



Week 1 – Mary Magdalene

Check-in

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... since this is our first time meeting after Easter, confession time, how much Easter candy did you eat? How much is left? Be honest, you're among friends, (with no judgment, because they did the same thing.

Opening Prayer

Resurrected Christ, live within us.

Change our hearts. Impact our lives.

Introduction

Have you ever sat through the entire credits of a movie to see a “post-credits scene”? This is a trend that has become quite popular in modern cinema, thanks to the Marvel movie franchise, who has perfected it with shawarma-eating superheroes & dancing baby Groots. (Google these if you haven't seen them... it's worth it.) The industry calls these post-credits scenes “stingers.” But the history of

these scenes goes back a lot farther than Ironman. In fact, “stingers” have been a literary device for millennia, even used by the authors of the books of the Bible... including the story of Easter. See, after the story of the resurrection, we like to skip to whatever is next. Jesus dies, is laid in the tomb, conquers death, and three days later is raised from the dead. The tomb is empty, Jesus is alive, fade to black, roll the credits...let’s all go eat chocolate eggs. And when we get to the Sunday following Easter, all the half-price candy is gone, the peeps are crusty, and in worship gatherings, we move on to a new series with new topics. But the “stingers” to the Easter story are incredibly meaningful, and if we skip them, we miss the power of the resurrection and the impact the risen Christ had on his disciples. So, for this series, we’ll look at these “post-credits scenes,” and how they turned Jesus’s followers into world-changing apostles.

Warm-up Question: Have you ever sat through the entire credits of a movie to see “post-credits scene”? What was the first one you can remember? What’s your favorite?

Series Setup

Stingers are sometimes used for comedic effect, (*a la* Ferris Bueller.) But most often, they are used as a way to set up the next film in a franchise and get the viewer interested in what’s coming next. In horror films, it’s the hand of the killer coming up out of the grave. In superhero movies, it’s the shadowy figure of the villain the heroes will face in the next film. But in every case, the idea is to show the impact of what the characters went through and to pique your interest for

what comes next. In all four accounts of Jesus's life in the Bible, there's something that happens after the resurrection but before the book ends. These scenes act precisely as "stingers," showing the impact of what the characters just experienced and definitely set up what's coming next. See, it's easy to think that the disciples witnessed a risen Christ and immediately went out and started the first Christian communities. But consider the whiplash they must have felt. They thought Jesus would be Israel's Messiah who would free them from the Romans. But Jesus's ideas were a little bigger than that... he was an eternal savior who would save all of humanity. And so, Jesus's followers couldn't immediately go share this good news because they didn't understand the scope of it yet. But over the next 40 days between his resurrection and ascending into heaven, the disciples would begin to see just how big this *good news* was. In the stories we'll look at during this time, we'll see how these "stingers" would take Jesus's disciples from mere students to the world-altering apostles who would change humanity forever.

Question 1: Let's start where the disciples started on that Sunday morning so long ago. If you'd have been one of the disciples, hearing and seeing this incredible event, what would you have thought and felt? What does Easter mean to you? What does a resurrected Christ mean for your life?

Scripture

Without further ado, let's get to our first *stinger*. Here's your setup: a group of women had gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body with oils

and spices, as was the Jewish custom in the days following someone's death. But when they discovered the empty tomb, they ran back to tell the disciples. Hearing what the women had told them, Peter and John ran to the empty tomb to see for themselves. They saw the empty tomb and the grave clothes still lying inside, but they were not quite ready to believe yet. So the men leave, and we pick up our first stinger...

Read John, chapter 20, verses 11 to 19.

This stinger begs a few questions... namely, why her? Why is Mary Magdalene the first disciple to whom Jesus appears? To answer that, we first have to ask and answer the question, who is she? Well, we do know a bit about her. First, Magdalene is not her last name. Rather, she is *from* a town called Magdala. She is Mary *the* Magdalene. (Though, the disciples and Jesus may have called her "Magdalene" to differentiate her from the other Marys in the group... like you might call a friend from Houston, "Tex," if there are too many Matts in your circle. But... can you really have too many Matts in your circle? No, no you can't.) We also know how she and Jesus met. Magdala was near Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus began his ministry. And during this time of Jesus's ministry, we learn from the Bible that she was "the woman from whom Jesus had cast out 7 demons." (Luke 8:2) This changed her life so dramatically that she joined a group of women who became as devoted to Jesus as any of his disciples. So, we know her bio... from Magdala, healed by Jesus, disciple... but why was *she* so

important? Why did *she* receive the honor of being the first one to whom Jesus appeared? We'll get to that in a minute. But first...

Question 2: Talk about this scene. What strikes you about how it unfolds? What would you have thought were you in Mary's sandals, there at the tomb? What catches your attention as you witness this beautiful and powerful moment in Mary's life?

Reflection

So, why was she the first person to whom Jesus appeared on Easter? Well, the Bible never really says, but Pastor Mike gave us some speculation in this week's reflection: that is, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first because she never left him. Other than Jesus's mama, (who was there for everything, too,) Mary is probably Jesus's most devoted disciple. She's mentioned everywhere... by name or as part of this group of women. She was there during his ministry, his miracles, his teaching; She is mentioned *by name* as one of a few who was there at his crucifixion, who watched as he hung on the cross and died; She is mentioned *by name* as one of only a few who was there as he was taken down from the cross and buried in the tomb. His other disciples, the men, had deserted him. Their ranks had denied him, betrayed him, and abandoned him. But who was there every step of the way? His mama and Mary of Magdala. Pastor Mike suggested that she was the first one Jesus appeared to... because she deserved it. She never left him.

And yet, the power of this “post-credits scene” is truly in the *why... why* she never left him. And that’s simple: see, Jesus didn’t just change her life... Jesus *gave* her life. Whether she really was truly possessed, or whether Jesus healed her of medical disorders, for them to be attributed to demons back then, they had to be really bad. She had to be tormented day in and day out, probably battered and bruised and defeated, making her an outcast in society. So we can only imagine the desperation and loneliness she felt, the pain of worthlessness and hopelessness and brokenness she endured. We can almost picture this scene... a woman, at the end of her rope, desperate for anything to help her, looking up from her depths of suffering into the kind, loving eyes of Jesus... when he says, “Mary... you are worthy. You are loved. You are healed.” And so when Jesus healed her of these things, he gave her life.

And so, when we fast forward to today’s “stinger” and this beautiful Easter scene, Mary is slipping back into her brokenness. The man who had given her dignity and worth, who had given her life, is gone. And not only is he gone, she can’t even say goodbye properly now because his body isn’t there. And so, she turns to leave and sees a guy she thinks is the gardener. (Bible got jokes.) And through her tears, she doesn’t recognize him. But when he says her name, (read that again, that’s important... when he says her name,) “Mary,” she hears the calm, gentle voice of her Savior, recognizes Jesus, and her hope, her faith, her worth, her life is restored. That is power. That is life-changing. That is what turns mere students into devoted followers who change the world. That is the impact of the resurrected Christ.

Question 3: Mary's life would have looked vastly different had she never encountered Jesus. Instead, she found her worth in the healing power of her Savior, not once but twice. What has Jesus healed you from? How would your life look different, if you never encountered Jesus? Or, if this is something you're still exploring, what is a 'demon' you need to let Jesus heal you from? Share if you are comfortable. If not, let the group pray for what can remain unspoken.

Closing

Jesus our Savior, risen from the dead, has called your name, just as he did Mary. Will you recognize the risen Christ? Will you hear your name and be changed forever? Will you allow him to cast out your demons and give you healing? After this scene, Mary isn't mentioned again. She makes no appearance in Acts or the letters of the rest of the New Testament, so we don't know what happened to her. What we do know, though... is at the end of today's "stinger," Jesus entrusts her with the message to take to the other disciples. He gives *her* the role of carrying the message of the risen Christ to the others... making Mary Magdalene the first preacher of the good news of Jesus Christ. And she did. She shared this incredible news because of how life-changing her relationship with him had been and would continue to be. Will you find your worth and dignity in following him? Will you accept his gift of life, just as Mary did in those precious moments that Easter morning?

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.