

**"Beyond the Bounds"**  
**Saint Mary Magdalene**  
**The Tenth Anniversary of the Union of Trinity and Saint Peter's**  
**23 July 2023**  
**Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**San Francisco, California**

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Judith 9:1, 11-14  
Psalm 42:1-7  
II Corinthians 5:14-18  
Saint John 20:11=18

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**Judith**

The use of the propers for Saint Mary Magdalene's Day, actually celebrated on the day before today, affords us several opportunities. The initial opportunity is an introduction to Judith, an apocryphal book that makes us aware of the power of women, too often ignored in the sacred scriptures. In this fictional tale, probably set in the Hellenistic era when the Seleucids ruled in Israel, and attempted to move them from the native religion centered on the covenant with YHWH, to a more Hellenic view of the world and the gods present in the world. Judith champions the defeat of the enemy Holofernes, and uses her sexual attraction to lure him into her tent, where she beheads him. That is the story line, but what does it have to do with Trinity and Saint Peter's and their union, which we celebrate today.

Judith is a woman who steps outside of the traditional bounds of her time to become a heroine in the national story. The book is not included in the Hebrew canon, although the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox recognize it in their canons. Jews and Protestant Christians generally do not. Never-the-less Judith can be an example that is helpful to us, especially as we celebrate this anniversary. She is helpful in that she stepped beyond the bounds which she was expected, as a Jewish woman, to observe and to be faithful to. She is one of several women in the Hebrew Scriptures who step outside the sexual bounds of their time to do brave things for the faith. What comes to my mind, is Tamar, Hannah, Rahab, Deborah, Esther along with the fictional Judith. They, each of them exhibits a power, sometimes sexual, that gives God's grace to a moment, when that might have been not so.

The reading from Judith this morning is a prayer in which she acknowledges God's power, and asks that that power be made evident in the national situation into which she will insert herself. She asks that God accompanies and stands beside her. In many respects this prayer is similar to the prayer that Hannah says, asking God to give her a child, a son. All of these women exercised a bravery that was beyond the bounds, that made for a time of God's grace and righteousness.

**Mary Magdalene**

Mary Magdalene has suffered in the tradition. Her apostolic nature has not been recognized as a calling that was given to all women. She has been connected to a tradition that called her a prostitute, and one that was incorrect in that attribution. It is John who corrects the scene for us, although the other writers of the Gospels recognize her role as well. She and other women make themselves available at the burial of Jesus, and in that duty, they are privy to a first view of the resurrection. Mary, in an apostolic gesture, announces to the disciples the resurrection of Jesus, which it will take them some time to acknowledge, and make their own. It is the women, specifically Mary Magdalene who announces the resurrection.

In the Gospel for today, John mirrors Mary's grief at the loss of Jesus, and her initial inability to recognize him as the Risen One. She mistakes him for the gardener, and asks that he who her where Jesus' body was laid. Jesus simply says, "Mary", and Mary understands and sees. Then begins her ministry, much of which, I believe, has been erased from the record. In John's Gospel, however, we get a glimpse.

### **Trinity+Saint Peter's,**

I understand that with the union of Saint Peter's and Trinity Churches, the patronage of Mary Magdalene was considered. It would have been a good model. It would have been a model of announcing the resurrection, the renewal of life and living for so many. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we get a clue of what we must consider on this anniversary, as we acknowledge the past and took into the future. Paul writes:

*"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"*

This place must be more than a building saved, but a gathering place for all who have been renewed in Christ. I can remember many efforts that were aimed at renewal and invitation: The Wednesday Taizé service, the ministry during the AIDS crisis, the recognition of the value of Gay and Lesbian people, the musical concerts, the Alcoholics Anonymous Mass, the feeding programs, the theater, the invitation to so many people to come here and to witness our communal life in Christ. We like Judith and Mary Magdalene are called to live beyond the bounds. There are many in the churches who are ignoring their communities and the ministry that could be initiated for them. That has not been our tradition, but it is a tradition that must be expanded and renewed in our midst. I have noticed that often, following the liturgy, people from the street will notice the open doors and walk in and look around. We must be aware of them, we must be a Mary Magdalene to them, we must be a host to them.

The psalmist characterizes the situation, the context of our place, and hopefully our ministry.

*My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God; when shall I come to appear before the presence of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long they say to me, "Where now is your God?"*

For so many in these days that is the question that is asked of the church, "Where is your God?" We need to give evidence of God's presence, and shared with the others who searching. I am reminded of a petition in Form II of the Prayers of the People:

*"I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of God. Pray that they may find and be found by God."*

Let us be a place for not only our own spiritual needs, but for those who are seeking, or who are lost on the way. May we like Mary proclaim, "I have seen the Lord."

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