

August 27 2023 Tippe Sunday Morning Worship

Prelude Zo Trembley

Welcome and community news

- **Tippe Break:** We will not gather for Sunday morning worship next Sunday, September 3rd due to the Labor Day weekend. We will still offer Centering Prayer at 6 pm on Zoom. There will be no Monday night gathering on Zoom September 4th, but Sanctuary Time of Belonging will resume on September 11th.
- As we kick off the fall season at Tippe, we're starting with a 4-week worship series, entitled: "I've Been Meaning to Ask" – a series focused on community – how we build it, repair it, and sustain it. We'll explore how we can listen to one another, how we might find connection despite ideological differences, and consider how to create space for compassionate dialog and for seeking the holy in one another. To delve more deeply into the "I've Been Meaning to Ask" materials, an Adult Education discussion group will be offered immediately after worship on 4 consecutive Sundays: September 10, 17, 24 and October 1st.
- "Cherished Memories" grief support group is being offered again this fall on Sundays for 6 consecutive weeks from October 15 through November 19 from 11:15 am – 12:45 pm. Diane Wirhanowicz and Carol Meverden will co-facilitate.
- **Bayview Community Center – 17th Annual Food Walk Sat, Sept 9 at 10 am**
- **Christmas Cantata – 2 tickets for Sept 16th at 7 pm at Miller High Theater**
- **Amazing Faiths Dinner Dialogues – we're cohosting with Grace Pres – registration filled up for this Wed, Aug 30th at 6 pm – would love a Tippe individual or pair to attend and help with hosting (serving at the buffet table)**

Readying Ourselves for Worship

***Surely God is in this place, Holy Ground!
Surely God is in this place,
Holy Ground!***

A Blessing as we Center Ourselves in this Moment

The Magdalene Blessing ~ Jan L. Richardson

You hardly imagined
standing here,
everything you ever loved
suddenly returned to you,
looking you in the eye
and calling your name.

And now
you do not know
how to abide this ache
in the center of your chest,
where a door
slams shut
and swings open
at the same time,
turning on the hinge
of your aching
and hopeful heart.

I tell you,
this is not a banishment
from the garden.

This is an invitation,
a choice,
a threshold,
a gate.

This is your life
calling to you
from a place
you could never
have dreamed,
but now that you
have glimpsed its edge,
you cannot imagine
choosing any other way.

So let the tears come
as anointing,
as consecration,
and then
let them go.

Let this blessing
gather itself around you.

Let it give you
what you will need
for this journey.

You will not remember
the words –
they do not matter.

All you need to remember
is how it sounded
when you stood
in the place of death
and heard the living
call your name.

Becoming Present to God and Each Other - Our Check-in

~ **The Joy of Passing the Peace** ~

One: May the peace that surpasses all understanding be with you

All: And also with you

One: Thanks be to God

Time for Young Hearts ~ an invitation, to reflect about the women
who root you
who shelter you
who nurture you
who sustain you

Gathering as God's People: Our Theme – *Women in the Bible*

Throughout the summer we've been delving into the stories that lift up women's voices, enabling us to turn our attention to perspectives that are rarely considered. We witnessed Hagar, in the Book of Genesis, turning faithfully to God in the most dire of circumstances. We observed the women throughout the Book of Exodus, noting the pivotal roles they played at every phase of Moses' life. Their radical acts empowered the Israelites to become a nation. We turned our attention to the deep love and connection between Ruth and Naomi, recognizing the depth of relationship we desire and that can be attained.

We have also gleaned wisdom from women in the New Testament - coming to understand more fully, through the often-studied story of Mary and Martha, that we each are called to action and also to make time for contemplation. Then we trained our gaze on one of the many "unnamed women" in the Bible, with a story that shows up differently in each of the four gospels. It was from the woman's vantage point in the Gospel of Luke, as she anointed Jesus, that we were invited to recall our own moments of pain and desperation – witnessing her faithfulness and vulnerability as she poured out the precious contents of her alabaster jar over his feet.

In our final week of this series, we turn to one of Jesus' most celebrated disciples - a woman weighed down by more projections and assumptions than any other in the Bible: Mary Magdalene. This morning we're invited to listen deeply to familiar gospel stories with fresh ears/ and open our hearts to the words attributed to Mary from her own ancient text.

Please rise, in body or spirit, to sing our first hymn:

Gathering Hymn 201 *A Prophet Woman Broke a Jar*

Opening Ourselves to God's Grace

Siblings in Christ,
whatever your perspective,
whatever your background,
your orientation,
your race,
whatever your hopes,
your dreams,
your fears,
gather to worship,
for here we are all one in Christ.
Thanks be to God!

Sharing our Innermost Lives with God – (a shared reading) – lend your voice to the words presented in bold in your bulletin:

One: For she who went before,

All: Blazing, praying, pushing, and shoving,

One: As we quenched, silenced, and diminished,

All: Lord, forgive us.

One: For she who stands before us now

All: Preaching, proclaiming, reaching, and naming,

One: As we listen, receive, and embrace,

All: Lord, we thank you.

One: For she who will come

All: Prophesying, leading, creating, and innovating,

One: As we long, anticipate, and hope,

All: Lord, make us ready.

**All: May we ever look back and lament,
look up with gratitude, and
look forward with open hearts.**

Special Music 144 *Thy Word* (Worship & Praise hymnal) let us sing together

Prayer of Intention

Holy Spirit, may we hear your precious Word for us today. May we grow in wisdom, strength, and love as we open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to the transformative message you have in store for each of us. Amen.

Bible Wisdom Teachings

Luke 8:1-3 Mary is healed

Mark 15: 37-41 Mary as benefactor

Matthew 27: 35-37, 55-56 Mary at Jesus' crucifixion

John 20: 1-18 Mary alone goes to the tomb and Jesus appears to her

The Gospel of Mary – pages 7,8,9

One: May we hear anew the origin stories of our faith and draw from the roots of our tradition.

All: **Thanks be to our God.**

Message “The Good in our Midst”

Apostle or prostitute? Witness to the resurrection or penitent whore? Prominent disciple or seductive temptress? Faithful follower or beloved wife? Over the centuries, you can trace a trajectory in which Mary Magdalene begins as a principal witness and follower of Jesus yet becomes known as a redeemed “woman of ill-repute.” Even today, “Mary Magdalene” is virtually synonymous with “prostitute.” However, through current biblical scholarship, Mary Magdalene’s so-called sexually sinful past has itself fallen into disrepute. By interpreters’ turning to the New Testament and other early Christian texts, we are coming to know Mary Magdalene’s place as an important figure in early Christianity.

In preparation for this message, I must admit over these summer months I’ve completely “nerded out” and gotten caught up in the academics while attempting to understand and know Mary Magdalene more fully. Ultimately, though, my intent is for us to enter a space for reflection and consider how Mary, her presence, and her words, illuminates our own journey. Her perspective gives us another opportunity to consider Jesus’ teachings. As we heard just moments ago from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene:

*This is why the Good has come into your midst.
It acts together with the elements of your nature
so as to reunite it with its roots.*

We begin with getting a sense of Mary among the disciples. Inferring Mary’s influence within Jesus’ movement is not an exercise in filling in blanks with the images of her that we prefer. Since the second century, Mary has been the target of projections. She has been portrayed as the Shulamit, the dark lover of the Song of Songs, whose physical passion symbolized holy ardor. During the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great wove that symbolism into a narrative in which Mary Magdalene became a converted prostitute; by the Middle Ages, it became fashionable to depict her as a naked penitent meditating in a cave, and religious houses for converted prostitutes were routinely named after “the Magdalene.” From the thirteenth century, some people said Mary was really Christ’s concubine, and early efforts at photography in Victorian England included posing adolescent girls as partially clad “Magdalenes.” Christianity’s efforts to

engage issues of human sexuality have been perennially undermined by caricatures of women as goddesses and vixens, and Mary Magdalene has been cast in both roles.

Through exploring the texts, we enter the rich tapestry of meaning in which Mary Magdalene played a pivotal role in Jesus' ministry. The legends of later times, and even of our day, frequently reflect the underlying power of Mary's influence, even when they seem distorted by the mirrors of wishful thinking. The details of Mary's life are often obscure, but her influential presence is unmistakable.

In the short reading from Luke, Mary is among a number of women who accompanied Jesus with the twelve in his travels, all having been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary, "from whom seven demons had gone out" is among those who were healed by Jesus. Demons were widely believed to be the cause of various illnesses, both physical and mental; such exorcism is another way to speak of healing, perhaps of illness with a mental component.

The Gospels don't explain how Mary or some of her companions came to be traveling independently. In the reading we heard today from Mark, the group of women mentioned are described as Jesus' followers who "provided for him." From the resources they had, whether economic or other, they functioned as patrons, performing *diakonia*, or ministry supplying provisions in the group. Mary is illustrated here in her role as benefactor.

The Matthew reading is one of the examples of Mary being present at the crucifixion. Other than the passage in Luke that we heard this morning, Mary appears in the Gospels only in the passion and resurrection narratives. She consistently shows up across all four of the gospels among the women at the cross.

Whenever she is mentioned in the company of other women, her name appears first, with the sole exception of John 19:25, where female members of Jesus' family are listed before her – this suggests a prominent place for her both historically and in the early tradition.

In today's longer gospel reading from John, Mary alone goes to the tomb. She is often referred to as "the first apostle," highlighting her role as the one who brought the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples. Mary is the first person to see the risen Christ. She is so overcome that she doesn't recognize Jesus at first. Only when he speaks her name does she realize that she is speaking to her rabbi, and so she cries out, "Teacher." She must have reached out to him because he says, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended." She follows his instructions to go and tell the disciples. Mary departs and is the first person to say, "I have seen the Lord." It is *her* experience that ultimately teaches the other disciples how to see Jesus as well.

Mary Magdalene's prominent role among the women disciples in the canonical Gospels and as a communicator of revelation in noncanonical tradition leads to the assumption

that she was a leader and spokeswoman who held a position of spiritual authority among many Christians.

Few people today are acquainted with the *Gospel of Mary*. Written early in the second century CE, it wasn't until the late 19th century when a single, fragmentary copy in Coptic translation came to light. Although details of the discovery itself are obscure, we do know that the 5th century manuscript was purchased in Cairo by Carl Reinhardt and brought to Berlin in 1896. Two additional fragments in Greek have come to light in the 20th century. Yet still no complete copy of the *Gospel of Mary* is known. Fewer than 8 pages of the ancient papyrus text survive, which means that about half of the *Gospel of Mary* is lost to us, perhaps forever.

This morning we heard the first three of the eight pages that have survived. These few pages give us an intriguing glimpse into a kind of Christianity lost for almost 1500 years. This brief narrative presents a radical interpretation of Jesus' teachings as the path to inner spiritual knowledge; it rejects his suffering and death as the path to eternal life; it presents the most straightforward and convincing argument in any early Christian writing for the legitimacy of women's leadership; it offers a sharp critique of illegitimate power and a utopian vision of spiritual perfection; it challenges our assumptions of the harmony and unanimity of the first Christians; and it asks us to rethink the basis for church authority.

Today's reading from Mary's Gospel reveals from the start that we are dealing with a deeply metaphysical perspective – reflections about existence, causality, and truth. Before we ask the ancient question “Why does the world contain evil and suffering?” we must first question how we know the world exists at all.

The path of Christianity that we find in this gospel is one of gnosis, or divine knowledge – it goes deeper than the teaching of rules by which we can live and improve ourselves.

Beginning with Page 7

The Teacher answered:

“All that is born, all that is created, all the elements of nature are interwoven and united with each other.

All that is composed shall be decomposed:”

This reminder of the interdependence and impermanence of all things is striking: nothing exists in itself or by itself - the world is a vast tapestry woven of relations. Not even the smallest strand in this web can be tugged without affecting all the myriad strands and interdependencies to which it is connected, and of which it is composed. This is true of matter, and it is also true of the nature of the human body and the psyche that animates it. We are reminded that this universe we perceive has not always existed, and that it will not exist forever. What has a beginning also has an end.

Ignorance of impermanence generates illusions, attachments, and therefore suffering – all the ancient wisdom traditions tell us this.

Page 8

On page 8 we hear:

*“Peace be with you – may my Peace
arise and be fulfilled within you!
Be vigilant, and allow no one to mislead you
by saying:
‘Here it is!’ or
‘There it is!’
For it is within you
that the Son of Man dwells.”*

It’s important to note that teachings across the canonical Gospels and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene all agree that as long as our peace is dependent on any kind of external reality, it is not Peace; as long as our love for others and for the world is dependent on attitudes and feelings toward us, it is not Love. To the extent that our life depends on the material circumstances and conditions that constitute us, it is not yet Life. It is still within the domain of the *outer person*, who is destined to fall into ruins.

Only within our true being do we find a Reality, a Life, a Knowledge, a Love, and a Peace that are not dependent. These are the Christ, the child of God. This Reality is both who we are, and what we must become.

The Gospel of Mary tells us to “Go to him” (page 8), to verify each of Jesus’ teachings for ourselves, and to become what Jesus is so as to discover what we eternally are.

Page 9

Through this noncanonical gospel, we hear Mary Magdalene’s ministry as she reveals Jesus’ teaching. Central to page 9 is the teaching:

“Do not add more laws to those given in the Torah, lest you become bound by them.”
This is a powerful statement – a reminder that as humans, we are constantly developing rules, laws, and policies intended to help us manage the world we are constructing. But if we come to recognize that our constructed reality is not Reality, then we can turn to Divine law to shape our lives, our hearts, and our relationships.

And as the disciples are overcome by sorrow upon Jesus’ departure, it is Mary who comforts the disciples and reminds them that Jesus’
grace will guide and comfort you...he has prepared us for this. He is calling us to become fully human.

This reaction of the disciples to the departure of the Teacher shows that his peace had not become established in them, that his teachings had not yet fully integrated, and that they were still immersed in fear and loss. Nevertheless, the Gospel of Mary seems to be telling us that there is something other than human nature at work in the disciples, which affects their motivation. Jesus was inviting them to live in the spiritual Reality that persecution becomes an opportunity for growth in consciousness and love.

And then we hear that she *turned their hearts toward the Good, and they began to discuss the meaning of the Teacher's words.*

In the midst of loss and adversity, Mary of Magdala modeled strength, faith, and hope in her suffering of the crucifixion of their master and friend.

This text gifts us with fresh understandings of Christianity, of discipleship, and of our own journey of self-understanding and spirituality. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene invites us to look anew at the ways we are interconnected and interdependent, to witness to God's laws rather than those that are human-made, and remain mindful of the abundant love and grace made available to us in every moment.

Reflection Questions

- How do Mary Magdalene and other women in our Bible Wisdom teachings shape my spiritual journey?
- In what ways do I stand up for others or accompany them on difficult paths?
- How might I remain awake to the Good in my midst?
- Where am I called to reflect the love and light of the Divine?

Short period of silent reflection

Sharing Our Wisdom

Hymn 324 *For All the Faithful Women*

Community Prayers & the Pastoral Prayer

- Prayers for Diane Wirhanowicz – shingles
- Prayers for LuAnn Weik and Sue Volkman, as they represent Tippe at Wauwatosa Presbyterian this morning and share about our Divine Intervention ministry.

Pastoral Prayer

Unchanging God,
when we look ...
really look ...
we can see you
in the people
all around us.

We are thankful for those who have the strength
to do what you have called them to do.
Give us strength, we pray,
to do the same ...
to put the needs of others
ahead of our own agendas,
to protect what is sacred,
and to name injustice when we see it.

Help us to bring out that of God
in people everywhere
whose lights have been hidden under a bushel
because of their race
or gender
or age
or religious beliefs
or sexual orientation.

Open our eyes to the gifts of every created being
that all may be appreciated
as they reflect your love and light
in the world.

Remind us to make room for those among us
whose lives do not mirror our own,
but have the propensity to enrich it.

Open our hearts
to LOVE as you love ...
to DESIRE LOVE for all people ...
to SERVE and PROTECT your creation
and all creatures.

Light of the World,
shine your healing light

into and around and through us
that the world you created
may once again reflect your goodness for all. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

ALL: Eternal Spirit

**Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all.**

Loving God, in whom is heaven.

The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

**Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.**

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory

of the power that is love, now and forever.

(New Zealand Prayer Book)

Benediction

May we, inspired by God's grace and the stories of so many courageous women,
go forth from this place,

ready to listen deeply,

accompany compassionately,

and discern way forward faithfully. Amen

Now that the worship has ended, may the service truly begin.

Our Response:

Holy One, now we your servants go in peace. Your Word lives on in us.

Postlude Zo Trembley