

Take a moment to think back to a time when you had some serious trouble communicating with someone you love.

You know what I mean – one of those moments that, no matter what you said or how you said it – it was the wrong thing. You dug yourself a hole, a hole so deep that you and the person you were talking to needed to get away from each other for a while to try and sort things out. Hopefully, you were able to address it again later on and life went back to normal...but, I bet you'll agree that there are fewer frustrating experiences between people than when this sort of miscommunication happens.

Now pretend you are Mary Magdalene – and you've just shared the most incredible news of your life with people you love – and they don't believe you.

How does that feel?

No matter which version of the Gospels we read – Mary Magdalene was there, and she told the disciples that the tomb was empty. He was gone – that was the message – and Mary was given instructions to be the bearer of that news.

Unfortunately, the way the text reads in nearly all the Gospels, the disciples have some trouble with what she said and they don't believe her.

So, they either dismiss her (rather rudely, too!), or they go look for themselves.

In today's Scripture, they receive the amazing testimony from Mary and other women, and consider it, "Idle talk."

Idle tale, indeed.

We know from past events in Jesus' ministry that the disciples were regular guys who had a little trouble with some of the more meaningful pieces of the whole Jesus package.

We know they were devoted and loyal, and they felt something when they were with him or they wouldn't have dumped their other lives to follow. We also know they saw plenty of unusual and amazing things while they traveled together on the road.

But they weren't the brightest bunch of guys, and it's very likely that when he started to tell them about how the end was going to happen, and that they would have to be

strong and carry on without him (doing many of the same things in the name of God), it probably scared them to pieces.

They may have even used “selective listening” and heard only what made sense to them, because when it all came down just like he said it would – they cowered in fear and went into hiding.

But the woman Mary of Magdala was brave enough to go out to the early morning with a few friends to serve the Rabbi one more time – and return to tell the others that he was missing.

I imagine if we were in the same situation, we would have trouble believing our dearest departed friend and teacher wasn't in the vault we left him in only days before. I suppose we'd be a little skeptical if divine messengers told the woman to tell us to get the word out that this truly happened and he was coming back someday. This is crazy talk – and in those days, coming from a woman, it might even be considered foolish wishful thinking, even if the woman was a trusted friend.

Maybe we shouldn't be too hard on the disciples and their reaction because this was too big – too important – and certainly most of them felt ill-equipped to deal with the reality of it all anyway. We can almost hear their thoughts – “Whoa! The Master wasn't kidding! What do we do now?”

Unfortunately, the modern person in me wants to shake them and have a serious heart-to-heart with them that would go something like this:

“OK, you guys – what's with this? Haven't all of you been with Jesus long enough to know that this was going to happen? Mary isn't a stranger to you – she's been hanging around with you for the last couple of years. You know her – she was a dear friend to Jesus, and to you! She takes care of you and gives you money for your ministry work on the road – and she's one of your greatest assets because she brings lots of other women along to help with all the work around here! And guess what? Jesus made sure she carried this message because she's going to be an apostle just like you! Are you crazy??? She's telling you the truth! The tomb is empty!”

You can tell I truly feel for Mary Magdalene.

She had to be frustrated beyond words at their reaction and doubt because she was part of the group of women who traveled down all those long dusty roads, getting Jesus' ministry out there. I have a hard time believing twelve men would do a three-year road trip and not have women around for the companionship and comfort they could provide – and remember that some women were financially comfortable enough to help fund the whole operation. They weren't always named in the Gospels, but their presence was noted, especially in the Acts of the Apostles and other “post-resurrection” events.

Women were an important part of the whole thing from beginning to end and after; we can be sure of this because we know Jesus accepted anyone – he hung out with the low-lives and “others” of their society – so women would most certainly be around.

And it seems Mary Magdalene had a special place in it all.

In some of the research I did for the class, “Women in Early Christianity,” I learned that Mary seems to have had a larger role than most of us realize. There’s a whole book that’s attributed to her – the Gospel of Mary – though only parts of it remain for us to read and think about.

It wasn’t included in the Canon discussion and selection of books for the Bible - historians believe it was left out largely because those who made decisions about what was to be included were men who didn’t think it was relevant (much like the disciples didn’t believe her message!).

But, within the Gospel of Mary there lies an incredible account of a talk she had with Jesus when he appeared to her after the Resurrection. It was almost like an interview – the format was very different than writing styles of the other authors of the time, and in this discussion, she asks the Rabbi about what to do next – she wants some explanation, which he provides. In her retelling to the disciples, she uses images that are definitely feminine - she speaks of the soul as if it has a life of its own, as it deals with darkness, ignorance and other human weaknesses.

It’s poetic and unusual...intelligent and moving.

And as in our Scripture for today, she freely shares her vision with the others - listen to how the disciples receive her testimony in the Gospel of Mary...

Chapter 9

1) When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her.

2) But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, Say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.

3) Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things.

4) He questioned them about the Savior: Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He

prefer her to us?

5) Then Mary wept and said to Peter, My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?

6) Levi answered and said to Peter, Peter you have always been hot tempered.

7) Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries.

8) But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well.

9) That is why He loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect Man, and separate as He commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said.

10) And when they heard this they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach.

Idle tale indeed.

I have a feeling the disciples weren't the only ones who were threatened by the place Mary had in Jesus' life...this passage brings the focus back to what's important in a way Luke's version misses.

Levy had it right. We should model our lives after Jesus, the Perfect Man, who showed us how to love one another, and who commanded us to preach our faith. That's what's really important.

Mary Magdalene brought the story to us all – if we are wise, we'll listen with joy to the news she brings.

Today, with millions of other believers around the world, we celebrate the miracle of an Empty Tomb that give us hope that Jesus is indeed resurrected – and proves God does love us that much.

It doesn't matter who tells the story – what matters, is there is a story to tell.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

Alleluia! Amen!

