

FutureChurch 2024 Mary Magdalene Celebration: *Women Witnesses to the Risen Christ*

Transcript of Victoria McBride's Witness

Good evening everyone. my name is Victoria McBride, and I'm located in Cleveland, Ohio. I'm very grateful to Russ, Martha, and Olivia for inviting me to speak this evening on this, the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene.

As Russ alluded to, I'm in the midst of a ministry transition. for the last 11 years, I was a teacher and an administrator at a Catholic high school. And about a month ago, I just started a new ministry as a lay pastoral care minister for a community of religious sisters. This has been a huge blessing, and it has also been challenging in some ways, mostly because of the way that I'm wired. In my work as a teacher, I got used to a rhythm of life where my days were relentlessly planned—sometimes down to the minute. I would go into school, I would have my classes, I would have meetings, and I had to be very protective of time to do the other administrative tasks that were on my plate. and as I transition into this new ministry, a huge blessing and challenge to me has been adjusting to the fact that my ministry now is a ministry of radical presence.

It is not rigorously scheduled. I have responsibilities, I have events that I help to facilitate. But as I've been sharing with a number of friends recently, it feels like my main responsibility right now is to be at the ready and to be open to whatever the day presents. And it's been so beautiful because on any given day when I go in, I encounter so many wonderful sisters who are eager to share with me their stories, who are eager to introduce me to other sisters in the community.

And I'm inspired by Mary Magdalene specifically in this context, because we're talking about how she proclaimed the resurrection of Christ. But first she had to sit by the tomb and wait, and she had no idea what she was waiting for. Christ said that He would rise again, but no one really knew what he meant by that. No one knew what form that would take. So I am really struck and touched by the deep faith that Mary Magdalene showed when she stayed with Jesus along the way of the cross, and even after He died, when she sat at His tomb and prayed and mourned and waited for something that she could not even envision.

And I pray that I can have her patience and her deep trust in Christ, to sit and wait and to listen for what I am called to do. There's no shortage of doing. There are always things to be done, but I'm praying to try to stop engineering my own miracles and wait to see what God—what Christ—has in store for me.

In this new ministry, I have encountered—in a very powerful way—the Body of Christ as well. I think about the passage from Corinthians: we are many parts and we are parts of one body. In my work I am now working alongside nurses. I'm working alongside social workers and psychologists. And in my first few days, I felt very insecure because I am not a physical healer like the nurses. I am not connected to social services like the social worker. I'm not providing mental health counseling like the psychologist. I have been asked to sit and to trust that my presence has value, and the sisters have been so gracious in assuring me, reminding me, that there is deep value in prayer. There is deep value in accompaniment.

It's not just about the tasks. It's also about sitting in companionable silence sometimes. Which leads me to the last thing that I wanted to share: Who has been Christ to me? How have I been surprised by God? One of the most consistent parts of my new ministry is distributing Communion to the sisters in the health care center. This is a ministry—Eucharistic Minister—that is somewhat new to me because I've always been a Music Minister. When I go to Mass, I'm used to being a part of the choir and singing or playing an instrument while Communion is happening. And now I have the opportunity to distribute Communion to the sisters. So I am encountering Christ in a literal way, and I feel privileged to bring Christ to the sisters each day. And in doing so, I encounter Christ.

It's humbling, and it is so powerful, to see the reverence with which they receive the Sacrament, to see how peace giving it can be, to see the joy that comes over them when they receive, and to be a part of their worship community. It is a ministry that is new to me, and it is one that I cherish—one that I was surprised would be so impactful to me.

And so, I am grateful for the example of Mary Magdalene. I'm grateful for her deep trust, for her patient waiting. Her patient waiting in a dark time after death, after pain, after suffering, and her willingness to boldly share once the miracle presented itself. To share that with others. I hope I can continue to follow her example.

Thank you.

Transcript of Ariell Watson Simon's Witness

Hello! As I was introduced, earlier, my name is Ariell Watson Simon. I'm calling in tonight from my home in rural Missouri. I live in the midwestern United States, and my wife and I live here- actually on the farm that my wife grew up on. I heard some folks earlier talking about being in Maryland. I'm also from Maryland. I grew up in Maryland on the East Coast and received my Master's of Divinity from Boston College. But have since moved to the Midwest, and I've now worked as a health care chaplain - both in Catholic and secular health care systems, in three different states.

You may have noticed from that brief introduction or snapshot of my life that my calling and my identity is are admittedly ... eclectic, I think it's safe to say. I am queer. I am Catholic. And I am a woman who is called to ministry in the rural Midwest, of all places. Sometimes all of those different pieces of my vocation seem like the pieces of a bunch of different puzzles that got thrown together into the same box. They can look incompatible at first glance, but I found that when I keep my eyes focused on Christ, I find that God has equipped me for exactly the ministry that I'm called to today.

I think of how Mary Magdalene recognized Christ when she heard him call her name. How critical that was, and I can relate to that. I find that God speaks to my identity, to the person I'm created to be. And in that naming, I hear a calling to a task that I am uniquely prepared to do, whether others heed or recognize that call or not.

So tonight, we celebrate Mary Magdalene's witness - that she saw Christ. I have to admit, I was honored by the invitation to share with you all tonight, but I was a little bit baffled by the invitation to share a witness to the Risen Christ specifically. Because most of my ministry has been working in hospitals and nursing homes, and end of life care ... really accompanying people in moments of deep pain, deep suffering.

And during the pandemic in particular, the needs were just overwhelming. Our health care systems were overtaxed. And during those years, I had the sacred privilege of holding the hands of countless people as they passed from this life. In those moments when I was witnessing the death of strangers in this very intimate way. I would try to make a connection with them. So I would look at their faces and try to see Christ in them. And as I accompanied those patients in their final moments, I was really strengthened by that witness of Mary Magdalene. The way that she stayed by Jesus through the agony of his final day.

There's one death that stands out among blur of those pandemic years. I was at home, asleep in bed on a very cold winter night when I received a call that a man had come into the local hospital. He was dead on arrival due to a fatal drug overdose. And I remember driving through these cornfields that were covered in snow. I was just racing to get there in time to meet his mother when she arrived at the hospital. I sat with her while the doctor told her that her son was dead. And we sat together and she wept. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, she was experiencing that gut wrenching anguish of losing a child. And I still remember her telling me 'When they count the Covid death toll, they won't count my son. But he died in this pandemic, too.' She told me about her son's fragile mental health and his struggle with substance abuse. She shared about how the loneliness of the pandemic had further isolated him until he was just totally overtaken by addiction. And I...I can still remember the three of us sitting in that trauma room. The mother holding her son's hand and me holding her. And I wonder if that's what Mary Magdalene felt like holding Jesus' mother while she wept at the foot of the cross.

Today, God has placed me in a very different health care ministry. I now work at an addiction treatment center where patients come to detox and to get support through their first month or so of recovery. It is a place of a lot of pain, but also a lot of hope.

Take, for example, a young man who sat in my office - I think it was last week. He has not yet celebrated his 21st birthday. And I asked him to share with me about a time that he's experienced God. And he told me that he has overdosed a total of 12 times. Every time he wakes up after an overdose, he has a growing conviction that God is the one who brought him back to life. And that conviction has grown in him and brought him to the place of coming into treatment, because he believes that God must have a plan for his life, some reason to keep bringing him back. And he's ready now to discover what that plan is.

When I sit with people in recovery like that young man, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that I am witnessing a miracle. It's the miracle of Resurrection. The Spirit of life is still at work today. Just as it was all those years ago when Mary Magdalene encountered Jesus at the empty tomb. The Spirit is at work through the cycle of death and resurrection, and it's also at work in me - calling, preparing, equipping me through every stage of this journey of witness.

I have to trust that maybe all those seemingly mismatched pieces, puzzle pieces, of my vocation somehow comprise the image of a new thing that God is revealing. Like our ancestor Mary Magdalene, my task is to witness, to grieve, to be open to surprises, and ultimately to go wherever God sends.

Thank you.

Transcript of Yunuen Trujillo's Witness

Hello, everyone. My name is Yunuen Trujillo. I am a woman, an immigrant, a Latina, and an LGBTQ Catholic. Now, the first time I saw the risen Christ was during a spiritual retreat. And to give you some background information, I was not raised as a practicing Catholic. I was born and raised in Mexico to a very Catholic family.

My great grandmother was the most devout person in my family and all she knew about the gospel was what she heard from the pulpit. She did not know how to read. And she believed that God was a punishing God. So, my mom decided not to raise us as practicing Catholics. But we did have a rich spiritual practice growing up.

At the age of 16.5, I came to the US undocumented and went through that whole journey. And I was grieving community. And a couple years later, I came out to my mom as queer. And that's how I ended up on that spiritual retreat. It was a spiritual retreat that was led by young adults who were immigrants just like me and who were very connected to their vulnerability. And from there, they were able to witness to the Risen Christ. Talking about a

Jesus of love; a Jesus that never, never died. Right? He came back to life. You cannot kill, love. And so it wasn't just that they were talking about a Jesus of love, but they were really a true Christian community. And it is because of them that I started identifying as a practicing Catholic. This was back in 2006.

Now, every time I think about the reasons to stay in the Church, I think that at our best our Church is a beautiful, inclusive space that witnesses to Jesus's love. The church - the people - for the most part, are where the gospel asks us to be, and, our heart is in the right place.

Now, I have seen the risen Christ many times since, but never as clear as in Javier and Martha. And the countless, mothers working with children, and adult children who have paired up in LGBTQ ministry to create inclusive spaces in their parishes. Who have said, 'You know, our children will always be our children, and nobody will tell them that they don't belong. We will create these welcoming spaces' even when they themselves, the parents and the mothers are going through this journey of self-acceptance and acceptance of their children. And even when it's not convenient for them to stand with their children, because it might ruin their reputation in the parish. And so I've seen the risen Christ in that witness - very clear in those mothers.

Now, the gospel accounts of the Resurrection say that while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. And after the male disciples left, she stayed and stood outside the tomb, weeping until she saw the risen Christ and recognized him. And so it is in the darkest times that we can more clearly see the light and identify it as such.

It is when we weep, when we connect with our own wounds and vulnerability, that we are better able to witness and to connect with the wound of another and to bring healing. That might even seem miraculous. It is when we stand in communion with each other that we are like Mary Magdalene who stood, who witnessed even when she wasn't a "credible" witness. Right? And in Jesus's time, she would not be a credible witness in a court of law, because she wasn't even considered a person. And so, we do that every single day that we stay in the church.

Now, there are forces in our church - and outside of it - today that are claiming to speak on Jesus's behalf to promote hate and so our witness is more needed than ever. Because if there's one thing that we know it is that Jesus didn't teach hate. And that trying to take dignity away from the groups that Jesus stood with, including women, is not what Jesus wanted.

And so, I wanted to share with you a very beautiful song by Los Guaraguaos. They are Venezuelan group from the 1970s. The song is called "Christ through the service of whom. And a part of it says:

Christ through the service of whom asked Jaime the laborer. We must bring Christ said Jaime the laborer, because they have kidnaped him. But Christ, Christ is of the people...

A church that does not denounce injustice and oppression and is a sold-out church.

We want resurrection, and so our witness to the risen Christ - more than ever - is needed. We hold the authority to witness, because we're the descendants of Mary Magdalene, because we're vulnerable, because Christ stands with us. And the people in the pews today are hungry for that - the Risen Christ and for that witness of love and inclusion.

And so I here's where I would like to invite all of us to think about: ways in which we can continue witnessing, the way swe have already been, but pushing the boundaries a little more, within the official structures that we are part of. But, like Mary Magdalene, unapologetically, without fear, and led by love and fierce compassion.

Thank you.