

“Three Women”
 A Dramatic Sermon for Easter Sunday
 based on Mark 16:1-8
 April 4, 2021

*adapted from “Easter Panic” by the Rev. Kim Skilling
 for Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
 by the Rev. Jody Andrade, the Rev. Jennie Sankey, and the Rev. Katie Day*

Cast:

Mary Magdalene - The Rev. Katie Day
 Mary, the mother of James - The Rev. Jody Andrade
 Salome - The Rev. Jennie Sankey

MARY MAGDALENE: How beautiful it all is here!
 I love the fresh air, the smell of the flowers and the earth.
 I love the music and the joy.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: Everything seems fresh and clean...even some of you!
 Look at your nice clothes and bright faces.
 You must have come here today expecting something special.
 And you seem to have found it.

SALOME: Isn't it wonderful when things go as expected,
 when all the pieces fall into place?
 You came here today expecting a celebration...
 To hear stirring music, to see beauty in creation,
 and to hear a familiar story of hope. And here it all is.

Pause.

MARY MAGDALENE: But let us tell you, the first Easter was nothing like this.
 There were no flowers, no music, no joy.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: And nothing went according to plan.
 Just as nothing had gone according to plan
 for what seemed like forever.

SALOME: Jesus disrupted all plans.
 People didn't know what to do with the feelings Jesus stirred up in them.
 The deep truths that Jesus spoke didn't fit with the way things had always been.

MARY MAGDALENE: When people – common, everyday, regular people – were around Jesus, when they listened to him speak, they connected to a feeling of power. Though we had gone through our lives feeling invisible, in the presence of Jesus, we felt...seen. And to be seen is to matter, and so to be around Jesus was to experience the feeling of power.

SALOME: Not the kind of power that King Herod or Pontius Pilate have. Their power is all about control, terror, and wealth. That's the last thing I'm looking for. I seek to embody my own name – Salome – which means “peace”. People forget that sometimes, especially when they notice that I share a name with Salome, daughter of Herod. But I believe that living for the kind of peace Jesus was about, is a kind of power of its own. I and the Marys and many other women have been following Jesus for a while now.

From town to town, we were there while he taught, we were there while he ate, we were there caring for him, working with him, learning from him. We witnessed his calm in the face of questions, his compassion for every single person, and his anger toward the systems that oppress the vulnerable. Just this week, we watched as a poor widow gave her last two coins to the temple offering, all she had to live on, while the rich gave their gifts, sure, but out of an abundance that keeps them quite comfortable. Jesus saw her, saw me, saw each of us as worthy and capable of living lives in this new kingdom he was always talking about – one where everything is about loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. On Friday, I thought all was lost – but now... I realize now that I don't have to be next to Jesus to experience a feeling of power. Because he is risen, Christ is risen, and with that knowledge, I have found deep, deep peace and a feeling of power that is unlike any I've known before.

MARY MAGDALENE: But Jesus was never a conqueror or rescuer... He healed people of disease; he opened their eyes to a new way to see; he gave hope and strength to survive adversity - *that* was Jesus' power. But he never promised to just eliminate all the bad and hard things in life

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: He was teaching us to follow him *through* difficult times, not be immune from them.

But the crowd didn't understand that.

SALOME: They wanted a conquering hero to make tough times vanish.
They didn't want a teacher who asked them to work through tough times,
to work on themselves, to work on the world.

MARY MAGDALENE: You see, to follow Jesus was both very easy *and* very hard.
Just like you, his followers, still do today – we struggled.
It was difficult even for those closest to him.
Jesus' own disciples failed him time and again that final week.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: None of the men even joined us women
in keeping Jesus company at the cross.

MARY MAGDALENE: Jesus showed up for the world, and the world rejected him.
Jesus was there for us in so many ways.
But we didn't know how, in the end, to be there for him.

SALOME: Which is probably why it was so important to the Marys and me
to get to the tomb so early that morning after the Sabbath.
We wanted to do something,
to show how much we had loved him, how much we *still* loved him

MARY MAGDALENE: We knew couldn't save him from what had happened,
but we could at least do this.
We could attend to his body and say our goodbyes
So, we left the house early, before daybreak,
so that the moment the first light peaked over the horizon
we would be there and ready.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: As the mother to one of Jesus' disciples,
in a way I had already learned how to say goodbye.
From the moment you hold an infant in your arms, that child belongs to you.
There is no greater intimacy than the quiet, midnight moments
when your nursing child locks you in a gaze with his wide, trusting eyes.
When you're a new parent, nurture becomes your nature.
You care for every need: filling little tummies with food,
slowing stroking hair to invite sleep, and calling out warnings
to not climb the tree too high or cast out in rough waters.
It's a joy to care for my child. My child. *My* child.
And then your boy becomes a man.
He begins to care for himself, eating what he wants, sleeping on his own schedule...
and taking whatever risks he chooses. Risks that make my stomach flip.

Risks I'd rather not know about until after the fact.
 With my daughter, it was gradual...slowly, over a few years,
 I realized she was no longer *my* child.
 But with my son, I can pinpoint the minute I lost him.
 My son stopped being *mine* the moment he laid eyes on Jesus.
 You see, my son belonged to me, and then he belonged to something so much bigger.
 He didn't so much *choose* to follow Jesus –
 it was just obviously the right thing to do – the new way to live.
 And though I spent most of my life teaching my son,
 now it was time for me to learn from him.
 And though I didn't understand all of the details
 or have the answers to all of the questions –

I knew in my heart it was right for me to follow Jesus, too.
 In following Christ, each of us says goodbye.
 Goodbye to the old ways, the old habits.
 Goodbye to the material goods or status we thought mattered.
 Goodbye to the closed, “family only” definition of community.
 Goodbye to safe and small and selfish and sinful.
 And what I feared most that morning on the way to the tomb,
 was that I – that each and every one of Jesus' followers –
 would never be able to go back to the old way of living.
 We had left safe, small, selfish, and sinful behind.
 We were part of something bigger than us. So what now? How would we go on?

MARY MAGDALENE: On the way to the tomb, as we wound our way through the dark streets,
 it occurred to us that we had no idea how we would get to his body.
 The stone would be too big and heavy for us to move.
 The soldiers would be unlikely to help. Could we do it? How?

SALOME: Yet when we arrived we realized that we faced an even bigger problem.
 The stone was gone, rolled away. That worry was taken care of.
 But Jesus' body was gone as well.

MARY MAGDALENE: Even after all these years and all the time I have had to try and put
 pieces together, those few minutes at the tomb remain a jumble of images and
 impressions. There was this young man in dazzling white. I don't know who he was.
 Maybe he was an angel. Maybe not.
 But whoever he was, he had this strange message for us...

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: “Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was
 crucified. He is not here. He has been raised.
 Go, tell the disciples & Peter: Jesus has gone ahead of you to Galilee

and there you will see him.”

SALOME: We know that it doesn't make a very good story.
And that you, who have known the story so long and well
probably can't imagine why we reacted with fear, trembling, and astonishment.
Why we didn't hug each other and laugh and celebrate at the joyful news.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: So we didn't do anything that the messenger said
We didn't calm down.
We didn't listen to or pass on the message... at least not at first.
We simply fell apart. We panicked. We ran.

SALOME: I have worked hard over the years to understand why we trembled with fear.
We should have shouted with joy!
I have worked hard to forgive myself for not immediately embracing
the wonder and the miracle.
After all, he had talked about his resurrection to us.
He had tried to prepare us.
Why didn't we get it?

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: We had experienced death before and knew what to do next.
Prepare the body. Mourn. Remember.
And somehow move on into a world
where he's no longer a part of our daily lives.
That was what we knew and that is what we prepared ourselves to do

SALOME: What happened that morning didn't follow any of the rules.
Or perhaps, to put it more accurately, it created a whole new set of rules.
The old rules that told us that we were on our own in life,
that when something died it was gone forever.
that there are endings and that they are final.

MARY MAGDALENE: But when Jesus rose from the dead those rules changed,
and that can be a frightening thing,
even when what replaces them is something as wonderful as resurrection.
That is the promise and challenge of this day:
the new rules are now new life.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: On what you call Good Friday, Jesus died.
But on Easter what died was despair
and a whole new way of living was born.
We found ourselves in a world where what is dead doesn't stay buried,
a world where no matter where we go or what happens,

Jesus is already present in that moment.

SALOME: For it all happened just as the messenger said.
He was raised and did go ahead.

MARY MAGDALENE: He appeared to me! And eventually to the others, as well.
What seemed impossible now was possible.
His promises were proved true, again and again.
Wherever we were, Jesus was there to meet us.

You don't know me.
You may *think* you do,
thanks to a pope in the middle ages who decided
that I simply *must* have been a *prostitute*,
apropos of nothing in your Bible or otherwise.
But I was - I am - just a woman. A person.
And Magdalene isn't my last name. I'm from the town of Magdala,
on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.
I had family, friends.
I left them all behind to follow Jesus,
teacher of wisdom, opener of eyes, friend of the powerless, welcomer of women,
bright shining light in a dark world.
He became my world.
He *saw* me, he saw us all, and he convinced us that we had value and worth,
that we belonged.
I followed him until the end, and when the end seemed like *the end*,
I wasn't sure who I was or where I belonged anymore.
But when the end *wasn't* the end,
when perhaps it was just another beginning
with new rules, new possibilities,
when I was standing face-to-face with the man I saw killed on a cross,
alive again –
that was when I *knew*... I belong, and no one could ever again tell me otherwise.
Because wherever I am, Jesus is there, too.
Wherever I go to share this great good news, Jesus goes, too.
Wherever the peace or love or justice or compassion or radical inclusion
of Jesus is shared, Jesus is present.
And there is nowhere I would rather be
than here, today, sharing the great good news
that he is not dead, but he is risen, he is alive.
Thanks be to God.

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: So is it any wonder, then, that among the earliest followers of Jesus this became our greeting?
We would meet one another and proclaim, “Christ is risen!”

ALL Christ is risen indeed!

SALOME: We did that to remind ourselves that no matter how hard life got, we were not alone.
Wherever we went Jesus was already there –
and that is good news.

MARY MAGDALENE: We did it to remind ourselves that no matter how trapped we felt, how deep our trouble,
how sealed the tomb seemed to be,
the rules had changed.
Death was ended. Jesus was alive.
Good news!

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: We proclaim Christ is risen –

ALL: Christ is risen indeed!

MARY MOTHER OF JAMES: – as a way to remember that in those moments when it feels as if all hope is past, all life defeated, all faith dead,
God still has something more to say. God still has something more to do.
Death is no longer an end, so nothing can be assumed.
It is good news!

MARY MAGDALENE: So we rejoice!
Yes, we fear and question: we are often confused and we wonder...
But we rejoice nonetheless.
For the message is clear –
The rules have changed. The promise is sure. The future is open.

SALOME: For Christ is risen...

ALL: Christ is risen indeed.