

Intimate Authority Holy Week Meditations, 4

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Mary Magdalene, in her recognition and reliance upon her Merciful Deliverer, became authoritative in holy love. Tears of remorse became gratitude. Peace, love and joy dwelt in her depths now. Degradation and accusation became distant relatives that she could refuse.

You could say that sexual brokenness, surrendered to Him, made her strong. Her weakness invited His power; whenever tempted by the old kingdoms, she had only to draw near to Him. Her gender made a difference here. She possessed that beautiful responsiveness which Jesus, the whole Man, cleansed and ignited with holy love. He became her center; His pure, strong light lit her from within.

Her redeemed womanhood, combined with her moral vulnerability (we are usually not delivered from all susceptibility to our pasts), forged a dependency upon Him that was qualitatively different from that of the other disciples. While other men had shamed and fractured her further, Jesus' presence set her free. Her wholeness was bound up in His life, her holiness in the intimacy they shared.

In gratitude, she gave all that she had to Him. That is evident in another extravagant display of worship. Mark describes her anointing Jesus with oil, breaking open an intensely fragrant and expensive bottle and pouring it over Him in front of everyone! Like the Pharisee in Luke 7, Jesus' band was not impressed by Mary's slavish, wasteful 'worship.' (Mk 14: 1-11).

Mark's account differs significantly from Luke's. It takes place just prior to Jesus initiating His Holy Supper with the disciples. Luke recounts Mary anointing Jesus' feet with her tears and with oil, but Mark describes Mary anointing His head, a sign of familiarity with Him. She knew Him now, and like any devoted woman, understood what Jesus' male friends didn't. Jesus was going to die.

She was anointing His body for His death. In the old kingdom, Mary must have used such oil to enliven her customers. She saved the best for last, to inaugurate the New Kingdom opened to all through the Cross. Mary had surrendered all to Him and Jesus redeemed it all, even the tricks of her trade, to fulfill His purposes.

Marvelous to me is her obedience in light of the social shame she still provoked. 'Some were indignant' (v. 4); the scorn started early on with the Pharisee in Lk 7 and continued with Jesus' disciples until the end. 'Once a bad girl, always a bad girl...' The traditions of men endure, even in the twice-born. The beauty of Mary? Shame never stopped her. She endured the shame for the joy set before her, the gift of knowing Him intimately and loving Him extravagantly.

What is costly worship for you? What do you offer Jesus that is often misunderstood by others and yet gives glory to Your Creator and Redeemer? I think of my peers with histories of same-sex attraction (a hard enough disclosure) who audaciously testify that Jesus is setting them free from its domination (harder still to confess in our gay-friendly age). For every 'Amen', that witness of Jesus' redeeming power provokes a shake of the head or even a warning to not damage someone by giving them false hope.

What do you offer publicly to Jesus that is costly, fragrant, and scorned? May Mary's worship set you free to worship Him with renewed audacity.

'Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for Me...I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' (Mk 14: 6, 9)