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Subject: Mary Magdalene Rocked My World
Date: July 18, 2023 at 2:42 PM
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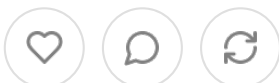


Mary Magdalene Rocked My World

One year ago today - and she still is

DIANA BUTLER BASS

JUL 18



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One year ago today, I posted my 2022 Wild Goose sermon, “**All the Marys.**” The sermon was based on research by my friend, textual scholar **Elizabeth “Libbie” Schrader.**

Within hours of the sermon being posted here, thousands of you shared it with your friends. **And now — a year later — it appears that it has been read or heard about ONE MILLION times** (posted in hundreds of blogs, Facebook pages, and on social media) by people in countries around the world. **YOU DID THAT. The Mary Magdalene sermon went viral because of you all here at The Cottage.**

Libbie’s thesis is simple: That the oldest manuscript of John 11 shows signs of having been altered by some ancient scribe. The familiar story of Lazarus

and his sisters, Mary and Martha, is a story with ONLY ONE sister, “Mary.” Martha had been added at a later date.

Here’s the central finding of Elizabeth’s work:

The text of John 11:1-5 as it currently exists in the NRSV:

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. . .

Her reconstruction of the text based on textual changes discovered in ancient manuscripts:

Note from Elizabeth: *“This reconstruction comes from readings in Codex Alexandrinus before correction (John 11:1-2), Papyrus 66 before correction (John 11:3-4), and Codex Colbertinus (John 11:5), which is uncorrected.”*

¹ There was a certain sick man, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary his sister.

² Now this was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

³ Therefore Mary sent to him, saying, “Lord, behold, the one you love is sick.”

⁴ But when Jesus heard he said to her, “The sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son may be glorified through it.”

5 Now Jesus loved Lazarus and his sister.

The significance is that if there is only one sister, Mary, and if that “Mary” is Mary Magdalene, then the Christological confession in the Gospel of John was proclaimed by one of the most important women in the New Testament.

That changes our understanding of women in the early Christian movement and — potentially — the future of the church.

[CLICK HERE](#) for last year’s post with the audio. This [LINK](#) takes you to the PDF written version.

Share

You turned a sermon from a campground in North Carolina into an international conversation. That’s the power of community. And that’s the spirit of Mary Magdalene herself — the first person to proclaim the news of the resurrection!





Artist Kristen Wheeler painted this icon — “Mary Magdalene: The Woman and the Cave” — and gifted me with it at this week’s Wild Goose in honor of last year’s sermon. For more information, permissions, or purchase, please visit her website: ModernInconographer.com

This past weekend, at the 2023 Wild Goose Festival, about 500 hundred people squeezed under and around a tent to hear an update on Mary Magdalene and the state of current research.

It *was* my intention to record the session — but the Holy Spirit seemed to have a different idea — my phone didn’t pick it up. The gathering was dynamic, full of energy, laughter, joy, and profound questions. My friend, Brian McLaren (who was there) said it was “fire.” I’m getting GOOSE bumps remembering. *(If you were there, please put a comment in the thread as to what stood out for you!)*

Despite losing the recording, I still wanted to share a few updates — these points are from my sketchy notes:

1. **About Elizabeth Schrader**

She’s now Elizabeth Schrader Polczer, Ph.D. Yes, in the last year, Libbie got married and she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation at Duke University. She also landed a great position starting this fall — Assistant Professor of New Testament at Villanova University. Congratulations all around!

Prompted by the viral sermon, she’s received incredible invitations from around the world. And the sermon and her research have been featured in podcasts, magazines, online, and on air venues globally. Here’s a great example from Broadview (Canadian), “**And Also Some Women.**” And don’t miss The Bible for Normal People’s great episode with Libbie.

And don't miss The Bible for Normal People's great episode with Libbie.

RESURRECTING MARY THE TOWER.

2. About additional evidence

In the last year, Libbie has been in conversation with historians of early Christian art. They've made some interesting discoveries, including the fact that (this is a quote from Libbie's email to me) "the majority of ancient fourth-century sarcophagi have only one sister in their depiction of the Lazarus story." She provided a couple of examples — a **fourth century piece** in the Vatican Museum and this c. 330 "**The Sarcophagus of Marcia Romania Celsa**." Also, this piece from the Victoria & Albert in London — The **Andrews Diptych** (a 9th century copy of what was believed to be a 5th century original). The collaboration between her research and art history colleagues continues.

3. About the text of the Greek New Testament

Last week, Libbie informed me that there is currently a formal proposal regarding her research with the **Nestle-Aland committee of the Greek New Testament**. The outcome of her textual work — and how it may (or may not) appear — in the New Testament is now in the hands of these remarkable professionals. (I'm sorry for making a joke about them in the first sermon! They are very nice people — and sermon jokes are, well, sermon jokes.)

4. About my journey

My experience of preaching this sermon — as well as my friendship and collegial conversations with Libbie — have reshaped my understanding and interpretation of the Gospel of John. I've come to the conclusion that John is the most feminist of all the gospel accounts. It "arcs" from John 4 (the Woman at the Well as prefiguring Mary Magdalene preaching Christ) to John 11 and 12 (the central narrative of the confession and theological foreshadowing of the Resurrection) and ending with John 20 with Mary and Jesus in the garden — and the first proclamation of the Gospel.

proclamation of the Gospel.

I've preached and written on Mary several times this past year here at the Cottage. You can listen to or re-read them in the Archive — but here are a few of my favorites:

Mary Magdalene and the Anointed One

Hidden in Plain Sight

I Have Seen the Lord

Elizabeth Schrader on Preaching John 11

5. About the Wild Goose update session

Honestly, the gathering was stunning — wild and holy. We could have gone much longer. But, at the scheduled end of the session, a huge wind kicked up threatening a storm and folks ran for safer cover. We heard the news of Mary Magdalene — and then — as one of my friends said — “it was as if the Holy Spirit scattered us to proclaim her story.”

One questioner asked, “Is Mary Magdalene at the heart of the next Awakening?” My answer: “Yes. YES, YES, yes, yes.”

Last year's Wild Goose theme was “imagine.” I asked you to imagine what Christianity would be like if Mary hadn't been hidden from view. This year's theme was “ignite.” And so, I now ask you to light up the church — and the world — with the good news of Mary the Tower! Also, if you start paying attention to Mary Magdalene, she shows up. Odd things happen. Really. In all sorts of unexpected ways and places. Take my word for it. She changed my life.

Leave a comment



Last July 18, many new people came to The Cottage. I wish you all a happy Cottage anniversary — and thank you for sharing these months in this online place.

I hope my words and this community have been encouraging, informative, challenging, surprising, and helpful to you on your journey.

And I hope you'll stick around for another year. Who knows what might happen?

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You can also email us at the.cottage.email@gmail.com with any questions.

You can also contact us at libbie@the-cottage.org with any questions.

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LIBBIE SCHRADER HEADLINES AT SOUTHERN LIGHTS January 12 -14, 2024

Last January, almost 700 people gathered at St. Simon's Island in Georgia for the Southern Lights Conference, a packed weekend of poetry, theology, and music.

WE'RE GOING TO DO IT AGAIN with great new speakers!

YOU ARE INVITED to join me and Brian McLaren as we **reimagine *our faith beyond patriarchy and hierarchy* in our interior lives, in our communities of faith, and in the Scriptures.** We've asked three remarkable speakers to take us through this journey: Cole Arthur Riley, Simran Jeet Singh, and Elizabeth "Libbie" Schrader Polczer.

Please come and be with us in Georgia. Or, if you'd rather be with us online, you can choose that option as well.

MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION CAN BE FOUND HERE.

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The Risen Lord is indeed risen. Present, intimate, creative, 'closer than your own heartbeat,' accessed through your vulnerability, your capacity for intimacy. The imaginal realm is real, and through it you will never be separated from any one or anything you have ever loved, for love is the ground in which you live and move and have your being. This is the message that Mary Magdalene has perennially to bring. This is the message we most need to hear.

— Cynthia Bourgeault

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