



Stations  
of the  
Resurrection

*Connection Groups 2020*

## Stations of the Resurrection: Encountering the Risen Christ in Our Midst

In the Resurrection accounts, Jesus appears to his beloved disciples in the moments they least expect to find him. Amidst their grief and confusion after the death of their Lord, the disciples are initially unable to recognize Jesus. Each time he appears to them, Jesus consoles the disciples that he is still with them, and at the same time he reminds them that the Risen Lord will not be found in the old, familiar ways. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Jesus asks the women at the tomb. The conversion of the disciples from grief to acknowledging the Risen Lord in their midst takes patience and time. It requires them to let go of being with Jesus in one way, so that they might know and love Jesus in a new and deeper way than they could have ever imagined.

Given our current moment, it is perhaps not so difficult for us to identify with the disciples’ experience of the world they knew being turned upside down, and the struggle and grief they felt as they tried to make sense of this new reality without Jesus physically by their side. Like the disciples, we find that life as we know it—our routines, the people and places that bring us meaning, how we recreate and how we worship—has changed. And yet, as the resurrection stories make clear, these are precisely the times when our Risen Lord calls us to a new and more expansive life in him, in fellowship with others. The task is to let ourselves be changed, to pay attention, and to become witness to the good news of the God who defies our expectations, who continues to delight in creation amidst our sorrow and anxiety.

This booklet is intended to serve as a companion to your prayer as we reflect together on where the Resurrected Christ is at work in our lives. The structure of this booklet is modeled after the Stations of the Resurrection, a form of Christian devotion developed in the late ‘80s that encourages meditation on the Resurrection and includes some of the Resurrection appearances. We focus on five of the lesser known Resurrection appearances in this booklet and provide options for prayer practices throughout.

To mark this new season of prayer and reflection, let us begin with the following poem:

# Beginners

by Denise Levertov

*“From too much love of living,  
Hope and desire set free,  
Even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere to the sea—”*

But we have only begun  
To love the earth.

We have only begun  
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?  
— so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?  
— we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,  
only begun to envision

how it might be  
to live as siblings with beast and flower,  
not as oppressors.

Surely our river  
cannot already be hastening  
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot  
drag, in the silt,  
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet—  
there is too much broken  
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other  
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know  
the power that is in us if we would join  
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must  
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.



*Raising of Lazarus* by artist Donald Jackson



# Week 1: Mary Magdalene Meets the Risen Jesus

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

Excerpt from *Magdalene* by Marie Howe

When Moses pleaded, and Yaweh agreed at last to let the people  
hear His voice  
it's said that he allowed each person to hear what each could bear  
to the very brim of that and no more.  
Afterwards the people said, Please Moses, from now on you listen.  
We don't want to hear it. You do the talking and listening now.  
Being with the teacher was a little like that  
as though he were a book too difficult to read.  
So, I thought I had to become more than I was, more than I'd been.  
but that wasn't it. It seemed rather that  
something had to go. Something had to be let go of.  
It wasn't that I saw something new — or saw suddenly into him,  
not that, not ever  
but that the room itself, whatever room we might be standing in,  
assumed an astonishing clarity:  
and all the things in the room: a table, a cup, a meowing cat.

## Practice This Week: Visio Divina

*Mary Magdalene is the first one to see the resurrected Christ. For this week's practice, we invite you to spend some time with Mary Magdalene in prayer and imagine what it must have been like to encounter the Risen Christ.*

(NOTE: For an optional theological reading on Jesus' appearing to Mary Magdalene, see the end of this booklet.)

Visio Divina (Latin for "divine seeing") is a method for praying with images or other media[...]It invites us to see at a more contemplative pace. It invites us to *see* all there is to see, exploring the entirety of the image. It invites us to see deeply, beyond first and second impressions, below initial ideas, judgments, or understandings. It invites us to be seen, addressed, surprised, and transformed by God who is never limited or tied to any image, but speaks through them.<sup>1</sup>

STEP 1: To begin, choose one of the following images of Mary Magdalene that speaks to you. Don't give it too much thought, just whatever one you feel most drawn to. Have the image pulled up on your computer (or printed out).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2009/07/praying-with-art-visio-divina>



<https://www.barberinicorsini.org/en/opera/saint-mary-magdalene/>



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander\\_Ivanov\\_-\\_Christ%27s\\_Appearance\\_to\\_Mary\\_Magdalene\\_after\\_the\\_Resurrection\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Ivanov_-_Christ%27s_Appearance_to_Mary_Magdalene_after_the_Resurrection_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)





<https://faithandleadership.com/gretchen-e-ziegenhals-mary-magdalenes-perspective-reflecting-resurrection>

STEP 2: Close your eyes, breathe, clear your mind, and ask God to enter into this time of prayer with you. Ask God to speak to you through this image.

STEP 3: Slowly read over the scripture passage John 20:11-18.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ 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.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

STEP 4: Then read the passage again, imagining yourself in the scene. Perhaps you are in the role of Mary, one of the angels, a disciple, the tomb. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch? Slowly

watch the scene unfold before you. What thoughts and emotions come to mind? What does Jesus want you to know in this moment?

After some time with the scripture passage, look at the image you've selected. Let your eyes pause and focus on the part of the image they're first drawn to. Spend a few moments here. Then gaze upon all of the image as you contemplate the person of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Christ. What do you notice in Mary's expression?

As your prayer deepens, open yourself to what the image might reveal to you. What does it and the Spirit want to say, evoke, make known, or express to you as you attend to it in quiet meditation? Become aware of the feelings, thoughts, desires, and meanings evoked by the image and how they are directly connected to your life.

Does it evoke for you important meanings or values, remind you of an important event or season, or suggest a new or different way of being? What desires and longings are evoked in your prayer? How do you find yourself wanting to respond to what you are experiencing? Take the time to respond to God in ways commensurate with your prayer: gratitude, supplication, wonder, lament, confession, dance, song, praise, etc.

STEP 5: In the remaining few minutes of your prayer with this image, bring to mind or jot down in a journal (whatever way is most helpful for you) the insights you want to remember, actions you are invited to take, wisdom you hope to embody, or any feelings or thoughts you wish to express. Bring your prayer to a close by resting in God's grace and love.<sup>2</sup>

OPTIONAL: If you'd like to take this prayer further, go outside and notice the world around you. Take a photo as an offering to God for what emerged in this time of prayer. As with the visio divina above, don't go searching too hard or with expectation or judgement—notice what your eye is drawn to and take a photo.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from

<https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2009/07/praying-with-art-visio-divina> and <https://www.prayerandpossibilities.com/pray-with-eyes-of-the-heart-visio-divina/>



*On the Way to Emmaus* by artist Janet Brooks Gerloff

## Week 2: The Road To Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24: 13-35)



## Practice This Week: Praying with Music OR Picture Book Reflection

After Christ breaks bread with them, the disciples immediately recognize the Lord they'd come to know and love. It is only upon reflection after the fact that the disciples are able to recognize Christ had been walking with them all along that day: "Were not our hearts burning within us?" they say to one another, "while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

*For this week's practice, we invite you to contemplate moments when, like the disciples, your heart was "burning within."*

### **Practice Option 1: Praying with Music**

(Note: For this practice, you will want to have speakers and your phone or computer nearby to play a song.)

STEP 1: Get into a comfortable seated position or lie down on the floor. Spend some time settling into prayer with the following intention: *I ask God to reveal God's love and abundance in my life in this moment.*

STEP 2: Then listen to the following composition. The lyrics and music describe a perfect summer night full of God's warmth, abundance and kindness. Let go of any expectations or searching for meaning, and simply let the music wash over you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyH9epNNx4g>

STEP 3: After you listen to the music, notice what thoughts, emotions, memories, or sensations arise. Just be with whatever experience comes up for you, trusting that God is guiding this time in prayer.

After several moments, you may bring to prayer the following questions: *Where do I notice God's love for me in my life right now? When have I felt my heart "burning within" as the disciples felt on the road to Emmaus?*

STEP 4: Take some time to write down (as a kind of extended conversation with God) what emerged for you during this time of prayer—the images, memories, insights, feelings, etc.

STEP 5: Close with a gesture of gratitude for this time with God and what has been revealed.

## Practice Option 2: Reflecting with a Picture Book

(Note: This option is suitable for children. You will need a computer, or a hard copy of the book if you can find one, for this exercise.)

*The Red Leaf by Shaun Tan is a beautiful picture book that depicts a nameless young girl as she passes through many dark scenes, only to find something hopeful at the end of the journey. If reading with children (or on your own), read the book twice. A digital copy of the book can be found [HERE](#).*

FIRST READING: On the first read, just notice the images and text, pausing to discuss the following questions on certain pages (feel free to add your own):

What do you notice in the pictures?

How do the images make you feel?

How do you think the little girl is feeling on this page? Why do you think she is feeling this? What do you think is happening in her life to make her feel this way?

Can you think of a time in your life when you felt like the little girl?

How does the red tree at the end of the book make you feel? What does it mean to you?

SECOND READING: Before reading the book a second time, let the children know that there is a surprise red leaf hidden on each page, but you have to look really carefully to find it. Then go back and read the book again, lingering on each page to search for the red leaf. Discuss the following:

How does it feel when you find the red leaf? Discuss how it's easy to miss the red leaf if you're not looking for it, and how we have to be patient. Talk with kids about how we have to pay attention and look for God in order to find God in our lives.

Share a time where you found hope or joy when you least expected it.

Where is God in your life now? What is one moment from your life in the last few days that was like a red leaf?

OPTIONAL ART ACTIVITY: Have kids draw a red leaf and write down the "red leaf" moments inside the leaf. Or, take kids for a walk in the neighborhood to collect a few actual red leaves. Then, with permanent marker or paint pens, have kids write their own "red leaf" moments directly onto the leaf. Hang somewhere visible around the house as a reminder to search for God in our midst.

# Week 3: Jesus Appears to the Disciples in Jerusalem

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

(John 20:19-23)

## Practice This Week: Praying with Scriptures

For this week's practice, we turn to St. Ignatius of Loyola, who was a 16th century Spanish priest, theologian, and mystic. His early life was marked by desire for military exercises and fame, however, after getting hit in the leg with a cannonball while serving in the Spanish military, he was confined to bed to heal. There, in the hospital, with only religious books around, he discovered stories about Jesus and the saints. His conversion took many years, but slowly, he devoted his whole being to following Christ. After leaving the hospital, he first walked to the northern part of Spain, called Catalonia, where he gave up his sword and military desires of fame, and instead dressed in sack clothes, became a beggar, and lived for some months in a cave where he is said to have prayed for seven hours a day. During this time he developed the basis of his Spiritual Exercises.

The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices that Ignatius developed to help people deepen their relationship with God. The Exercises are "divided into four thematic 'weeks' of variable length,...and designed to be carried out over a period of 28 to 30 days. They were composed with the intention of helping participants in religious retreats to discern the will of God in their lives, leading to a personal commitment to follow Jesus whatever the cost." A significant component of Ignatius's Exercises is the act of "praying the scriptures." This exercise is not some kind of mystical prayer but a prayer form in which one uses his or her senses in an imaginative way to make the Gospel scene real and alive.



### THE PRACTICE:<sup>3</sup>

Select a passage from one of the Gospels in which Jesus is interacting with others. In this case reflect, upon John 20:19-23.

1. Read the Gospel passage twice aloud so that the story and the details of the story become familiar.
2. Take five minutes, close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination. Imagine yourself as a main character or even a simple bystander in the passage. See what is going on and watch the men and women in the scene. What does Jesus look like? How do the others react to him? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words? Engage your senses: what do you feel, smell, taste and touch?
3. After the five minutes, write down or name aloud what you experienced. What was your point of view? What did you witness? What did you feel, smell, taste and/or touch? Did this exercise change the way you thought about this passage? Did it change the way you thought about the disciples or Jesus?
4. Close with a prayer, naming specifically the ways in which you encountered Christ and the scriptures with more clarity.

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<sup>3</sup> From "The Praying Life" by Deborah Smith Douglas, and "Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book."



*Thomas the Doubting with Figures* by artist Ivan Valchev

# Week 4: Jesus Strengthens the Faith of Thomas

*Please give me time to decipher the signs  
Please forgive me for time that I've wasted*

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:24-29)

## Practice this Week: Listen & Reflect

[Give this song a listen.](#) (I [Emily] especially like this particular video because it was filmed live at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival this past October, back when we could gather, and cram together in spaces, and breathe the same air. Note that the song doesn't start until 1:27.) Then reflect on the questions below.

*What will be left when I've drawn my last breath?  
Besides the folks I've met and the folks who know me  
Will I discover a soul-saving love or just the dirt above and below me?*

*I'm a doubting Thomas  
I took a promise  
But I do not feel safe  
Oh me of little faith*

*Sometimes I pray for a slap in the face  
Then I beg to be spared cause I'm a coward  
If there's a master of death  
I bet he's holding his breath  
As I show the blind and tell the deaf about his power*

*I'm a doubting Thomas  
I can't keep my promises  
Cause I don't know what's safe  
Oh me of little faith*

*Can I be used to help others find truth?  
When I'm scared I'll find proof that it's a lie  
Can I be led down a trail dropping bread crumbs?  
To prove I'm not ready to die*

*Please give me time to decipher the signs  
Please forgive me for time that I've wasted*

*I'm a doubting Thomas  
I'll take your promise  
Though I know nothing's safe  
Oh me of little faith  
Oh me of little faith*



## FOR REFLECTION:

Reflect this week on doubt and on the nature of your own doubt. Perhaps take a few minutes to journal your answers to these questions. In your moments of doubt, where do you go? What pulls you out? When have you “seen” Jesus so that you believed? How do you proceed when you don’t feel safe? This song ends with the main character taking the promise in spite of their feelings of safety—what promise are you being asked to take right now? What risks are you being asked to take right now? Where are you being called to trust?



*Credit: Swanson, John August. The Great Catch, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.*

# Week 5: Jesus Forgives Peter and Commands Him to Feed His Sheep

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

—John 21:1-19

## Practice this Week: Charting Your Prayer Life

*“These days, by the grace of God, my prayer has changed. I pray these days with much less conviction of my own importance in setting an agenda for God’s busy day, and much more of an awestruck sense of great privilege of simply participating in God’s eternal love, letting it shine through my life as unobstructed as possible, like sunlight through clear glass ... Consequently, my prayers of intercessory are much more trusting and quiet, much less insistently partisan and vocal than they once were. When I remember before God the pain of the world, I am less concerned with verbal eloquence than I used to be, much less implicitly sure that my job in prayer is somehow to change God’s mind.”*

Deborah Smith Douglas is an Ignatian-trained spiritual director, Camaldolese Benedictine oblate, member of the Episcopal Church and of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross, she has taught classes and led retreats across the United States and Britain. A lawyer by trade, Douglas was raised in the Presbyterian Church in a Mennonite community in central Kansas, and spent summers with Lutheran and Baptist grandparents. In college, she began attending Episcopal services and reading Catholic and Jewish theology.

### THE PRACTICE:<sup>4</sup>

In Deborah Smith Douglas’ book, “The Praying Life,” Douglas reflects on the age-old question, “How is your prayer life?” For Douglas, that question implies change. It implies the dynamic nature of our prayer lives. Our prayer lives change, grow (or shrink), and they develop in response to changing circumstances.

For Douglas, the question is an opportunity to imagine her prayer life from an aerial viewpoint, “a chance to look back and see the riparian loops and bends, shallow places and rapids, the floodplains and dams” of her prayer life. “It is all the same river,” Douglas writes. “The continuity, so often hidden in the small view of daily life, is revealed. And my river, while sometimes dallying in near-stagnation, sometimes choked by debris, sometimes even appearing to flow backward, continues stubbornly to seek the sea.”

The past months, some seismic shifts have taken place in our society as a whole. Have these events affected the way you pray? Perhaps like the disciples in the reading, while once your nets were empty, perhaps those nets are now full? Or Maybe where once your nets were full, there now seems to be nothing? Are you finding it hard to recognize the Risen Christ in front of you?

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from “The Praying Life” by Deborah Smith Douglas

Take this opportunity to reflect on how your prayer life has changed both before and after this pandemic began. How does it relate to the emotions of the disciples in the passage above? Look gently, without judgment. We are in uncharted territory and there is no “correct” way to be amidst such anxiety. After reflecting, take 5-10 minutes to reflect on what you would hope for your prayer life in the weeks ahead. Keeping Brown’s tributary theme in mind, will this be a time for white-water rapids? Or will this be a time of placid flow for the body of water that is your one unique and precious life of prayer?



# Additional Reading

## Week 2: Mary Magdalene Meets the Risen Jesus

*Sermon delivered at Wadham College, Oxford, on the 21st of April 2018 by Rose Lyddon*

When we first meet Mary Magdalene, she has just been released from possession by seven demons. Possession seems like something which can't have relevance to us, so far is it from our frame of reference, but if we understand this state as a profound alienation from the self, we can come closer to apprehending it. It suggests loss of control over one's life, a state of chaos in which one's actions don't feel like one's own. And who among us doesn't know something of this state: who hasn't done things which feel profoundly disconnected from who we are or who we want to be, and asked ourselves in confusion, "Why am I doing this? Why can't I stop?"

But on meeting Jesus, Mary is released from her demons. Her life changes completely. She and other women who have been healed follow him, abandoning their homes, families, safety and security to be with him. This was a much greater risk for women than it was for men, and yet the Gospel tells us that there were many women following Jesus as he wandered around first century Judea, even supporting his ministry from their own means. Something had happened to them which made giving up everything they had in the world worth it.

The next time we meet Mary Magdalene she is at the foot of the cross. At this point, the disciples have abandoned Jesus. Peter has denied knowing him and has fled. But among those gathered beneath his dying body are the women whom he has healed, whose lives have been utterly transformed by their meeting with him.

Imagine, for a moment, how they might have felt. This force, having come into their lives so briefly and changed it so completely, was about to be removed. Did Mary Magdalene wonder whether the healing she had experienced would be taken away? Whether she would be cast back to the demons?

The nature of the crucifixion and all the devotion attached to it is deep, heartbreaking loss, but also dread: we can imagine his followers asking themselves, "Where do we go from here? Who will we be after this?" The crucifixion is not a quiet grief but a confusion that goes grappling in the dark.

But Mary doesn't go away. She accompanies Christ's broken body to the tomb, and on the Sabbath she returns at dawn: some of the Gospels have her with other women, carrying spiced oils to anoint his body, and others have her alone, as in the reading from John we heard earlier.

At first, she doesn't recognise him: and then he calls her by her name and suddenly she does, and she reaches out, desperate, crying "teacher." And he tells her: do not hold onto me. Jerome translated these words as *noli me tangere*, do not touch me. But the original Greek speaks of continual action. He's telling her that she no longer needs to cling to him, because he is always with her.

In this line is the essence of what the resurrection means, then and now and for all time. What Jesus is saying is: you're safe. I'm not going away. The healing that I have given you won't be taken away.

The promise of the resurrection is not that fear and suffering will cease, but that we will be kept safe throughout it by the love of God who is risen from death and eternally alive. The promise is that sin — which should be understood as everything which separates us from ourselves, which is the state of alienation signified by the seven demons — no longer has dominion over us. Neither Mary Magdalene's demons nor ours can hold us in the face of a love which will never abandon us. As our reading from Paul says, there is no longer anything that can separate us from the love of God.

Rowan Williams writes that, "You have an identity not because you have invented one, or because you have a little hard core of selfhood that is unchanged, but because you have a witness of who you are. What you don't understand or see, the bits of yourself you can't pull together in a convincing story, are all held in a single gaze of love."

It is significant that in our reading from John's Gospel, Mary doesn't recognise Christ until he speaks her name. This is a moment of recognition that goes both ways: Mary recognises herself, and in this she recognises God. The vision of selfhood articulated here is not one of self-definition, or trying to pin down some static version of ourselves which makes us resistant to change, but of responsiveness.

We are not made whole, suddenly; we remain fragmentary. But we, like Mary Magdalene, are taken on a journey with a companion who refuses to leave, who holds us in his love. And on this journey we are repeatedly transformed, repeatedly called to become more ourselves. Love slowly dissolves all that separates us from God — and in letting ourselves be continually and radically transformed by love, we become by degrees who we are called to be.

### Week 3: Jesus Appears to the Disciples in Jerusalem

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