

Sunday 22 July

John 20: 1-18

Mary Magdelene; controversy surrounds her identity and I don't intend to enter into it. I accept her as the gospel reveals her. One who went to the tomb with a broken heart and intent on carrying out a sacred role. To tend to the body of one who has died. She then experiences a shock and a case of mistaken identity. She supposes Jesus is the gardener. I wonder if you have ever had a similar experience? Thrown off balance by sadness and unexpected circumstance, have you lost touch with who God is calling you to be? It is in the calling of her name, that Mary's relationship with the Lord is re-established. Jesus says; *do not cling to me*. The old physicality has passed and a new relationship with the Lord is created. Mary is then instructed to go and to tell others the good news.

The whole pattern of the activity in this scene is grounded in love. Love makes the painful journey to the tomb "doable" and love enables the moment of recognition, in a single word. Mary becomes the apostle to the apostles when she is commissioned to go and tell what she has heard.

This story provides a fitting time to come to recognition of 54 years of faithful service of the Ladie's Fellowship. As was the case with Mary, a new relationship with the Lord awaits.

Even while we come to celebrate and give thanks for years of service we recall the nurturing side of both genders. As

Robert said of last week's gospel, today's message is for all. So I invite all to reflect on the gifts of the feminine.

I wonder if you all accept that you have a ministry in the church? You do! Each one of you has been loved and reconciled by God, and God asks you to be channels of that same love, salvation and reconciliation to others.

Now the Ladie's Fellowship has done this work in spades over the years. Barbara informs us that the name of this group was chosen in order to include divorced and unmarried mothers. I think this was progressive attitude for its time.

All of Jesus' ministry was focused on proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, healing disease and sickness.

Fundraising for myriad charities was a key focus for the group. Anglicare, Appin Hall Children's Foundation, Ronald McDonald House, Children First, Cancer Council, and Royal Flying Doctor, to name a few recipients. This group of faithful women had a direct hand in assisting healing.

As mothers and leaders of St Faith' and St Margarets, they were role models demonstrating to how to love the Lord. Service was their aim and achievement. The work of the Ladie's Fellowship was proclamation and through their care for others, they showed how the Kingdom of God comes near.

Of course, not all of what was achieved came in the form of tangible outcomes. Emotional healing and companionship can be the fruits of working with others. Our world continues to cry out for healing and because we have been healed by

love, it is our calling to be the same agents of healing and love to others.

Now if you pardon the pun, these sound like motherhood statements. So what is the deep-well that the feminine side of The Spirit has enable the Ladie's Fellowship in the past, and will enable them to find new ways to share their tender care in the future?

I've heard it said "we can't do as we once did. We can't fund raise anymore". That may be the case, but our community needs the wisdom that is known to this group. When I look around, I know that you have nursed others through illness and you have been a beacon of hope for friends and families.

When Jesus called Mary's name, he asked her to go ahead of and tell others. This my invitation to your members today. Go ahead of us. In so many ways you have made life better and more beautiful for others all the while focusing on the glory of God.

I want to explore the essence of a woman's experience that can be identified as prayer? It is not all about words! This is what Jan Richardson has to say: "Across the centuries women have carried prayers in our bodies and in our blood. We have passed down the sacred stories from body to body. We have struggled to know our bodies as texts, to perceive the ways that God has written God's own story within us, to understand how the Word still seeks to take flesh in and through us. And we have hungered for places of safety and

community in which to do this, to gather in the company of others whose stories both echo and challenge our own.

So here we have a beautiful explanation of the level of encounter that has been the Ladies' Fellowship. They have been a refuge for each other and the broader community. But the Lord still whispers. Go and tell others. This commission is for each of us. As the ladies now need to shift their focus from doing to being, I am inviting them to join me in an on-going spiritual quest. A small group focused on learning and growing in the faith and companionship. Your experience is ripe for sharing.

Some of you may know the internationally renowned spiritual writer Joan Chittister. A woman of senior years and infinite wisdom. She has been in Australia of recent weeks. She is currently writing about what it means to be a prophet. That is, to speak God's words to the community. She identifies the world in a state of transition and says that we must move forward. The old world is gone and a new one beckons. In a nutshell she identifies our world in crisis saying we can't do nothing....we must do something!

So in a ritual we are about to create we give thanks for all that is past, for what is present, and we look forward to what God has in-store for us. Come and join me as we create the future.

AMEN

## References

Richardson, J. R. *In The Sanctuary of Women* Upper Room Books Nashville. 2010

Br David Vryhof, *God's Mission – and Ours-*  
SSJE .org.

## Liturgy

### **Confession and Intercession**

God of compassion,  
we acknowledge the times  
we have lived too long  
with the words the others have put  
into our mouths,  
With the pain they have written  
Onto our bodies,  
with the terror they have burned  
into our hearts,  
with all the shame they have inscribed  
onto our souls.

We know the time we have clung  
To sackcloth not of our making,  
when we have lived clothed in  
weariness,  
cloaked with anger,  
and, and enshrouded by sorrow.

We grieve the occasions  
when we have lived with alienation,

rather than association,  
when we have sought isolation  
rather than consolation,  
when our wounds within have shut others out.

We confess our fear of the dark  
and our uncertainty of the light.

Yet you have placed within us, God,  
a longing for survival  
a hunger for wholeness,  
a yearning for comfort,  
And a hope for all our healing.

Bless our mouths  
to name our wounds,  
that we may not fear them;  
our bodies  
that we may cherish them;  
Our hearts that we may delight in  
their longings  
and our souls, that we may trust  
the wisdom of the stories they hold.

Grant us the courage  
to be touched by you,

that when our days of weeping are done  
we may wear your garments  
of gladness  
see one another in the light  
of your love,  
and stand together in the power  
of your resurrection.  
In the name of the risen Christ,  
we pray. AMEN



## Ritual

Light a candle for the present 1

This is the candle of the present.

This is where we are together.

Our time and energy

are gathered into this space.

Here we recognise one another,

we know one another,

and we are known.

Light a candle for the past 2

This is the time before any of us

knew one another,

the time when we are in

our mother's womb,

and all that is to be

Is contained in the

very being of God.

This is a candle for the future 3  
I light this candle of the future  
because I believe in the past  
and I believe in the present.

Because I have touched  
these times.  
I know there is energy  
That goes ahead of us.  
Because there is tangibleness,  
because we have marked these times,  
I have hope for the future.

Bless to us oh God, these times  
Of present  
And past and future.  
May these flames  
of dwelling  
and memory  
and of hope  
become an endless ring of blessing

to you.

AMEN

Jan Richardson