

Sermon preached for the Feast of Mary Magdalene

St Just in Roseland & St Mawes, 22nd July 2018

Gospel of John 20.1-2,11-18

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

Mary went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

From the lips of Mary Magdalene, I think we have just heard the most perfect sermon ever preached. A woman directly commissioned by Christ preached the very first sermon of our faith. And she did it in just five words!

There were so many interesting things I wanted to tell you about Mary Magdalene today, but I have found myself meditating on those five words.

Underneath every sermon lie the depths of an iceberg and those five words are loaded with the details of the life Mary Magdalene had walked with her God. Each word chosen conveyed something of her faith and her extraordinary understanding of Christ.

I, have, seen, the, Lord.

I.

Look at the confidence with which Mary Magdalene says I.

She knows that this is her testimony. These are the words of a woman entrusted by Christ. She could have said simply 'Jesus is back', but she doesn't. She owns her statement. The voiceless woman found her voice.

Mary's I comes from a life transformed by her following Christ. Comes from a sacred friendship that transcended any social or patriarchal limitations placed upon her because of her gender. So much so that he now asks her directly to speak, to preach, to testify to him. And his confidence in her gives her the right to own those words.

I, Mary Magdelene, a woman liberated and loved by Christ.

A woman who hierarchy and patriarchy, look down upon.

I, a woman who church, art and history will treat very unfairly.

I, a woman, was asked by Christ to speak of what I saw.

Have.

Mary Magdalene's use of the word 'have' is an active word. Unlike 'had' have conveys the past *and* the present of her experience. It affirms the continuance of Christ, the same that we continue to believe. But Mary's *have* also proclaims her beholding of her experience.

Mary Magdalene says I *have* been in the presence of something incredible.

I have been changed by the mystery and tangibility of God who continues to walk on this earth. Have followed, have devoted, have loved Him with everything I have and still do so. I remained at his tomb because I refused to give up when everyone else did, and now, I have a Gospel to proclaim.

Seen

There is something powerful about seeing something with ones own eyes. Here Mary testifies not just to what she believes but to what she has seen. At a time when women were not seen as reliable witnesses, it is remarkable that she became the one to see all this. But maybe she could see because the eyes of her heart had been opened in love. A love so enduring that it kept her there long after everyone else had left.

And revealed to those very human eyes was the mystery of God.

Though dazed and confused by a miracle, those eyes witnessed the revelation of incarnation. They saw the eternal promise of hope made real in temporality.

I have seen, Mary announces, and bears her personal testimony to the invisible made visible. To life conquering death.

The.

Mary's use of the definite article places something specific and particular above all other possibilities. One gets the impression that Mary had long listened carefully to all that Christ had said about who he was and what was to happen. Maybe that's why she was the one

who remained waiting. In telling others, there could be no mistake, and Mary uses 'The' to make it clear. Nobody was to argue with this or with her.

Mary Magdalene had seen, risen from the dead, the only true Son of God. The only source of being. The only source of love. The wisdom of God in human form. The God who turns everything upside down and inside out, who transcends falsity and pride. The Christ who restores, heals, and calls. The one who began to build his church with the words of Mary's testimony.

Lord.

A word fraught with all sorts of modern baggage, but for Mary Magdalene, this is the divine Kyrie. By using Lord she places him in his rightful position. The King of humility, Master of charity, Teacher of compassion, Author of love.

She had seen him die, she had grieved his death, and there in the midst of her sadness and bewilderment, he had come back. And called her by her name. The one she had so carefully listened to, been heard by, been seen by, had kept his promise. Was there a sigh of relief as she realised that it was all true? And so, Mary Magdalene proclaims The Lord as the one who reorders the world and the human heart. Above all things yet in all things, beyond all things yet beside all things. He can't be clung to because he rises beyond human grasp and yet still dwells right there in human hearts.

Mary Magdalene, a woman sent by Christ, preached the most perfect sermon to the disciples. A sermon confidently and personally given. Delivered in her own heartfelt language but with no room left for misinterpretation. Her sermon pointed lovingly towards the risen Christ and left open the space for the second question 'have *you* seen the Lord?'

Today we keep the Feast of Mary Magdalene. We celebrate how the key Gospel message was first of all entrusted by Christ to the hands of a woman. Mary Magdalene, Apostle to the Apostles and preacher of the most perfect first sermon ever preached.

Mary went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

Amen