

Intimate Authority: Holy Week Meditations, 3

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Intimacy with Jesus made an ex-prostitute the bearer of the most important event in human history.

God entrusted a woman, not one of the 12, with Christ's resurrection. That's why the Roman Catholic Church names Mary Magdalene the 'Apostle of Apostles.'

Mary's surrender to Christ was marked by weeping and lingering, two earmarks of loving another with all one's heart. Such sustained intimacy gave Mary authority. Such reliance on Jesus gives us authority.

Mary's life also demonstrates how Jesus exchanges our false attachments for His faithful, unfailing love. False intimacy is no match for His Mercy. And false intimacy can be a degrading and cruel master. God wants to elevate our sexuality to the level for which He intends it—the authentically human in which our desires are subsumed by a passion for Himself and thus transformed.

No easy or tidy task. False intimacy dehumanizes us and the enemy of our souls fights hard to keep us bound. Satan rules a kingdom of unrealities that seems real enough to seduce us until it cripples our capacity to overcome evil with the good. The face of Mercy in Jesus Christ shines on us then picks a fight with that kingdom. Mercy takes hold of our hearts and asks each of us: who will you serve?

Weakened by devotion to the sensual gods, subject to the scorn of the Pharisee without and within, our change seems hopeless. But God's Kingdom in Christ is true, and is thus far more powerful than the silky illusions of our enemy.

In the sexual arena, I have witnessed deliverance—the clash of one Kingdom overcoming the lesser one—occurring after relationship with Christ is established. Like Mary, we need to know Him first, to trust His advocacy amid the shame of our weakness and religious judgment. And He needs to know that we will serve Him alone. He does not want to purge a house that has no intention of staying true to its owner; Jesus knows that demons return 7-fold to the fickle home. (Lk 11: 23-26)

He is faithful. Relying on Him alone, we cooperate with the Master as He thoroughly cleans house from the ungodly residue left by our false intimacies.

Mary exemplifies this. After she lingered with tears at Christ's feet next to the Pharisee and joined the disciple's band, Jesus delivered her of seven demons. (Lk 8:2)

Intimacy invites deliverance. We recognize Him and we rely upon Him, going where He goes, and He in His powerful mercy, cleanses us. I love the ease and naturalness with which Mary's deliverance must have occurred. The closer we get to Him, the nearer we come to freedom, even from dark and destructive things that are so familiar we do not even recognize them as evil.

We must never romanticize or trivialize false intimacy. It is costly. Sexual violations of all sorts invite unclean spirits to lodge themselves in our depths and to hide there. But when we realize as Mary did that Jesus is not going to reject us and that our cure lies only in nearness to Him, then we will be unafraid to come into His Presence. We will not be shocked at the cleansing He has yet to do!

Annette and I each experienced significant deliverances from unclean spirits long after our walk with Jesus began. Mine involved familiar spirits tied to longstanding exposure to pornography, hers involved a spirit of control that she relied upon after the devastation of rape from an adult relative when she was 4-years-old. Our 'Kingdom clash' occurred willfully and prayerfully with the help of trustworthy, discerning saints. After the tussle, we each had a new authority to choose Life and to resist mental and moral strongholds that we had tolerated.

We must not be afraid that our residual brokenness will contaminate Christ or His community. We just enter in as Mary did—looking for every opportunity to worship and serve Him. He knows our hearts. We can know that no matter how broken and yes, still unclean we may be, He will deliver us!

The key is not coming under the Pharisee—the accusing, critical gaze. Like Mary, we must exercise courage to come as we are, our ragged, divided hearts intact, and cast ourselves upon His merciful feet. Like Mary, we must learn to weep and linger there. Our deliverance will come, is coming, will come!

Leanne Payne says it like this: 'In seeking only Him who is our righteousness we begin to see more clearly and purity of heart and life ensues...Jesus assures us and we know most certainly that

He will remove the wheat from the chaff, that He will transform the desire where and when necessary, and that He will elevate it to higher places when our perception of His will for our lives is too low.'

Deliverance strengthens our reliance upon the Deliverer, and grants us a godly fear of sin and spiritual darkness. We should have a holy regard for the kingdoms of this world, especially those we have participated in. We remember Mercy, the grace He gave us to know Him and to follow Him alone. We become a people of One House, One Kingdom, united with Christ. Where else can we go, how else can we live? He alone has the keys to life.