

**March 23, 2008**  
**Matthew 28:1-10, Acts 10:34-43**  
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**The Other Mary**

We know something about Mary Magdalene, but who is this other Mary? According to Matthew, these two women are the first witnesses to the resurrection.

These are among the group of women who follow Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem and who minister to his needs. They are witnesses to everything Jesus has said and done: his teaching, his healing, his miracles, his moments apart, his betrayal, his laughter and his tears. They are a part of a larger group of women who, after the other disciples flee, witness the crucifixion. They watch Joseph of Arimathea take the broken and bloodied body of Jesus, wrap it in a clean linen cloth and place it in his own new tomb. They see the great stone being placed at the entrance of the tomb; they watch the guards seal the tomb to insure no one comes to steal the body. Having seen where he is buried, they come at dawn to mourn.

They are totally unprepared for what they experience: an earthquake shakes the earth; an angel descends from heaven; the stone is rolled back; an angel sits upon the stone; the tomb is empty. The terrified guards collapse in fear; the frightened women manage to keep their wits. The angel tells them the Easter message: "Do not be afraid. He is not among the dead. He is risen. He has gone ahead of the disciples to Galilee where they will see him." As Mary Magdalene and the other Mary run in fear and joy to tell the disciples, they meet the Risen Lord. Jesus also tells them not to be afraid, but to tell the others that he will meet them in Galilee.

Out of all the people God could choose to be the first witnesses to the resurrection, God chooses Mary Magdalene and this other Mary. If you want to get an important message across to people or convince them that something is true, you want to find the most reliable witnesses you can get. Yet, God chooses two women at that time when the testimony of women did not even hold up in a religious court. Of course, this was not a court case, but it could have been. (Was the body stolen or not? The guards passed out. Their testimony is useless. Tell us, what did you see?)

Why are these particular women chosen? The Christian tradition has not been kind to Mary Magdalene. She has been seen as an immoral woman of the streets. Who would believe the testimony of such a person? Yet, the tradition doesn't match the Biblical witness. Mary Magdalene is not a woman of questionable morals with a bad reputation. According to Luke, Jesus heals her of a severe physical or mental illness by casting out "seven demons (8:2)." Apparently, she is one of the most well-known and respected leaders among the women who follow Jesus and the disciples.

Who is this "other Mary?" The New Testament mentions as many as seven women who bear the name Mary. This "other Mary" cannot be Mary Magdalene, since they were together. Is she perhaps Mary the mother of Jesus? Earlier in Matthew's gospel, the mother of Jesus is spoken of as having other sons named James and Joses, Simon and Judas. According to Matthew, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, is one of the women who watch the crucifixion of Jesus. Are these women the same? Mary Magdalene and this "other Mary" watch Jesus being placed in the tomb. If she is the mother of Jesus, why doesn't Matthew simply tell us? He doesn't. There is also Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha, but this "other Mary" does not seem to be Mary of Bethany. According to John, Mary, the wife of Clopas, stands at the cross with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. There is also Mary of Jerusalem, in whose home the early church meets. The question is made more complicated because the different gospel writers speak of each Mary in a different way. By the time we try to figure out which Mary is which, we end up scratching our heads in puzzlement.

We can't say for certain who this Mary is. Maybe that is the point. It doesn't matter. What matters is that these women are faithful witnesses to all that Jesus says and does. They follow him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They help in whatever way they can. They provide for the needs of the community. Over the course of his ministry, their lives are transformed by Jesus. When the other disciples flee, they stay to watch the crucifixion, not out of some morbid curiosity but, rather, out of

love. When Joseph of Arimathea takes the body of Jesus, wraps it in clean linen cloth and places it in his own tomb, they watch. Then, that first Easter morning, they go to the tomb as soon as they can see the path.

We don't know who she is, but she and Mary Magdalene take the astonishing news of Easter to the disciples. The disciples believe the women and go to Galilee, where they meet Jesus. Mary Magdalene and this woman, simply described as "the other Mary" are the vital link in the spread of the gospel.

You and I are like this other Mary. We walk with Jesus or rather, I should say, Jesus walks with us throughout our lives. We meet him in classrooms, in hospital corridors, schools, coffee shops, homes and offices. We sit with him and listen to his teaching. We watch him heal and restore lives. We see him weep with us at the evil, sadness and brutality of life. We care for one another in his name and we reach out to those who have no one else but Jesus to care for them. We see how the world still denies him and persecutes his children. We know his power in our own lives: leading us from bitterness to love, from sin to grace, from selfishness to generosity and from death to life. Sometimes, we come face to face with the Risen Lord and we do not even know it.

Now Jesus comes to us to tell us not to be afraid, but to go and tell others that he lives. Wherever we go, he is always out there ahead of us. We are ordinary people to whom God has entrusted extraordinary news. We are his witnesses.

Peter is one of those witnesses. Our Scripture from the Book of Acts describes how Peter bears witness to the crowd that gathers in the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius in Caesarea. He tells of all that God has done through Jesus. Peter is not a trained speaker; he is not a scholar; he is a fisherman. Yet, he follows Jesus. Even when he falls flat on his face, Jesus forgives him, fills him with his Spirit and sends him out to be his witness. He is willing to go somewhere he doesn't particularly want to go to meet Gentiles he was always taught to avoid. When he arrives, Peter says, "We are witnesses to all that Jesus did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses (10:39-42)."

We are ordinary people who have come to new life through the resurrection of Jesus. God chooses us, because the most reliable witnesses are those who experience in their own lives the truth of what they say. Paul says in II Corinthians, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us (4:7)." Each one of us has a role to play, a witness to make, a service to render and a story to tell. Yes, we are like the other Mary; we tell what we know and what we have experienced.

On Maundy Thursday, we remembered the events of the last night in the life of Jesus. We celebrated the Lord's Supper. We followed him into the garden; we witnessed his arrest, trial and beating. We heard the crowds cry, "Crucify him." We followed him as he bore his heavy cross to Calvary. We listened in disbelief to his crucifixion. We sat in stunned silence at his death. In the semi-darkness, twelve of our elders read the story of Christ's passion. One by one, they extinguished the candles until we sat in total darkness. As they read, I closed my eyes and listened to them bear witness to the gospel. Each one of them had a distinct voice and a particular way of reading. You might say I heard the story of Jesus filtered through their voices - which told their own stories. I listened to their voice and thought of their lives as devoted caregivers, good friends, talented business leaders, volunteers, small group leaders, providers of hospitality, teachers, parents, community organizers and servants of Christ. When we have met Jesus, our lives make quite a witness. We don't have to talk about things we have never seen, heard or experienced. All we have to do is tell what we know to be true for us: how Jesus helped us deal with cancer, opened our hearts to strangers, led us to mentor prisoners, put our marriage back together, took away our fear, showed us how to forgive, gave us hope in the face of death or taught us how to trust God.

There are two things that make Easter so remarkable. First and foremost, God raised Jesus from the dead to vindicate everything that Jesus said and did. His word is true and can be trusted. All the evil of the world cannot destroy him, nor can death contain him. In his resurrection we find our life. The second remarkable truth of Easter is this: God chooses ordinary people like you and me, who have come to know the Risen Lord, to be his witnesses. Tell what the Lord has done and is doing in your life. Easter is here. He is risen. The word is just beginning to spread.