

**First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida**

Lenten Luncheon: Tuesday, April 19, 2011

Welcome and Thanks to Circle II for the Luncheon

Unison Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you again for all that this Season of Lent has meant to us. We praise you for the opportunity it has provided for us to share in these times of fellowship and food together, and most of all, to reflect on what the death of Jesus upon the cross means in each of our lives. Grant us, we pray, the courage during this Holy Week to examine our own lives in the assurance of the love and the grace which you have shown for us, and for the whole world, in the life, the suffering, the death on the cross, the burial in the tomb, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son, for it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Opening Hymn No. 14

“Count Your Blessings”

Stanzas 1 and 2

Jesus Blesses Mary’s Life

Luke 8:1-3

Leader: Soon afterwards Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve disciples were with him,

People: as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,

Leader: and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Mary Magdalene Reflects on the Many Blessings in Her Life

I do not know about you, but there is no way in which I can count my blessings and think about what God has done in my life without thinking about all that God has done for me in Jesus. As I came to know him and he touched my life and brought healing to me I was completely changed. I do not know what it was that possessed me and was tearing my life apart. All I know is that he brought me sanity and health and wholeness. But even more than that he treated me and other women in a way that no other men have ever treated us. He regarded us as people of worth. He affirmed our dignity. As he allowed me and those other women to travel with him and his disciples we may not have been one of those twelve people he called his disciples, but certainly we were right there with them, learning from him and being allowed to share our own thoughts with him. It was just wonderful as a woman to be treated in this way.

His message over and over again was of God's love reaching out to heal the broken, bruised and battered lives. I could affirm that Jesus was speaking the truth, because as he had assured me of God's love it had happened to me.

I saw him heal a woman, who had been ill, some said, for at least eighteen years. She was so bent over that she couldn't fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her he said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And then he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight. I thought back to the time when Jesus had spoken similar words to me with the same quiet authority.

It was this authority above all else that turned some of the religious leaders against him. He spoke and taught and acted like he was acting directly from God's authority and many people thought this was blasphemy.

Many of us were so caught up in the excitement of what Jesus was saying and doing that we failed to appreciate how the opposition was growing towards him.

We did not really understand or believe his words when he spoke of having to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things, to be killed, and on the third day to rise again.

I guess we did not understand or appreciate what he was saying because we just did not want to believe it. Even more it just seemed too hard to believe that anyone

would want to hurt someone who was doing so much good and bringing so many blessings to so many people's lives.

Even as we made that journey to Jerusalem with him we thought it was just to be there for the Passover. As he entered the city from the Mount of Olives there was so much excitement as people spread their clothes on the road in front of him and cut down branches from the trees and waved them and cried out, "Hosanna, Blessed is He who Comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna to the Son of David."

With such a welcome I really thought that all of his words about suffering and death certainly must be wrong, and I was relieved. But then it happened all so quickly as so many turned against him.

I was not there as he shared that Passover meal with his disciples but as word came that he had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane where he had been praying, and that Judas had betrayed him to the authorities and that all of his disciples had fled away and that Peter had even denied that he knew him, and that he was on trial and people were crying out, "Crucify him," it was just too much for me to comprehend. Unfortunately I found out that all of these rumors were true, and before I could appreciate all that was happening I heard that they were leading him out to crucify him. I did not want to go, but I could not stay away. After all that he had done for me, I could not abandon him now. As you read with me about what happened please try to imagine all that I was feeling for him and for myself, and think about how you would have been feeling if you had been there with me.

Mary Magdalene Witnesses the Death of Jesus

John 19:25b-30

Leader: Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother,

People: "Woman, here is your son."

Leader: Then he said to the disciple,

People: "Here is your mother."

Leader: And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said,

People: "I am thirsty."

Leader: A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said,

People: "It is finished."

Leader: Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Mary Magdalene Reflects on Being a Witness of the Death of Jesus

It was all so fast. I just could not believe what was happening. As I heard his words of concern for his mother, I thought how typical. Even now as he is suffering such terrible pain and agony his thoughts were on the needs of others.

To say that I was in shock is to underestimate what was happening to me. It was just unbelievable that people would be so cruel to someone who was so kind and who had brought healing and wholeness to my life and to the lives of so many people. It was so unfair. It was so unjust. He had done nothing to deserve how he was being treated. John was there but where were the rest of the disciples? Were those cowards still in hiding after deserting him in the garden? How alone he must have felt as the soldiers and the priests and so many others jeered at him and laughed at him. From some of his cries it sounded as if he felt that even the God he called Father had abandoned him.

After all he had done for me I certainly was not ready to abandon him. But still I felt so helpless. Here he was the One who had changed my life and had given purpose and meaning to my existence once again and he was dying, and not just dying, but suffering the cruel death of cross. How terrible it was that I could not do anything against those forces over which I had no control. As some of you may know, it is so hard to see someone you love suffering, and all you can do is to watch and pray.

Although I really did not want to see it happen I must admit that I experienced a strange sense of relief when Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” and he gave up his spirit. At least he was not suffering any more. These wicked people had done their worst, but at least now they could hurt him no more.

When he died I really did not know what I could do. I had never had someone I knew and loved crucified before. I did not know if I could get hold of his dead body to at least show him some tender loving care in death. I certainly did not want him to be cast into some common grave. But what could I do as one woman against the might of Rome that had killed him? I certainly did not expect that things would develop as they did. Please read with me now about my next experience on that terrible day.

Mary Magdalene Witnesses the Burial of Jesus

Mark 15:42-47

Leader: When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

People: **Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.**

Leader: Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

People: **Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses, saw where the body was laid.**

Mary Magdalene Reflects on the Burial of Jesus

How surprised I was when I heard what Joseph had done. I certainly did not know him and I thought that all of those with power and in authority there in Jerusalem were

against Jesus and were determined to get rid of him. How comforting it was for me to see that there was at least one person with power and position who would use his position to show his concern and love for Jesus. I wish that there had been time to anoint his body as Mary and I wanted to do, but it was getting towards sundown and the Sabbath was about to begin. All we could do was to mark the place so that on the first day of the week after the Sabbath was over we could come and make sure that he received a proper burial. As it turned out, of course, when we did come back to try to do that we found we just could not do so. But I am getting ahead of myself. All I know is that if on that first day of the week I had been able to anoint his dead body I most likely would not be here today speaking to you. It was my experience that morning that was to change my life once again. But that story is for another day, because if I was to tell it to you now you just would not be able to appreciate my anguish and all of the pain and sorrow I felt as I watched him suffer and die on the cross, and then had seen him lain in that tomb and the stone rolled across. Today I would like you to think how you would have felt if you had been me. I want you to know something of my sorrow, of my anguish and of my pain, because I believe that until you have shared some of those experiences you will never come to appreciate what I came to experience on that first day of the week. If you had experienced with me the healing touch of Jesus, and then you had been there with me as he suffered and died and was laid in the tomb, how would you have felt?

(Some of these reflections have been based on First Person Portrayals by Carl B. Rife. 1972 C.S.S. Publishing Co. Inc. Lima, Ohio)

Silent Reflection and Meditation

Unison Prayer: *(based on No Ordinary Man by Nick Fawcett, page 182, 1997, Kevin Mayhew, Ltd, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England)*

Lord Jesus Christ, living as we do in the light of Easter we can lose sight sometimes of the darkness of Good Friday, with your cruel death upon the cross. But for those who were part of it there could be no mistake, no escaping the awfulness of seeing you hanging there upon that cross. For them it was their darkest hour, what

seemed like the end of their dreams, and for a time their faith in you swung in the balance. Yet even there, especially there, you were at work, bringing your love to all. Lord Jesus Christ, teach us that even when life seems dark your light continues to shine, now and always. Amen.

One Minute Prayer for someone in your life for whom life seems dark and who needs the assurance that the light of God's love in Jesus Christ still shines on them.

The Lenten Challenge to pray for that person for one minute each day during this week.

Position Descriptions and Application Forms for our Church Custodian position are available from the church office.

Nails, Lenten Devotionals and previous weeks' Reflections are on the table in the hallway.

Closing Hymn No. 7 "Jesus Loves Me" Stanzas 1, 2 and 3

The Charge and Benediction from the Rev. Dr. Richard C. Halverson, Presbyterian Pastor and former Chaplain to the United States Senate:

Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has a purpose for your being there. Christ, who indwells you has something he wants to do through you where you are! Believe it, and go in his grace and peace. Amen.