

# “Selected Gospel Sections”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 11

## “The Women at the Tomb”

Matthew 8:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18.

**Objective:** To understand the message of the Gospel accounts in their context within each work independently and then to compare the accounts to each other to seek understanding of emphasis and focus. The goal is then to apply this message to our time and context in order to understand the message’s call on our lives.

**Materials:** To use the Greek, Syriac, and other ancient translations in order to help us understand the message of these Gospels. We will also examine the writings about these passages in journal articles, commentaries and other sources.

### Procedures

1. To first translate each text from Greek and then compare it to other ancient translations.
2. To identify issues of importance within the texts and to explore possible meanings as they applied to the original audience.
3. To take the meaning for the original audience of the Gospels and to understand it how applies to our modern context and cultural situation.
4. To explore ways that these text call the disciples of Jesus to live their lives as faithful followers.

**Matthew 28:1-8** <sup>1</sup> And after the Sabbath, in the dawning of first day of the week, Mariam Magdalene and the other Maria (went) to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And behold and there was a great earthquake for an angel of the Lord descending out of heaven, came and rolled the stone away and sat upon it. <sup>3</sup> And his appearance was like lightening and his clothes were as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And from fear of him the ones guarding shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the messenger answering said to the women, "Do not be afraid for I know that you are seeking Jesus the one who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for He was raised just as He said. Come now see the place where He was lying. <sup>7</sup> Then

**Mark 16:1-8** <sup>1</sup> And when the Sabbath was passed Maria Magdalene and Maria (the mother of) Jacob, and Salome bought spices in order to go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And exceedingly early on the first day of the week they came upon the tomb after the sun had risen. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the doorway of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And after looking they saw that the stone had been rolled away, indeed it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And after entering into the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in white clothing, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, the one who had been crucified. He has been raised, He is not

**Luke 24:1-12** <sup>1</sup> And on the first day, at early dawn they came to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone having been rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> And being perplexed about this, behold two men stood beside them in dazzling clothes, <sup>5</sup> and the women were afraid of them and bowing their faces unto the ground, (the men) said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but He has been raised. Remember how he spoke to you while He was in the Galilee, <sup>7</sup> saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise up." <sup>8</sup> And

**John 20:1-18** <sup>1</sup> On the first day of the week Maria Magdalene came while it was still dark unto the tomb and saw the stone removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> Therefore she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciples whom Jesus loved and told them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have put Him." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter went out, along with the other disciple to the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Then the two were running together and the other disciple soon ran ahead of Peter and came first to the tomb. <sup>5</sup> And after stooping down he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not enter. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came and following him he entered into the tomb

proceed quickly to His disciples because He has been raised from the dead, and behold He goes before you into the Galilee, there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”<sup>8</sup> And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy; they ran to report to His disciples.

here; behold the place where they put Him.<sup>7</sup> But go away, and tell His disciples and Peter that He is going ahead of you into the Galilee. Look there for Him just as He said to you.”<sup>8</sup> And they went out and fled from the tomb for terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were terrified. [But all they had been commanded they told briefly to those around Peter. Afterward, Jesus sent out from east and from the west through them the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation, Amen.

they remembered His words.<sup>9</sup> And after returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.<sup>10</sup> Now they were Maria Magdalene, Joanna, and Maria the mother of Jacob and the other women with them told these things to the apostles.<sup>11</sup> But these words seemed to them to be nonsense and they were not believing them.<sup>12</sup> But Peter got up and ran to the tomb and stooping down saw the linen cloths only; and he went away amazed at what had happened.

and saw the linen cloths lying there,<sup>7</sup> and the towel which was upon His head, was not with the linen cloths, but had been rolled up separately into one place.<sup>8</sup> Then also the other disciple entered, the one coming first, to the grave and he saw and he believed;<sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture that He must rise from the dead.<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples departed again to their place.<sup>11</sup> But Maria stood outside the tomb weeping. Then as she wept she stooped down to look into the tomb,<sup>12</sup> and she saw two messengers in white one at the head and one at the feet, where was lying the body of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> And they said to her, “Woman why are you weeping?” She said to them because

**they have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have put Him. <sup>14</sup> After saying this she turned around and she saw Jesus standing and she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She thought that He was the gardener, she said to Him, Sir if you carried him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him. <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mariam!" She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni," which means teacher. <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold onto me, for I have not ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup>**

**Mary Magdalene went  
announcing to the  
disciples that, "I have seen  
the Lord," and that He had  
said these things to her.**

This is the last lesson in this series and ends with the pivotal event of human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hodges describes the resurrection as, “The central fact of the Christian faith ...”<sup>1</sup> The truth However, is that this is far more than just an event in history, it is when everything changed. Ed Chinn writes, “Many people, including Christians, view the Resurrection only as a great historical event. They pause each Easter to reverently remember the death and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Paul, however understood that it was much, much, more, and when he wrote to the people of Philippi he had these words to say about the resurrection of Jesus Christ: **“The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the participation in his sufferings. It includes being conformed to his death <sup>11</sup> so that I may perhaps reach the goal of the resurrection of the dead.”**<sup>3</sup> Can you even begin to imagine what it must have been like to be the very first witness of the resurrection? It is of interest to me that though Jesus had selected twelve men to be His disciples; yet none of these were the first to testify to the “resurrection” of Jesus. None of these were the first to see the risen savior, that privilege, that honor would

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<sup>1</sup> Zane Clark Hodges, “The Women and the Empty Tomb,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (1966), pp. 301-309.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/the-power-of-his-resurrection/>

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:10-11. CEB.

fall to a woman. In the accounts of the Gospel women were given the commission of being sent to inform the Apostles that Jesus had been raised from the dead. In a sense these women were apostles to the Apostles.

Being a witness of Christ, especially of the resurrection was an event of crucial importance. Revelation highlights the exalted status of not only being a “witness” of Jesus Christ, but especially exalts those who died because of their witnessing.<sup>4</sup> After the death of Judas the Apostles selected another to act as witness to his resurrection to return their number to twelve.<sup>5</sup> That such an honor of being the first human witness to see the resurrected Lord is truly amazing to us today, but the fact that this would be a woman would have been even more amazing to an ancient audience, including an ancient Jewish audience. According to the ancient Jewish historian Josephus the testimony of a woman was considered inadmissible in a Jewish Court.<sup>6</sup> Even in modern times there is some dispute regarding the admissibility of the evidence from a woman in Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 6:9; 12:11; 12:17

<sup>5</sup> Acts 1:21-22 - **“Therefore, we must select one of those who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus lived among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when Jesus was taken from us. This person must become along with us a witness to his resurrection.”** CEB.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.15. “But let not a single witness be credited, but three, or two at the least, and those such whose testimony is confirmed by their good lives. **But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex** <sup>21</sup> Nor let servants be admitted to give testimony, on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment. But if any one be believed to have borne false witness, let him, when he is convicted, suffer all the very same punishments which he against whom he bore witness was to have suffered.” Translated by William Whiston - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link42HCH0008>

eyes. This debate is an ancient one and in each case is based on their perception that women's character is unreliable. The prohibition of women's testimony is seen among many Jews as being derived from a biblical decree rather than from a socio-historical criterion and therefore is not seen as subject to change.<sup>7</sup>

While it is not the case that the Bible directly discusses women's eligibility to testify, the issue of testimony itself is addressed in Deuteronomy 19:15.<sup>8</sup> This verse is seen as evidence that only a man may testify because it uses masculine forms to describe the witnesses here. Others within Judaism (Yair Shiber) argue for a very different perspective. Shiber asserts that a woman is eligible to give testimony because of Deuteronomy 21:18-21,<sup>9</sup> which includes the mother as a witness against the rebellious son. Some have said that the parents are not so much bringing testimony here against the rebellious son as bringing a complaint. In later times tannaitic sources (A.D. 10-220) will require warning the rebellious son in front of witnesses,

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<sup>7</sup> Ilan Fuchs, "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

<sup>8</sup> **A solitary witness against someone in any crime, wrongdoing, or in any sort of misdeed that might be done is not sufficient. The decision must stand by two or three witnesses.** CEB.

<sup>9</sup> **Now if someone has a consistently stubborn and rebellious child, who refuses to listen to their father and mother—even when the parents discipline him, he won't listen to them—** <sup>19</sup> **the father and mother will take the son before the elders of that city at its gates.** <sup>20</sup> **Then they will inform the city's elders: "This son of ours is consistently stubborn and rebellious, refusing to listen to us. What's more, he's wild and a drunkard."** **21:21 Then all the people of that town will stone him until he dies. Remove such evil from your community! All Israel will hear about this and be afraid.** CEB.

and thus absolving the parents of acting as actual witnesses. It is the case that sources from other cultures, in period of the Old Testament do not form a clear picture of whether women were generally disqualified from acting as a witness.<sup>10</sup> Some, such as Bruce Wells have made the claim that women could indeed give testimony and he touts support from Assyrian, Babylonian, and Nuzian sources.<sup>11</sup> There is, as one might expect disagreement of when, and if, women could testify in the Old Testament era. The earliest Jewish text dealing directly with this issue is unclear<sup>12</sup> and so leaves us still in a certain limbo.<sup>13</sup>

This leads us back to Josephus as the first testimony that gives a reason for a woman being unable to give testimony “Let the testimony of women not be accepted because of the levity and boldness of their gender.”<sup>14</sup> Fuchs makes the insightful supposition that Josephus may have been heavily influenced by contemporary Greek and Roman concepts of women in his assessment of their nature as being unreliable witnesses. Scholars of Qumranic law (Dead Sea Scrolls) disagree on the interpretation of sectarian literature

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<sup>10</sup> Ilan Fuchs, “Women’s Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Wells, *The Law of Testimony in the Pentateuchal Codes*, in *Beihefte zu Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), pp. 51-53.

<sup>12</sup> *Sifre* 190. This writing is incredibly difficult to date as it has transitioned through the hands of many editors.

<sup>13</sup> Ilan Fuchs, “Women’s Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Antiquities*, 14.8.15. Translated by William Whiston - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link42HCH0008>

concerning the ability of women to give testimony. However, even those that do hold that women can give testimony reduce the allowance of their testimony to instances of testifying against spouses who have diverged from the cult's internal regulations, or where the testimony was needed for a physical examination of another woman. Baumgarten indicates that, "There is no evidence, so far as I know, of women acting as witnesses in criminal cases in any Jewish source. Similarly, it has been inferred from the general practice of Athenian and Roman law that women were, with few exceptions, excluded from the witness box."<sup>15</sup> In later Jewish commentary on the issue of testimony there were certainly those who expressed concern for the admissibility of testimony from those involved in occupations that were considered questionable stating that it should not be accepted. Some relate this to women as well, though this seems to be making many assumptions.<sup>16</sup>

The inadmissibility of the testimony of slaves was a later addition to those that were not allowed to give testimony and Fuchs suggests that perhaps this should be considered as a possibility for the prohibition of the testimony of women as well, as a later inference, perhaps derived from contact with Greek

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Baumgarten, "On the Testimony of Women in 1 QSA," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76:4 (1957), pp. 266-269.

<sup>16</sup> Ilan Fuchs, "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

and Roman culture. Shiber indicates that he believes that women were prohibited from giving testimony by the rabbis of the tannaitic period (A.D. 10-220) in order to preserve the traditional family. Fuchs finds such a supposition to be incredulous as there are indeed materials from Roman sources that would indicate that the testimony of women is an “affront to modesty.”<sup>17</sup> In other words it destroys the traditional family structure. There is indeed at least some indication from the early rabbinic sources that in certain cases a woman could testify, but only if immediately following the incident and before any contact with others. The issue seems to be concern over a woman being influenced by others as if a woman is particularly susceptible to such influence.<sup>18</sup>

In the Amoriac period (A.D. 200-500) the inadmissibility of women’s testimony is unequivocal. Such a ruling is based upon the fact that the words used in Deuteronomy 19:15 are masculine and therefore the indication is that only men are able to stand as witnesses. To be sure, there were those who disputed such a view stating that basically the whole of the Old Testament is written in masculine form. Over and over again the Jewish sources of the tannaitic and amoriac periods give the consistent perception that the testimony of

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<sup>17</sup> Cicero, *Against Verres*, 2.1.94.

<sup>18</sup> Ilan Fuchs, “Women’s Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

women was to be rejected based upon the nature and character of women.<sup>19</sup> This same perception aligns with what is to be found in the Greek and Roman sources of this period as well, that is why the contrast that we find in the New Testament stands out as a beacon of light in a sea of darkness. All four of the Gospel accounts highlight the role of the women at the resurrection of Jesus. Why in all four accounts? Perhaps it is because the Gospel writers understood the contrast with much of the received wisdom of their era and they perhaps understood that such received wisdom was not wisdom from God. This was made apparent to them by the actions of the angels sending the women as messengers and by the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Maria Magdalene as the first human being to see the resurrected Messiah.

In our previous study on the anointing of Jesus, we find that He does not treat women with the suspicion and disdain that was common for that period. Jesus accepts their testimony, and their gifts, expressing both His appreciation of them and announcing that their story will be told over and over again as far as the Gospel message reaches. In this last section it is particularly Mariam Magdalena who is set apart for honor. She, and other women were going to the tomb to prepare the body more fully for its final rest by bringing aromatic spices. They set out while it was still dark. Each of the Gospel accounts will emphasize

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<sup>19</sup> Ilan Fuchs, "Women's Testimony in Jewish Law: A Historical Survey," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. 119-159.

different aspects of the story depending upon their focus. There is no attempt by any of the Gospel writers to give every detail as if they were giving testimony in a court to those that were skeptical of the testimony. The Gospel writers had no need to be compendious since many of their readers already knew more facts than is presented by each of the writers. The challenge of each gospel account was to encourage spiritual insight, we believe that this was done by granting divinely guided insight to those writers to allow them to select the right details and to exclude the right details in order to accomplish their divinely ordained task.<sup>20</sup>

So many times today people approach the Gospel accounts as if they were intended to be court documents meant to prove their validity and their veracity. These documents were intended to be read by believers in order to guide them into greater spiritual insight and help them to become more fully and completely disciples of Jesus Christ. They were not intended to be the only source of “belief” or “trust” in Jesus. They were not intended to just overwhelm us with unequivocal force so that we would be forced to believe based on the sheer volume and rectitude of the data. Jesus also sent spiritual witnesses into the world; in this instance the angels that came and spoke with those that came to the tomb. Later on Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to be with His people and to lead, guide, and direct them in power from on high.

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<sup>20</sup> Zane Clark Hodges, “The Women and the Empty Tomb,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (1966), pp. 301-309.



He also sent human witnesses that were empowered through His Spirit to not only to speak but to live as He lived. They were to be people that were more than just people of the book, they were to be people of the Spirit and they were to become a part of the living story of God. God is not as the deists propose simply a spectator, but a participant in His creation and among His people. This fact is most fully seen in the sending of Jesus, to be born, to live, to die and to be raised from the dead.

In the Gospel of Matthew we are only told about Mariam Magdalene and “the other” Maria from among the women that went to the tomb. The account of the others is not included. Here we are given the only account of an earthquake taking place at the resurrection by any of the Gospel writers. Matthew clearly sees this as a divine action. We told by Matthew of the guards who shook in fear and the account only mentions one angel and then the account simply says they looked in the tomb and then departed quickly and ran to report to the disciples what they had seen.

Mark gives a similar account, but adds the detail that the women wondered who would roll the stone away so they could enter the tomb. This account too only mentions one angel, but adds the detail that they were to go and tell His disciples and Peter that He was going ahead of them into the Galilee. This account has some severe textual problems, but does not disagree with the account in Matthew, though it does emphasize

different details. Surely this is the mark of authenticity. If you have ever sat and listened to eyewitness testimony in court you would have been very suspicious, or at least you should be suspicious if all the details are the same among multiple witnesses. It is an indication of collusion and sharing among the witnesses. Something that courtroom witnesses are challenged not to do. Mark's account in some manuscripts and in some modern translations has a disputed reading that is also not found in many modern Bibles because it is not found in some of the earliest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark.

Luke's Gospel also recounts the women going to the tomb at early dawn, finding the stone rolled away and upon entering the tomb finding no body. Here however, we are told that there were two men (angels) and we are given the famous phrase "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" They are then reminded of the words of Jesus telling them about these things during His ministry. We are also told that Maria Magdalene and Joanna, and Maria the mother of Jacob (James) and the "other women" told these things to the apostles, but that they did not "believe" them (they did not trust their testimony). Peter, in this account is reported as running to the tomb, seeing the empty tomb and going away amazed. This account gives a number of details not found in the other two accounts.

Finally we come to the account of John, which is the longest of the accounts, where emphasis is placed only on Maria (there is no such word as Mary in the Greek text here) Magdalene who came while it was still dark, she sees the stone removed, runs to tell Peter and the other disciples. Here we have the account of Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved (John) running to the tomb. We are told that this other disciple (John) came first to the tomb, looked in but did not enter the tomb. Peter, as is his nature rushes into the tomb upon his arrival and sees the cloths lying there, but no body. The fact that there is no body is found in all four accounts. Jesus is risen. This is central to all of the accounts, Jesus is risen, even if not directly stated this is the inference.

In John's Gospel we are told that Maria stays at the tomb after the disciples departed, weeping, she then sees two "messengers" (angels) in the tomb standing at the head and the foot of the tomb and these messengers ask her why she is weeping. She still does not get it, she thinks someone has taken the body. Then it happens, the most incredible thing in all of history, she sees the risen Jesus. She is the very first human witness of the resurrected Lord. At first she does not recognize Him. She expected Him to be dead, but then He speaks her name and she recognizes Him. Jesus then sends her to deliver a message to His



disciples. She is an apostle to the apostles. Out of all the people Jesus could have chosen He chooses her, a woman, for this honor.

In all four Gospel accounts the primary messengers who were commanded to announce the resurrection were women. Among these women, just as Peter acts as the primary spokesperson for the male disciples, Maria Magdalene acts as the primary spokesperson for the female followers of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> There is no controversy among Gospel writers, women are credited with testifying to the resurrection of Jesus and they are cast as credible witnesses, in contrast to the way they were viewed in this time by others. I do not believe that it is by chance that this is the case. I believe that God chose these women distinctly. Jesus could have just as easily appeared to Peter and John when they were at the tomb, or for that matter at any time and at any place that He chose. Jesus chose to honor Maria Magdalene as the first human witness to see the resurrected Lord.

All the old arguments, stereotypes, and reasonings of both ancient and modern man fall to the wayside as Jesus orchestrates this set of events and chooses as His first witness a woman from whom He had driven

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, "Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection," *Theological Studies* 48:4 (1987), pp. 631-646.

seven demons.<sup>22</sup> She is mentioned twelve times in the Gospels, more than most of the Apostles. She was one of the women that travelled with Jesus and supported him financially.<sup>23</sup> She saw the crucifixion of Jesus as is recorded by the Gospel writers.<sup>24</sup> She was a devoted follower of Jesus and she never failed in her devotion to Him. She stands as a beacon of faith and devotion to all followers of Jesus down through the centuries. She also stands as a message that Jesus does not reckon her testimony as worthless, or in some sense as of no account. She is the very first human witness to see the resurrected Lord. God is no respecter of persons.<sup>25</sup> God values all people and challenges all people to follow His Son with a distinctive devotion and trust. Jesus seeks to encourage this trust regardless of status or standing in the community. He values this more than sex, race, creed, power or money. He calls for us in this story to trust Him fully in a way demonstrated by our devotion to Him.

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9

<sup>23</sup> Luke 8:2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:55-56; John 19:25. Luke only mentions that there were women without giving their names Luke 23:49.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 10:34-35 **Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him."** NET. Romans 2:11 **For there is no partiality with God.** NET. Galatians 3:28 **There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.** NRSV.

# Synopsis

This account, of the women at the tomb, is found in all four Gospel accounts and the leading actors in all four of these accounts are women. They are cast as the central actors around which everything else turns. This state of affairs stands in stark contrast to the ways of the ancient world where not even the testimony of a woman was considered to be admissible, or trustworthy in a court of law. By contrast the Gospel writers indicate that it is women who were still acting out of a singular devotion to Christ, though even they failed to believe that He would rise from the dead as He had predicted. They went expecting to find Him still in the tomb and in need of the burial spices that they had prepared. All of history, all of their experiences, had taught them this is what they should expect. All the men are somewhere else, not having a part, initially in this unfolding drama.

God uses the testimony of women to bring the message of what had been done to the ears of His Apostles, those who would be sent to proclaim His message far and wide, but first that message originated with women who stood as witnesses of the empty tomb. In particular, Jesus chose Maria Magdalene as His first human witness of the resurrected Messiah, the one who would save all who would trust in Him. Jesus



chose to overturn convention and tradition, and to challenge the way things were done in His choice. Maria Magdalene stands forever as a witness of this momentous moment, a monument to the value that is placed upon true devotion, above all else. This is a calling to all of us to trust in the words of God, and in the words of Jesus above all else. Jesus calls us to be true believers, to act out of true devotion and for all of this to be reflected in the way we live out our days. God is not a respecter of persons.

# Questions

1. When you read the Gospel accounts are you reading with eyes that believe, or are you seeking to believe? Does it matter which? Why, or why not?
2. Why do you believe in Jesus and His resurrection?
3. How do you determine the basis for your beliefs?
4. Why do you think it is so hard to believe some things?
5. What does it take for you to change a belief? Why that?
6. How do your beliefs affect the way you live each day? Why?
7. When you think of Jesus what images come to your mind?
8. How hard do you think it is to believe in the concept of the resurrection? Why do you think it is so hard?
9. On what do you base your evaluation of the “truth?” Why?
10. When you read the accounts of the resurrection what points stand out to you the most? Why?
11. Why do you think Jesus chose to appear first to Maria Magdalene after His resurrection?
12. What difference do you think it means that Jesus chose a woman to be His first human witness of the resurrected Lord?

13. Why do you think the disciples of Jesus failed to believe the testimony of the women regarding the empty tomb?

14. Who do you trust? Why do you trust them?

15. Why do you think Jesus was supported by women in His ministry and not men?

16. Why do you think it is important today for us to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important for us to know that on the first day of the week, after the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, He was raised from the dead. It is important to know that people were not really expecting this to happen; they took spices for His burial and His disciples were not waiting at the tomb to watch Him rise. What happened was considered impossible, unexpected, and it was unbelievably, despite Jesus telling them that this is what would happen. What do you believe today that gives you hope?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words raising Jesus from the dead, sending His angels to earth, rolling the stone away. So often we do not see God working in our world because we have just come to expect things to happen. We take them for granted, and we decide what is possible and what is not, based upon our experiences of what we have seen happen; usually many times. We then decide what is not possible because we have not seen it. God is in these words challenging us to believe in Him more than in our own experiences and own powers of observation. What are some ways that you live out your trust in God?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

God challenges His children to learn how to live their lives not from what is accepted wisdom and not from what seems good to each individual, but from Him. He sent His Son to live, and to die, to show us how to do both. Jesus lived His life in service to His Father in heaven and for others. Jesus died the same way; out of obedience to God and in order to serve others. Because of this, Jesus has blazed the trail for those who would truly be the human beings that God always intended them to be. What are some ways that we are challenged to live like Jesus?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us to trust Him and to understand that we are not alone. We are not called to live our lives in fear and seeking to serve only ourselves. We are called to be people that trust in God, who answer His calling for our lives as we follow His will and serve the needs of others. How are we as Christians today called to serve others?