

Sunday 2nd May 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 8:1 – 3
Theme: “The Chosen: Mary Magdalene”
“Mary, her story, and what it means for us”
*** *Series on The Chosen (1)***

Introduction:

This is a series of messages about some of the people who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry.... It is based on the Bible, *and the Gospels in particular*, but it also includes insights from the YouTube series, “The Chosen”....

What is “The Chosen” series? And what’s its aim? Well in a nutshell, the series aims to provide a back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves about the characters.

Let me read what one commentator has to say:

The Chosen is the first multi-season show about the life of Christ.... The Chosen tells stories of radical transformation among the followers of Jesus.... The Chosen spotlights the real-life men and women who knew Christ....

The Chosen includes scenes and dialogue directly from Scripture, but it also includes scenes and dialogue not in the Bible. Viewers learn on the opening scroll that it is “based on the true stories of the gospels of Jesus Christ”. Some location and timelines “have been combined or condensed” and “backstories and some characters or dialogue have been added.

“However”, the scroll says, “all biblical and historical context and any artistic imagination are designed to support the truth and the intention of Scripture” (*Michael Foust, 4 Things You Should Know about THE CHOSEN on YouTube*).

Well, here goes.... This morning we’re going to look at Mary Magdalene, her story, and what it means for us....

Part 1: “A Biblical view of Mary”

We are introduced to Mary Magdalene by Luke in chapter eight of his gospel. Let me read to you what Luke says: **Some time later, Jesus travelled through the towns and villages, preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God. The twelve disciples went with him, and so did some women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary who is called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been driven out; Joanna, whose husband Chuza was an officer in Herod’s court; and Susanna, and many other women who use their own resources to help Jesus and his disciples** (*Luke 8:1-3*).

The next we hear of Mary, though, is in connection with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. She is one of the women who witness Jesus’ death on the cross, and are present at the burial of Jesus late on that Friday afternoon (*Matt. 27:55-56, 61*).

And as we heard on Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene was one of the women who went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus on the Sunday morning after the Sabbath.

Mark tells us:

After the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus... (*Mark 16:1*).

And John tells us:

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loves, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” (*John 20:1-2*).

We heard what happened on Easter Sunday: Mary Magdalene is the first person to see the risen Lord Jesus alive again!! (*John 20:11-18*).

That’s all we know about Mary Magdalene from the Bible....

John Wenham in this brilliant book *The Easter Enigma* has to this to say:

With the exception of the Mother of our Lord, Mary Magdalene is the most favoured woman in the Bible. Yet apart from a brief mention by Luke of her healing and her service to Jesus in Galilee, she appears in the story as suddenly as a meteor, shines brightly for a moment, and then disappears forever (p. 22).

However, maybe that that’s not all we know about Mary Magdalene. Scholars, *including John Wenham*, argue that Mary is the unknown prostitute who goes to the home of Simon the Pharisee, and who falls at Jesus’ feet and wets his feet with her tears, and dries them with her hair, and then pours perfume on his feet *in gratitude to Jesus for his forgiveness* (*Luke 7:36-50*).

...Plus they argue that Mary is also Mary of Bethany, who sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to him as disciples do, *while Martha prepared the meal for them all*, and also later poured oil on Jesus’ head (*Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-3*).

At first sight, all this appears a little farfetched, but John Wenham finishes his detailed analysis of all the passages by writing that the case for Mary Magdalene being the unknown prostitute and “Mary of Bethany” is “substantial” (p. 32).

John Wenham writes about what possibly may have happened in the life of Mary:

It is easy to let the imagination run riot in attempting to reconstruct the story, but it cannot be far from the truth, if we see her as a great contrast to her older sister Martha: Martha practical and fulfilled in managing one of the more distinguished homes in in the village; Mary attractive, adventurous and visionary, yet frustrated in her role as second fiddle, moody, longing to get out to see the world and enjoy life.

It is easy to see how her leaving of home, at first so exciting and enjoyable, all turned sour on her. It is not surprising that when she turned back her conversion went very deep indeed.

After she had been reunited with her family, both Luke and John give glimpses of her spiritual intuition and her devotion to Jesus (p. 27).

Anyway, regardless, the Gospels tell us about a woman who is healed of the demonic, and in thanksgiving follows Jesus and helps him in any way that she can, *and who is so close a follower of Jesus that she is the first one to see the risen Jesus....*

Part 2: “The story of Mary in THE CHOSEN”

The writers of *The Chosen* use the facts from the Gospels, together with their imagination to craft a possible back story for Mary Magdalene.... They do this to encourage us to read the Gospels for ourselves. Dallas Jenkins, a writer and the director of this series says:

“The ultimate goal is to get you to go back to Scripture, whether you are a believer or not”.

Let me share with you some of the plot of the first episode or two of *The Chosen*.... We are introduced to Mary, *known by all as Liluth*, a woman who is demon possessed and lives in the Red Quarter of the town of Capernaum. She has had a devout father and mother and cherishes *in her sane moments a little scroll of Scripture* in a doll that her parents have given her.

This is a scroll of Isaiah 43:1

But now thus says the Lord,

He who created you, O Jacob,

He who formed you, O Israel

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine”

In one of her insane moments, she hurts a man who is with her. Nicodemus, “the Teacher of teachers” visiting from Jerusalem, goes with bells and incense to try to drive the demons out from Mary, *or Liluth as he knows her*. He fails miserably, and the demons in Mary cry out to him as he flees:

“We are not afraid of you!”

After this, Mary despairs that anyone can help her. She goes to a cliff overlooking the Sea of Galilee, tears up her scroll of Isaiah 43:1, and prepares to commit suicide....

However, a dove keeps hovering over her, and flying around her, and she changes her mind.

She goes back to bar that she frequents and asks for a large drink. As she goes to pick up her drink, a stranger puts his hand on hers.

She says, "Don't touch me" and she rushes out of the bar drink in hand, and the stranger follows her. He calls out to her, *and remember everyone knows her as Liluth, and nobody knows her real name:*

"Mary! Mary of Magdala!"

She drops her wine, and turns to him, and asks, **"Who are you? How do you know my name?"** (*cf. Isaiah 43:1*).

Jesus responds by speaking Isaiah 43:1

But now thus says the Lord,

He who created you, O Jacob,

He who formed you, O Israel

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine"

Jesus then places his hands on either side of her head. She cries out, and Jesus puts his arms around her (*end of Episode One*).

Shortly afterwards we see Mary restored to health: "Redeemed".

Part 3: "What it means for us"

Well, there's a lot of artistic licence here....

But remember that Dallas Jenkins ultimate aim is to get you to go back to Scripture and read about all the things that Jesus did....

What are we reminded of in the story of Mary Magdalene in the Bible, *and in this The Chosen series*?

- * Firstly, that we too like Mary Magdalene have been rescued from a hopeless situation. Remember what Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians:

In the past, you Gentiles were spiritually dead in your disobedience and in your sins. At that time, you followed the ways of this world, and the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now is active in those who are in disobedient.

Actually all of us at one time were like them, and lived according to our natural desires, doing *whatever suited* the wishes of *our own* bodies and minds. In our natural condition, we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger (*Eph. 2:1-3*).

But God through his Son Jesus has rescued us!! Do you remember what Paul goes on to write.... He writes:

But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us so great, that while we were dead in our disobedience, he brought us to life with Christ....

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift. It is not by your works, so that no one can boast about it.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God planned for us to do, in order that we may walk in them (*Eph. 2:4-10*).

Like Mary after Jesus healed her of those demonic spirits, we are “redeemed” people, people who have been rescued by God from our hopeless situation *through the suffering and death of God’s Son for us* (e.g., *Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20 cf. v. 11*). Like Mary in that slide from *The Chosen*, we have the word “Redeemed” over a picture of ourself.

- * Secondly, the only appropriate response to all that God has done for us through His Son, Jesus *is the response of Mary Magdalene*: that of following Jesus and listening and learning from him.... And Jesus calls us to live our life in loving service of others, as he did, *out of intense and overwhelming gratitude for our rescue*.

Conclusion:

As you watch *The Chosen*, and as it drives you back to God’s Word, may God bless you as He reminds you again and again of His great rescue of you....

And may God empower you *through His Spirit in you* to follow Jesus in your life....

God bless you! Amen.