.

And I think you know this, too, don't you?
 But, I digress.
 You really want to know about us, don't you?

Attractions

When I first saw Him I felt something.
 Even today, I cannot say for sure
 what this "something" was.
 Yes, I was attracted.
 How could anyone not be interested in Him -
 His energy! His integrity! His bravery! His wisdom!

I was attracted to Him
 as one is drawn to a beautiful flower.
 Not as an exotic thing that is rare and fragile,
 rather, more like a blossom on a common plant
 which in a specific moment,
 when the light falls just so,
 becomes wonderfully radiant in a new way.

I was drawn to Him like that -
 curious to see more,
 interested in how the ordinary
 was transformed into extraordinariness
 without becoming elitist or exclusive.

His alluring brilliance was a type of revealing,
 a showing of a grander potential
 residing in all "flowers,"
 "flowers" like you,
 "flowers" like me.

So, yes, I was attracted to Him,
 but selfishly so.
 I wished that what He had become -
 a truly beautifully human being -
 might also be true for others,
 maybe even me.

And was there another type of attraction?
 Oh, gracious, yes!
 I wouldn't so much call him handsome
 as magnetically vivacious.
 One just wanted to be close to Him.
 Many had a crush on Him.
 Women and men of all ages...
 we all felt it.
 We were drawn to Him.
 He was seductive
 in the most innocent of ways.

He sparked something primal in us.
 It was part sexual,
 but it was something deeper, too.
 We were living in dangerous times.
 And, in and through Him,
 we sensed nearness to a force
 which was not only survival,
 but a new kind of thriving.
 That was most attractive.

Thankfully,
 He wasn't like the other new heroes
 who flashed about in costumed hope
 eager for what our attraction would profit them.
 He seemed to genuinely care about us,
 even as our shallow infatuations
 flitted and flirted about Him.

Beyond any immediate physical allure we felt,
 we also sensed there was substance.
 This guru was no magician
 tricking us with slights of hand
 or well-placed curtains and mirrors.
 He was the real thing.
 He was... He was....
 Good.

In a time when Evil was winning,
 He was Good.
 That may not seem very important
 to be a Good Man in Evil Times
 - but it was. It still is.

You poor men,
 everyone telling you who and what to be.
 It must be hard.
 I want you to know:
 when you rise up in your truth
 with care and openness to others;
 when you root yourselves in ethical ways
 higher than any one groups' gilded codes;
 when you rest into your weaknesses
 while also trusting your strengths;
 you become a Holy Nest
 where Good comes to live.
 Where God is in residence.

He was such a man.
 A Good man.
 A man of God.

He knew what was right
 and had the courage to speak what was just.
 The ones with power wanted Him
 to promote or defend their party line,
 yet He spoke what was universally true.

Course, some hated him for that.
 Some were terrified by Him for that.
 Some attacked him for that.
 Eventually, it got Him killed.
 But, for many of us
 He offered in-the-flesh proof
 that the Good was possible.
 And so, we loved Him for that.

We loved Him not only for the dreams
 He conjured to rise within us,
 but for what He actually was.
 He was living proof we could be Better.
 And that lured me in even further.

I wanted to know how He became such a person.
 What forces in heaven or on earth made Him so?

I became a disciple.
 A very dedicated one.
 I studied not only what He taught,
 but also the one teaching.

I wanted to be like Him.
 I'd spent too much time
 listening to arrogant scholars pontificating
 about what was righteous and ethical
 while their judgmental attitudes
 revealed the depths of their own sinful natures.

So there He was -
 this just plain Good man -
 embodying a kind of righteousness
 that even a donkey understands.
 The birds and beetles knew this, too.
 Animals of all types felt safe with Him.
 People of all types felt safe with Him, too.

We loved Him for being unflinchingly Good.
 And we loved Him for his courage
 to speak what was Good and True
 even when it cost Him everything.
 Everything.

True Love

Amid our attractions and hopes,
 fueled by His integrity and courage,
 I found another love rising.
 It was less profane.
 Less strings attached.
 Today, I would say,
 it was a love born of the Spirit,
 most definitely manifested in the Body.

If I were a theologian, which I am not,
 I would say this is what is meant by “Christ” -
 a co-dwelling of Love in the eternal realm and this world.

This is what we found in Him -
 in a very real person’s flesh and blood compassion and dignity,
 in daily practiced Goodness,
 we understood we were in the presence of God.

Unlike the blessed stone carvings,
 unlike the sanctified and codified rules,
 unlike the beloved prayers our mothers taught us
 in Him the Good was tangible -
 there was no interruption
 between the sacred and the profane.
 Everything belonged together,
 and we began to sense it always had,
 and it always would.

So when He died, slain by fear and anger,
 we began falling away, away, away,
 from the tender construct of Holy Love,
 this beloved shelter
 He had begun to build in us, with us, for everyone.

We were on the edge of losing
 this precious gift He’d given us,
 and then, something happened.

His love took yet another new form.
 We found ourselves falling forward
 into a new way of loving -
 yet more freed;
 yet more empowered;
 yet more vivacious;
 in a way that did, and always will,
 transcend life on earth.

We inherited the greatest gift of all:
 His eternal love.

This love, this endless love,
 this love is still real.
 And it may be for you, as it is for me,
 that this love, His eternal love,
 is even more real now
 than it was before
 when I only knew Him as a man.

On this morning,
 I will not tell you stories of miracles,
 of things you may or may not believe,
 for the true wonder of that first Easter morning
 has absolutely nothing to do
 with stage props and special effects.
 Rather, it had, and always has,
 everything to do with Divine Love.

In every moment of creation's pulse of life -
 God, as love, is present.

Whenever good and evil clash-
 God, as love, is present.

When He was here as
 a genuinely righteous ambassador,
 God, as love, was present.

God, as love, is still present.
 Right here - in this room.
 Right here - in each of you.
 Right here - below us in the very real earth.
 Right here - above us in the very real sky.
 Right here - next to us in each living being.
 Right here - around us in every sacred soul.

Love is no easy thing.
 It is not even one thing -
 it is many things.

May we be blessed in this life
 to know first-hand different expressions of love.

May we be very blessed in this life
 to know one of those forms of love
 in the person and eternal presence of Jesus
 the one we call The Christ.

May He guide us in this great love journey
 turning each day into Easter morning,
 making each day a celebration.

God, as love, is always present.
Always. Amen. ✠ (*kms*)

Pastoral Prayer

On this Easter Morning
we rest our wandering souls
in the great shelter of Your endless Love, O Holy One.
We celebrate Your endless compassion for everyone.
You welcome each of us, as we come, into Your presence -
here on earth as well as in heaven.

We who call Jesus of Nazareth our Triumphant Christ
believe in a salvation from all that harms,
be these actions we have chosen and committed,
or be these actions done to or against us.
Eternally, You offer a way
to bridge any broken arch.
You offer wholeness and healing
to soothe any breach or wound.

While our mortal selves cannot fully understand such love,
our souls can know these things to be true.
Christ has risen and is rising
every time Your Love blooms in our hearts. Amen! ✠ (*kms*)

Prayer of Dedication/Offering

Alleluia! Risen One, on this Easter morning we share these gifts overflowing with
praise and gratitude! Alleluia! Amen! ✠ (*kms*)

Celebration of Holy Communion

(Please use your own words and traditions; these are merely suggestions.)

Invitation

Who would have guessed
that the holist moment of our faith
would happen in a graveyard
as angels spoke to a grieving woman
who mistook the Christ for a gardener.
This is such Good News!
It tells us that no matter who we are,
no matter where we are on our faith journey,
we are always welcome in God's Amazing Presence.

This Easter as the Beloved Community
gathers around the Resurrection Table
please know that everyone is truly welcome!
The only requirement to participate in this ritual
is Your desire to do so.
Know, too, you are equally welcome
to honor a different way

to express Your relationship with the Divine.
 What is shared at this Table, essentially, is Love -
 and it is extended to one and all,
 whether or not one partakes of the cup and loaf.

This is the table of Eternal Love.
 Come, for all things are ready! ✠ *(kms)*

Prayer of Preparation and Consecration

O Lord of Eternal Love,
 we gaze upon these simple things -
 a loaf of bread, a cup of juice -
 and we see Your Love made manifest.
 In the beauty of the world - grains and grapes - You are here.
 In the beauty of tradition - loaf and cup - You are here.
 In the beauty of our needs - sustenance and forgiveness - You are here.
 May we receive Your forever love
 as we share these blessed elements. Amen. ✠ *(kms)*

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Boundless God, there are no words adequate
 to thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ.
 How could we ever express
 the wondrous grace of being so loved?
 May we not try to match Your affection act for act
 rather, let us offer a renewed commitment
 to strive to embody Your love as Jesus did,
 not only in this world, but in the one to come. Amen. ✠ *(kms)*

Benediction

In every moment of creation's pulse of life - God, as love, is present.
 Whenever good and evil clash- God, as love, is present.
 In the body and eternal presence of Jesus Christ - God, as love, is present.
 In you, and me, and everyone we see - God, as love, is universally present.
 Alleluia! Go forth in faith, hope, and LOVE! Amen! ✠ *(kms)*

Worship Resources (alphabetical by title)

The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle. Karen L. King.

Invoking Mary Magdalene: Accessing the Wisdom of the Divine Feminine. Siobhan Houston.

Jesus and Woman: An Exciting Discovery of What He Offered Her. Lisa Sergio.

The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity. Cynthia Bourgeault.

Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend. Bart D. Ehrman.

WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter: Women of the New Testament.

Miriam Therese Winter.

Soul Sisters: Women in Scripture Speak to Women Today. Edwina Gateley and Louis Glanzman.

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