

## March 19 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Mary at the Tomb

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is Mary at the Tomb, located in the Narthex, on the left west wall.

The window is one of five that were moved from our former church on Ninth and Court Streets, which was dedicated on May 8, 1900. The window depicts Mary at the tomb when Jesus appears to her as shared in John 20:15-16: *He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? "Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").*

We see Mary sitting outside the tomb with an unused burial oil vessel off to the side, sobbing thinking that someone has taken Jesus' body. Behind her, we see Jesus approaching Mary in the faint early morning light to console His dear friend and to allow her to be the first to see the risen Lord. The Christ is robed in the brightness of white, representing His purity and glory. Mary is robed in scarlet, signifying her suffering in her great grief and despair and cloaked in blue, symbolizing her hope that comes from her Lord. A vine is intertwined around the tomb and behind Jesus, symbolizing His words from John 15:5: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* The depiction at the tomb is bordered by a white arch and pillars, possibly signifying *'the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth'* as expressed in *1 Timothy 3:15*. The larger arch framing the inner arch contains a mandala, embedded with a red and rose templar cross and a golden crown encased in purple, signifying Christ's eternal kingdom as in *Revelation 11:15 – 'The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever'*. Of particular note is that the templar cross was worn by knights symbolizing martyrdom. Throughout the window, we see laurel leaves and flowers, symbolizing the triumph and victory of Christ's resurrection.

The scene at the tomb is one of deep affection between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, who faithfully followed Jesus throughout His ministry from the moment of His healing her from seven demons to His crucifixion, burial and now resurrection. Mary was in despair and sorrow in not finding the body of Jesus, so much so that she could not distinguish the risen Jesus. Only when Jesus calls her by name does she then know that it is Him. *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27)*. With great joy she clings to Him. Jesus tells her not to hold onto Him for He had not yet ascended, but commanded her to *"Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'."*

Mary Magdalene then went to the disciples with the news: *"I have seen the Lord!" 'And she told them that He had said these things to her'*. (John 20:17-18). Because she was an eyewitness to the risen Christ, she was also the first one to bear witness to Him before the Apostles. She becomes the first evangelist, announcing the Good News of the Lord's resurrection; thus she is known as the 'Apostle of Apostles'.

In Luke 8:1-3, we are told of those who set out with Jesus in His ministry, which included Mary Magdalene and several other women. *'He (Jesus) continued according to plan, traveled to town after*

*town, village after village, preaching God's kingdom, spreading the Message. The Twelve were with him. There were also some women in their company who had been healed of various evil afflictions and illnesses: Mary, the one called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's manager; and Susanna—along with many others who used their considerable means to provide for the company'.*

As with Luke, commentary notes that the gospel narrative gives a prominent place to women, as believers in Christ, as His devoted followers and constant attendants, and also as faithful and unswerving witnesses to His wondrous works. Women in Jewish society did not typically carry important roles, which makes their involvement in Jesus' ministry more radical than normal for the time they lived in. In every stage of His ministry, our Lord modeled love for all, even the least in society. The women were immediately and entirely won to Christ's cause. They sat at His feet and listened with gratitude to the gracious words which He spoke; they brought their children to be blessed by Him; they followed Him with lamentations when He was led away to death.

The ready faith of the Gospel women is illustrated by the many narratives of miracles performed in their behalf. The faith of Martha and Mary was rewarded by the restoration to life of their brother Lazarus. There was the woman whom physicians could not cure, yet her faith led her to touch the hem of the Master's garment and she was made whole. To the widow of Nain, as she accompanied the dead body of her son to its sepulcher, her son was restored to life. The despised Syrophenician woman proved her humility and her faith, and her daughter was made whole. In the life of Christ, the influence and activity of the women were marked by purity, magnanimity, and faithfulness, and as such with Mary of Magdala.

Mary was a Jewish woman from the fishing town Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Her name is mentioned 12 times in the Gospels, more than most of the apostles. Mary must have suffered from severe emotional or psychological trauma, battered and bruised, injured and in agony from the entailed suffering of demon possession. Seven is noted as a mystic number suggesting 'completeness,' implying that when the evil spirits dominated Mary, the suffering was extremely severe. In her great suffering and turmoil, only Jesus could have seen who she really was, as He commanded the demons to leave her and restore her to an even greater life than that preceding her suffering.

The friendship forged in her healing and wholeness led to Mary's remaining life, serving as a reflection of her immense gratitude. The "resources" provided as a part of the support of Jesus' ministry in Luke's Gospel account suggest that Mary might have been wealthy. It may be that she was connected with the industry of the town, for it would seem as if she was not without means, which enabled her to serve the Lord with her substance. Regardless of her place in society, her great healing helps us understand what fueled her generosity and dedication up to that morning at the tomb and all that followed.

In Luke 7, we are told of a woman that may be Mary Magdalene although not with certainty. We are certain that there was a great devotion exhibited to Jesus. *'A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.'* The story is consistent with Mary's outpouring of devotion for Jesus, and with Luke shortly thereafter, identifying her first among the women who accompanied and supported Jesus with their substance in His ministry.

Mary Magdalene's love and devotion led her to follow Jesus to the cross and to His tomb. The four Gospel accounts record the presence of women at the foot of the cross. Matthew, Mark and John record Mary Magdalene's presence, *'Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene'* (John 19:25). In Luke 23:55-56, *'The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment'*.

Mary Magdalene's great part in the Gospel history was at the Resurrection. Although women were not called to testify in that age *'because their words seemed to them like nonsense'*, she was given the supreme honor of receiving the first greeting of her risen Lord and to give testimony to that occasion that changed the world.

Mary Magdalene's powerful witness of Jesus Christ was undoubtedly put in place to strengthen the faith of others. While there are no scriptural details of her beyond that Resurrection morning, we do know that Mary held a special place in the story of Christianity and was placed there by God. Through her eyes, we learn a little more about who Jesus was. He found her in her darkest place and healed her miraculously. She was one of His friends and a faithful follower. Mary's actions perhaps spoke the loudest, supporting Jesus' ministry with all she had to give. To what she thought was the bitter end, she gave her life to follow Him and care for Him. And in the end, she found her risen Lord: *'Fear not: For I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; Thou art mine'*. (Isaiah 43:1)

*'We know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture'* ( Psalm 100:3). It is in knowing and claiming that we are His, fully redeemed, that we shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. We are to worship the LORD with gladness and come before him with joyful songs.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(98\) Big Daddy Weave - Redeemed \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

## **Looking ahead – Sunday March 26**

Middle Narthex Window – Christ at the Door