

There were plenty of messages given about women this week – here are a few:

“Moms in the House, with kids at home” was a headline this week in the Washington Post. The ‘house’ they were referring to, of course, is the House of Representatives.

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton was holding a Town Hall Meeting to talk about “Sex in the City” – not the TV show, but the fact that DC has the highest number of HIV infected women than any other city.

And, don’t even get me started on the Washington Post article that was all about Hillary Clinton’s cleavage!

Last week 15,000 “Women of Faith” gathered at the Verizon Center for music, spirituality and inspiration in their personal relationship with Jesus.

Today the Lutheran Church celebrates – a woman - Mary Magdalene for her discipleship, for being, “The Apostle to the Apostles” as she has been called throughout history.

Just like there is no shortage of opinions and messages on working mothers, women and sex, women and politics and women and faith, so is there no shortage of opinion and message of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene is a woman with a reputation – and not a good one. Her story has often been that she was reformed by her encounter with Jesus, turned from her wicked sexual sinning ways and followed Jesus. But you’ll see that most of the information and presentation of Mary Magdalene of this sort has little or no biblical basis.

So who is Mary Magdalene? And how and why do we get mixed messages from or about her?

Given the few number of women highlighted or named in the gospels, you might wonder, as the early Christians did, if this Mary was the same woman as some of the other women in the Bible. Is this the Mary who was the sister of Martha and Lazarus who put the costly

nard on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair just before he went to Jerusalem? You might have some hazy recollection of Mary Magdalene as a sinner or prostitute – wasn't she the woman who crashed Simon the Pharisee's dinner party, wept on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair? This woman is identified only as a sinner in Luke's gospel and most assume she was a prostitute.

It wasn't only the people in the pews as we say now, but leaders drew conclusions about Mary Magdalene and the other women in the Bible, too. In a sermon preached in 591, Pope Gregory the Great declared that these three women were the same – Mary Magdalene, Mary with the nard, and the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house. She was a woman, she was sinful so the party crasher must have been a prostitute, and therefore Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. And, throughout history, in paintings and stories, Mary Magdalene has been portrayed as a red-headed sexual sinner – presented as either a prostitute or an adulteress.

Over the next years and generations, scholars, preachers, people of faith began to question the validity of Pope Gregory and others' conclusions and in 1969 the Catholic Church officially declared Mary Magdalene was misidentified as the sister of Martha and Lazarus, or as being a prostitute.

Yet, that hasn't stopped recent books or movies like *The DaVinci Code* or *The Last Temptation of Christ* from positing Mary Magdalene as something more to Jesus, wife even, than the disciple that she was.

Just as mothers in the House of Representatives and Senate, women and sex and Hillary Clinton's neckline make newspaper headlines, we still have a hard time accepting Mary Magdalene for who she was – a friend and supporter of Jesus – a disciple who served him and loved him as the Twelve did.

So, who is Mary Magdalene?

Mary was from a place on the west side of Galilee named Magdala – In biblical times, people didn't have last names, so they were

identified by the place they came from. So, Mary received the identifying name of Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned 12 times in the gospels. 11 of these are from accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection. She is the only consistent name across the gospels at the cross, his death, removal for burial, and his resurrection. The other time she is mentioned is in Luke's gospel, the 8th chapter. Mary Magdalene was one of two women named that provided Jesus and his group with money and supplies. Luke also tells us that Mary was cured of evil spirits – Jesus had cast out 7 demons from Mary Magdalene.

Mary was one of the women who accompanied Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem. On the journey to Jerusalem, Mary experienced a little of what the kingdom of God could be like - men and women together, called together for the purpose of spreading God's word, working together, learning from the Teacher. A kingdom of God where the formerly demon-possessed and sick, tax collectors and fishermen all belong together working in God's name.

Bernard of Clairvaux was perhaps the first to refer to Mary Magdalene as "the apostle to the apostles" because she was sent by the resurrected Jesus to tell the others what he told her.

In today's reading from the gospel of John Mary is transformed from a faithful disciple of Jesus to Mary with a message.

Mary Magdalene is Mary with a message – "I have seen the Lord".

Like Mary, woman and man, we have each stood in the dark, numb with grief, unable to make sense of what is missing. We have run this way and that, only to come to stand again in the very face of emptiness; finally, we gather the courage to look into that emptiness – asking God for what is missing. And, we, like Mary, hear Jesus call our name. We hear assurance of his presence, of God's providence in our lives. And, like Mary, woman and man, we are sent with a message – The Easter message.

Ruth 1:6-18
Acts 13:26-33a
John 20:1-2, 11-18

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Pastor Wendy Moen
July 22, 2007; Mary Magdalene, Apostle

A message of hope and restoration at the hand of God. A message of healing by God's great mercy. A message of joy in and through a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us share *this* message with the world. Amen.