

Two women, Mary and Elizabeth are unlikely mothers. One too young, one too old, both scandalized unjustly by stubborn traditions. Nonetheless, their love, integrity, creativity, and joy rub off on their more famous sons.

Two sisters, Mary and Martha, play host. One is more tactical, the other has the gift of presence. Thank God for both of these saints. They are creators of safe space. There are others like them, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susannah to name a few.

A prophetess named Anna recognizes the nature of Jesus at his dedication; an unnamed woman, the Pharisees call her a sinner, bathes Jesus' feet with tears and fine oil; another unnamed woman, known only as a widow, demonstrates generosity in the giving of a coin (most likely her only coin) for the Temple offering; an old woman, we don't know her name either, rejoices in finding a lost coin by throwing a party for her neighbors.

The women of Luke live in a world that seeks to make them invisible in matters of theology, and politics, and economics, and other venues of power. But they have not been, nor will they ever be invisible.

In the person of Jesus, countless women meet someone who finally...really, truly, sees them. Jesus sees them as God's beloved and created. Jesus sees them as talented, and strong, and capable, and smart, AND most importantly, as disciples. And Jesus knows their names, speaks their names, loves their names, respects their names, gives thanks for their names.

Therefore, it should not be a surprise that it's the women, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Mary the mother of

Jesus, and Joanna, and others who stay by Jesus' side through the events of a dark Friday, and keep vigil throughout an excruciating Saturday, and come ready to prepare the body early on a Sunday morning.

Here's the thing. I think the more famous male disciples knew something of marginalization, but their something was only a sliver of what their female counterparts experienced. Peter, and James, and John, and the others were imagining a reversal of fortune. At the side of Jesus, they would be powerful, and it was this power that would bring a sense of fulfillment. Theirs was kingdom all too familiar to the ones we've known throughout history. When Jesus is arrested, and ultimately killed, the men are devastated, bewildered, and shaken beyond stupor. Rome's power is too much, even for faith. And what kind of kingdom can survive a crucifixion?

But the women who followed Jesus had a different, more grounded set of expectations. I don't think they cared about acknowledgement or visibility in Rome, or in some future state, because they had finally found it in its most authentic sense. They didn't give two hoots about kingdoms, because they had found kin-dom. The men who followed Jesus listened to parables about the kingdom of God. The women who followed Jesus were living it in the present. And these brave, remarkable women had no intention to go back to pre-kin-dom living.

I think their actions on Sunday morning show just that. What happens in the Kingdom of God? People love one another, care for one another, are mindful, and intentional, and reflective about why their neighbors matter. They are present for one another. They show up to funerals, and make casseroles, and volunteer to help with arrangements, because that's all they can do, and all they can do is enough.

Jesus mattered to Mary, and Mary, and Joanna, and to the others. And they were planning to do all they could to celebrate the gift of his impact upon their lives.

You know some of the other details. The stone is rolled away, and the tomb is empty, and strange angels are there, and just like the shepherds who kept watch in fields by night, the women are terrified – that is amazed in every way – by the presence of these beings.

But here's the meat of the text. These strange angels say to our wise disciples, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here, but has risen!!!"

In an instant, the three women, not to mention the ones who aren't named, are flooded with a thousand memories of their time with Jesus: how he made them feel; how he saw them, and heard them, and empowered them; how he helped them to create a community of living in a world bent on dying.

And they remembered what he'd said – how all of these events would transpire, but that on the third day he would rise. And sure enough, there was that empty tomb, and angels to boot, and a hundred seemingly disconnected events that all of a sudden pointed to something more concrete.

Jesus brought life to people and communities that had been dead to living for too long. The women who followed Jesus knew purpose, knew calling, knew living. And the spirit of such living can never be ended, not even by something as final, and powerful, and tangible as Rome. Jesus is back at it, and these women are ready to follow.

And you know what happens next. They run to tell the men, who cannot and will not believe such idol chatter. Even Peter is skeptical, only believing once he's sprinted to the tomb, and seen with his own two eyes.

I think Peter and his companions are still learning the difference between kingdoms and kin-doms. Kingdoms still insist that the privileged and deserving and designated are the messengers. Kin-doms insist that the message is a whole more important than the messenger.

The women are ready to do the work of Jesus. They've actually been doing it this whole time. And although they don't move at the pace we prefer, the men, because of insightful and courageous women, will eventually do the work of Jesus, too.

On many levels, Easter is about the mystery of resurrection. But I'm not so much interested in dissecting that mystery this morning. There are things I faith. And there are details that make me curious, and some that make me doubtful, and some that make me indifferent. And there are theories and theologies that are beyond my little brain's capacity to process. Maybe that's a place I can go to next year.

But for today, I'm much more interested in God's capacity to resurrect, recreate, and renew our own living. Pontius Pilate, or the High Priest, or even an everyday Pharisee wouldn't so much as glance at someone like Mary Magdalene, or Mary the Mother of James, or Joanna, let alone bother to learn their names. And yet Jesus did. He saw them. And because they saw and were seen by him, we too, see and are seen by Jesus.

Let me rephrase it another way. Jesus said, “God is good. God created and loves this world.” And Jesus said, “Mary, Mary, Joanna, God also loved and created you. That means you are worthy, and it means you can tell everyone you encounter the very same thing.”

Jesus saw people in such a way as to help resurrect their purpose. And those people learned to see others in a similar manner. And all of their seeing throughout the centuries makes each of us seen, too!

Sardis Baptist Church, you have the createdness of a loving God. And you have the power to be present. And you have the hope of the Easter story. And you have names, good names, that are seen, and spoken, and realized, and celebrated.

In the season ahead, may God help us to see one another in such a way as to align our names with our calling and purpose, in order that we might live lives that bring healing to our world.

On that very first Easter, invisible women realized they were visible. And stepping into the light, they looked to land of the living, and followed Jesus. Morning has broken, Sardis! God’s light shines upon us. May we follow in the footsteps of visible women!

Amen.

Seen and Seeing
Bob Stillerman
Easter Sunday, 4/17/2022
Luke 24:1-12



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