

Encounters: Mary Magdalene

John 20:1-18

3/26/23

Discussion Guide

Preparation Discuss this question: What is real faith?

Passage

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" John 20:1-18

So what do we learn about faith from this encounter with Jesus?

1. Despite the fact that Jesus warned them numerous times of his impending death and resurrection three days later, when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, saw the stone rolled away, the body gone and the linens neatly folded and placed on the stone slab where Jesus laid, she concluded: "They've taken the body!" (vs. 2) Why do you think that was?

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2. Scripture says there an inherent spiritual blindness within every human being. Is that true and have you ever experienced it?
3. How can we help the spiritually blind to see?
4. What emotional and psychological reasons do people have to disbelieve in God?
5. Thomas Nagel, a prominent American philosopher, in his book, "*Last Word*," expressed his vested interest in God not existing:

"I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition. I don't know anyone who is genuinely indifferent to whether there is a God."

Do you think a majority of people feel the way he does? What other vested interests do people have to disbelieve in Jesus?

6. Do you know anyone who prayed a prayer similar to this one and it worked? "*God, I don't know if you are there but I do know what prejudice is like, and I am willing to be suspicious of my own prejudices. Lord, help me break through those hang-ups I have so I can see you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*" Is this a potential tool for evangelism?
7. Talk about this statement: "*While faith is much more than being rational, it is certainly not less than rational.*" Is there a rational element to faith or is it a blind leap of faith?
8. What evidence is there in Mary's encounter with Jesus that the resurrection accounts are real and not made up?
9. Can reason alone or evidence alone produce faith? If not, then why bother with the evidence for the resurrection and the claims of Jesus? Why bother with apologetics period? Can't we just take the Gospel accounts for their word and believe?
10. Has faith become personal for you? When did that happen and how?
11. Do you tend to emphasize the anger of God, the harshness of God, the judgement of God or the tenderness of God? Are there parts of the church body that emphasize one over the other?
12. The only way Mary found Jesus and the only way we will is by him seeking us out. He comes to her, gently opens her heart to faith, and then breaks through with a personal address. Has he done the same in your life?
13. What do think about Pastor Richard's contention that we have an advantage over those who merely knew Jesus as a person while walking on earth: "They only

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knew him externally; we can know him internally?" Have you thought that as being an advantage over those who saw him personally?