

SOME WOMEN OF OUR GROUP ASTOUNDED US!

I love this long Scripture passage for a variety of reasons. It is a great story, rich in detail, very human and with at least some humor in it. Humor? Do you remember laughing anywhere while it was being read? Of course not. The humor comes after you do some mulling. For example, the two disappointed and dejected disciples are leaving Jerusalem. They are crestfallen, stricken, perhaps even shattered. They are so into their own selves and their own grief that Jesus himself approaches and they don't even recognize him. He asks them some questions to draw them out. And as they tell their tale they say, "And this very day some women of our group have astounded us!" That's the funny part. Funny? Well, it's the way they say it and their reaction to it. They speak of how the women astound them as if that has never happened before. Whereas we all know that that is something that men experience from women on a regular basis. I just think it's kind of quaint, a tad humorous and pretty common.

And their reaction to what the women said? Well, they are leaving Jerusalem aren't they? Doesn't really sound like they believed what the women said. But as it turns out the women were right on and these disciples will come to know that and then they too will proclaim that Jesus is risen because they experienced him as risen themselves! But this little wordplay raises a deeper question for me. Given the apostles' relationship with Jesus as the Twelve, the new Israel, why would Jesus not appear to one of them first? Why not to his mother? Why to Mary Magdalen? Why specifically to a woman and why specifically to this woman? She is someone out of whom he had cast seven demons. Demons had hold of her. Jesus set her free—completely. She was a different woman, a different person. Her love for Him and for what He did for her knows no bounds. She's the last to leave the tomb where they bury him and the first to arrive early that Sunday morning. Love does that.

But there is more going on. This is the beginning of the new creation. Remember in the original creation when our first parents sinned they were expelled from the garden. No access to the tree of life. Death followed—and more sin. Eve had been deceived by the serpent. She in turn went to Adam and she deceived him. They both ate the fruit that the Lord had not given them to eat. Both reached out and took what had not been offered. Eve's sin leads to Adam's sin. Adam's sin leads to death.

But for the new creation God chooses another woman, Mary of Nazareth to right the wrong. Mary speaks her trusting Yes to God's angel and the new creation begins. She conceives God's only begotten Son and gives birth to the One who will become the new Adam. Now that Jesus has fulfilled his mission by preaching, healing, teaching, restoring, suffering and dying and now rising, who will grasp this? Who will spread the message? The opportunity will be given to woman first. Mary Magdalen, a great sinner but forgiven and set free, becomes a stand in for the sinful Eve. Mary of Nazareth cannot fulfill this role. Precisely because she is the sinless one. It is for a woman who knew sin to be the first to grasp, to experience the risen Lord, to make her own profession of faith. It is for such a woman to be tasked with the mission of announcing the Good News of resurrection and thus salvation, to the men. The one who had brought a deceiving message that led to death is replaced by another who is free from sin and now embraces her Lord in love and runs to tell everyone what she has seen and heard. A truthful message that leads to life.

The deceiving word that led to death came through a woman. The restorative and healing and transforming word is to come through a woman so that the new creation might unfold. Mary Magdalen is acting like a true apostle as she does this. She is the apostle to the apostles. That is why she is there at

Calvary, there with Jesus' mother and there at his tomb on Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalen is a key player in those early days of the resurrection. She was the first to recognize the Lord as risen. When she would gather with the others and they would be in the Upper Room doing what Jesus had told them to do—in memory of Him—she helped them all to grow in their belief that He is risen and that He does abide with them and that they will recognize Him as present in the breaking of the bread.

We will break bread here very soon. You will see me hold up the large host and break it in half and then again into two smaller pieces. In that moment you will make your own public profession of faith. “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world, blessed are those who are called to the Supper of the Lamb.” And we will say what the Centurion said: “O Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” And then we will receive Eucharist, and we will enter into communion and WE will come to recognize Him in our midst in the 21st century in Ambler, as his other disciples did all those years ago. It is the same reality. Notice that only one of the two disciples is named. Clopas. Who is the other disciple? Why--it's you. Just add your name.