



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

## **Grow. Pray, Study for the Week of February 18, 2024**

### **Weekly Prayer**

Holy God, touch me with the power and assurance of the early disciples, as they shared and lived the Good News. Empower me to be your hands and feet in this world. Remind me that many are hungry, many are homeless, many are lonely, without friends or fellowship. Remind me of the many in need and show me ways to offer life and hope and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Monday, February 19**

#### **Scripture: John 20:1-10**

Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

#### **Observation**

Very early on Sunday, Mary, Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" found Jesus' tomb empty. Notice her first report: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." We'll see this week that the gospels made it plain that none of the disciples were waiting hopefully for Jesus to rise from the dead. Mary simply wondered if "they" (grave robbers? the authorities?) had taken Jesus' body.

#### **Application**

Mary went to the tomb "while it was still dark." She didn't expect to find Jesus alive, but she was eager to care for his body as soon as possible to express her devotion. (The

Jewish laws Jesus had challenged forbade that work on the Sabbath.) How can you nurture a desire to go to Jesus first, even in times of darkness or discouragement?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, when Mary first found the tomb empty, what had happened there went stunningly beyond her imagination. Open my heart and mind to trust in the unimaginably good news of the empty tomb. Amen.

## **Tuesday, February 20**

### **Scripture: John 20:11-18**

Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means *Teacher*). Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

### **Observation**

Mary thought Jesus was "the gardener." In symbol, he was — Adam failed in the first garden (Genesis 3), but Jesus (the "second Adam") would tend earth's "garden" well (Romans 5:15-21). Mary didn't recognize Jesus by sight, but it seems his beloved voice, the way he said her name, was unmistakable. Then Jesus sent Mary as the very first eyewitness to the risen Christ.

### **Application**

Mary knew Jesus' voice. She had listened carefully to what he said. (Unlike most Jewish rabbis in his day, Jesus taught women as well as men — Luke 10:38-42). How can you come to know the "sound" of Jesus' voice? What practices and choices can make your relationship with Jesus personal, a link between your heart and his?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, for Mary just the sound of your voice saying her name turned darkness to light, despair to joy, in a flash. Give me ears to hear the ways that you call me by name. Amen.

## **Wednesday, February 21**

### **Scripture: Mark 16:1-8**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

### **Observation**

The oldest manuscripts we have of Mark's gospel end at 16:8. Some later manuscripts contain either a short or a longer ending (reflected in the footnotes in many English Bibles). We don't know if the abrupt ending was Mark's intention or reflects an interruption or loss of what he wrote. But even as it stands, verse 6 said Mary and her companions had heard the good news: "He has been raised."

### **Application**

Mark's ending makes some people wonder if we can trust the gospels. Author Phillip Yancey said such passages actually point toward the gospels' honesty: "Accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb sound breathless and fragmentary .... the early reports seem wispy, mysterious, confused. Surely conspirators could have done a neater job of depicting what they would later claim to be the hinge event of history." How is the way you live your daily life shaped by whether you find the gospels essentially credible?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, the most loving thing the women could think of to do was to complete your burial. But you had so much more in store for them — and for me. Lead me on to a life lived in the light of your resurrected life. Amen.

## **Thursday, February 22**

### **Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10**

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. Look, there was a great earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven. Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it. Now his face was like lightning and his clothes as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn't here,

because he's been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' I've given the message to you." With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. But Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there."

### **Observation**

Having set down Jesus' prediction that he would rise after three days (Matthew 16:21), we might expect Matthew to say, "So on the third day the disciples gathered, eager to greet the risen Lord." Not even close! He said, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb." These very real women he wrote about felt "great fear and excitement," a reaction much like most of us would have to an unexpected encounter with the supernatural.

### **Application**

All four gospels said women, led by Mary Magdalene, were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a convincing story about people seeing Jesus, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene." What does Jesus' trust in Mary to share the good news of Easter tell you about how Jesus saw the value of both women and men in his new creation?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you called your first followers, and now me as I follow in their footsteps, to a great adventure. Help me be honest about both the great fear and the excitement your call creates. Help me conquer my fear and follow you. Amen.

## **Friday, February 23**

### **Scripture: Luke 24:1-12**

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the

tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

### **Observation**

Even Jesus' death didn't dim the women's loyalty. They returned to his tomb "very early in the morning on the first day of the week." They didn't find his body, but did find two men in gleaming clothes who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here but has been raised." They reported this to the eleven, and again we see the bluntly honest way the gospels reported what happened. "Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women."

### **Application**

These accounts make it clear that no one expected to see Jesus alive that Sunday. They were gripped by preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would be and do, and of what death meant. In what ways can preconceived ideas make it harder for you to trust the Bible's testimony? When have you found greater joy and peace after letting God overturn some fixed idea of yours?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, whatever else your disciples were, they were not gullible and naïve. It took a lot to convince them you were alive again—but once convinced, not one of them ever gave up their faith. Give me a steadfast heart like theirs. Amen.

## **Saturday, February 24**

### **Scripture: Luke 8:1-3**

Soon afterward, Jesus traveled through the cities and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. The Twelve were with him, along with some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. Among them were Mary Magdalene (from whom seven demons had been thrown out), Joanna (the wife of Herod's servant Chuza), Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

### **Observation**

Mary Magdalene has come to play such a large role in speculative popular fiction about Jesus that it's a bit of a surprise to see how relatively small (yet vital) a role she played in the gospels. Luke 8 is the only mention of her name before Jesus' cross and resurrection. It was extremely brief, yet it showed that she had good reason to become one of Jesus' deeply committed disciples.

### **Application**

At times, as in this reading, the gospels give almost no details. When they do, the details may differ, and we wonder which is most accurate. But on the big story, they all agree. Pastor Frederick Buechner wrote, "When Jesus came, the whole course of history was changed. That is a fact as hard and blunt as any fact ... all the way down the twenty

centuries since [Jesus' life,] there have been countless different kinds of people who in countless different kinds of ways ... have been grasped by him, caught up into his life ...in this man, there is the power of God to bring light into our darkness, to make us whole, to give a new kind of life to anybody who turns toward him in faith, even to such as you and me." Jesus changed Mary Magdalene's life for the better. In what ways has he changed your life? How will you remain open to let him continue changing your life for the better?

**Prayer**

Dear Jesus, Easter was not a one-day event — it changed everything, for all time. Let it continue to shape and change me, and my world, for the better. Amen.