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St. Mary Magdalene

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“Addicts of Sin Now Free in Christ”

Text: John 20:1-2, 10-18; Acts 13:26-31; Proverbs 31:10-31

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to fall into sin but how hard it is to crawl out? A moment of weakness, or a moment of foolishness, can result in a whole lot of pain.

It's like that in many areas of our lives. Bad habits form so quickly and take so long to break. It's so easy to eat too much, especially a big dessert, but how hard it is to diet and work off the weight. And how quickly your temper can be lost and hurtful words spoken - words that take a long time to heal.

The youth and I at the Higher Things conference a couple weeks ago heard the story of a pastor whose daughter had fallen into drug and alcohol addiction. It took her only a moment to get hooked, and years of pain and struggle and danger to get out.

Those are pictures and evidences of *the much bigger problem* of our fall into sin. Our much bigger problem because the pits of bad habits can be climbed out of. It might not be easy and it might take a long time, but it can be done. Bad habits can be broken and good habits formed. You can learn to mangle your temper, and addictions can be broken.

But the pit of our sin, the sin we are born with, the sin that infects and corrupts our nature from the moment of our conception, is different. The sin that was ours ever since that one sudden, horrid moment when Adam and Eve fell into the pit of sin and dragged the rest of us along with them. And ever since, we've been trying to climb out. But we can't. No amount of strength, no amount of ingenuity, no amount of perseverance or resolve can do it. The walls are too tall and steep and slimy and mucky, so that no matter how hard we try, it doesn't take long before we fall back in.

And all this doesn't even include when we fall into the pits of other people's sins, like what happened in Aurora, CO a few days ago. How devastating those pits are, too.

All of that is important perspective and background to think about as we commemorate Mary Magdalene today. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus had expelled seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). Some church tradition holds that she was a prostitute, a woman well-acquainted with the ways of the world. A woman whose sordid reputation was known far and wide. But whatever the truth of her was, all are agreed that she was an outcast and that her pit of sin was deeper and darker than most. And she was stuck in that pit for life.

Until she met Jesus - or should I say, until Jesus met her and pulled her out of that pit just as suddenly and completely as she fell in. What she couldn't do and could never do, Jesus did and gave to her! He forgave her and loved her and gave her a new life - a new life set free from the old, *as if it had never happened at all*. No one had ever done that for her before, or loved her that way before. And even though I'm sure there were those who came along and reminded her of her past and her sins and unworthiness and tried to drag her back down and back into the pit of her past and her sins, the forgiveness and love of Jesus was constant, and held her fast to Himself.

So you can imagine her joy! An addict healed in an instant. All the weight of her sin taken off immediately. She was forgiven and made new. For that's what Jesus came to do.

So yeah, she didn't want Jesus to leave. She was devastated at His crucifixion. So when she saw Him in the garden three days later, resurrected from the dead and alive, she wanted to cling to Him there and not let Him go. She called Him **Rabboni** - teacher, for Jesus had taken her under His wing and taught her love, taught her forgiveness, and taught her what it means to be fully human. For you cannot be fully human unless you are in a right relationship with your heavenly Father. Where you were meant to be.

And so Mary can teach us today. She loved much because she had been forgiven much. And she knew it. *Do you?* She loved much because she had been rescued from a pit she could not otherwise get out of - and she knew it. *Do you?* Or if your love is cold, and you find yourself not clinging to your Lord like Mary, is it because you don't want to admit you're addicted to sin and cannot get out? But that's what addicts do, isn't it? *Deny*. Deny that you have a problem. Deny that you love your comfort more than your Saviour. Deny that you fear what others think of you more than you fear what God thinks of you. Deny that your greed, your lust, your anger, your dissatisfaction with the life God has given you is a problem. Deny that you don't really believe and trust that everything God is doing in your life is good and for your good, because there's some stuff that really doesn't seem good. Mary knew how deep her pit. *Do you?*

It's true. Your sinful nature is addicted to sin, and keeps craving another hit, another jolt to satisfy it. And it keeps coming back for more. That's not the life you were meant to have. That's not the life you were created to have. That's life in the pit. The pit that is, in the end, your grave.

But into that pit Jesus came. He didn't just reach a hand down for you and say: *Hang on, I'll pull you up.* He came down into the pit to be with you. **That's His incarnation.** He came down from heaven and was born into this world of sin to be with sinners and addicts like you and me and Mary. To grab hold of you here with *both hands, both feet*, and a body whipped and abused and hung on a cross. To go to the very depths of our pit that no one be too deep, too weak; that no one be excluded, and bring us out. **That's His resurrection.** To bring you out of sin and death to life in your baptism, and not only to life, but a new life, a life of freedom. Out of the pit of sin and now free to live. Like a bird set free from it's cage to joyfully fly through the air, or a dog set free from it's leash to joyfully run through a field.

That's the forgiveness and freedom Mary had been given and why she loved so much. And it's the forgiveness and freedom your Lord gives you too, in a whole new life.

Now, some people hear of that freedom, that Christ's death and resurrection has brought us up out of the pit of sin and death and that you are now free to live, and you know what they do? *They jump right back down into the pit again!* Back into sin, using their freedom for that. Or sometimes we fall into it. Or sometimes we're foolish and just want to see how close to the edge we can get . . . and look in . . . to see how close we can get, how far we can go . . . and a little farther . . . and ahhhhh! [We fall in.] In that way, dogs and birds are a bit smarter than we, huh? *They're not going back!* Unless a tasty morsel lures them back. Satan does that to us, too.

You see the problem? That's why - like in the reading from Acts today - the death and resurrection of Jesus is and must be the church's constant message and proclamation. It's the only way out of the pit. The pit into which we keep falling. The pit that Jesus is constantly rescuing us from. Yes, *constantly.* Isn't that good news? He doesn't just pull us out once, clean us up, and then find us back in that same pit later, look down and say, "*Stupid!*" and walk away. No. He rescues us again. He forgives us again. So great is His love for you, His child. So great His love that doesn't want you to live down there in the muck and mire and prison of sin, but in the freedom of His love and life.

Maybe that's why Mary clung to Jesus in the garden like she did. No doubt because

of His love for her and her love now for Him. But also because *what was she going to do if He left?* Who was going to pull her out of the pit? The pit of sin into which - if she's anything like us, and we know that she is - she would keep falling back into?

Mary had to learn that Jesus wasn't leaving, but that she would have to cling to Him now in a *new* way. For He was ascending to "**My Father and your Father**" in order to be present with all people in a new way - to be present not just in *one* body, with *one* mouth, and *one* set of hands and feet, but to be present now in *many* bodies, with *many* mouths, and with *many* sets of hands and feet, in every pulpit, in every font, and on every altar, all around the world and for all time! That through His Word and Sacraments He continue to forgive and rescue His people. That through these means He continue to wash and feed and teach us. That all people everywhere repent and cling to Him with the hands of faith, clinging to Him where He has promised to be for us now, and live made new in His glorious freedom.

Which brings us to the reading we heard earlier from Proverbs: **An excellent wife who can find?** Maybe these verses should be understood not just of earthly wives, but even more of the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Bride of Christ that, set free from the pit of sin and death to live in freedom and love, uses that glorious freedom and love to do good and take care of others. To run through that field or fly through the air to others and help them. For you don't have to worry about the pit anymore, you don't have to worry about death anymore - Jesus has taken care of that for you.

And so your concern now can be those Jesus has given to you. Like the good wife of Proverbs, providing for and taking care of those Jesus has given you in your home, in your church, in your neighborhood, in the world, not afraid of what may happen or of the pits that may be out there - even pits that may come suddenly and unexpectedly in a crowded movie theatre - but confident of your Saviour's saving love for you, and of His life given to you. Life given now and that will live forever.

That's the love and life Mary knew. And it changed her. No one would have wanted her as a bride - she was used and damaged goods! But there was one who did want her, and (she would want you to know) who wants you and is here for you. So come (she would say), come and receive Him and **cling to Him here**. And then go live in the glorious freedom He has given you, no matter what happens. You have been set free to love. You have been set free to live.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.