

Misfits, Leaders, Disciples, and Prophets: 12 Amazing Women of the Bible
Part 2: Disciples
May 5, 2019

ACTOR SCRIPTS

(Scripture: Luke 10: 38-43, Luke 8:1-3, John 2:1-12, John 19:25b-27)

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Reflection: Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander

Mary of Bethany (France Blanchard)

I knew Jesus pretty well so it makes sense that I would be a disciple: someone who told his story and lived the way of life he taught us to live. He spent a lot of time at our house, and we were always gathering in folks to spend time together while he stayed with us. We had quite a community going there. This was all before my brother died, the first time. Jesus and my brother were best friends, and they spent a great deal of time together, so you might have heard of him – his name is Lazarus. He got to be pretty famous after Jesus raised him from the dead. Word travels fast when something impossible like that actually happens! We were pretty famous as a family anyhow, that's how we met Jesus in the first place, but after the resurrection thing, our social capital as a family shot through the moon!

Early on, Jesus showed up at our house just to get a free meal, I think. But after he and my brother got to be better friends, Jesus started showing up just to talk to Lazarus. We fed him too, of course, but it wasn't long before the conversation and the relationship surpassed the hunger pangs for the reason to visit. My brother appreciated the company, too. The two of them seemed destined to be friends. Once the conversation started to flow, they would go well into the early morning hours before either one would grow weary.

It was such a joy to catch snippets of their conversations between my chores, and I could hear their belly laughs and guffaws, often coming from the house as they would tease each other and challenge each other on one thing or another. I always thought it would be glorious to have a friend like that, to listen to, and engage with the way they did.

Every once in a while, I would linger near the room they shared just listening to their shared stories. Oftentimes I became so engaged that I forgot what I was supposed to be doing and just leaned against the entry to their room, taking in all they were discussing. On those days, my sister Martha would walk by, see me loitering, and quickly shoo me out of the house and back to the chores that needed to be done. Oh, how I cherished those times though! It was worth whatever tongue-lashing I received from Martha whenever she caught me.

I remember one day I actually stepped into the room where the two of them were talking and I just sat down and started listening. I was amazed at how long it took Martha to find me there! She never even considered to look there, of all places! But what was even more astounding to me was that Lazarus and Jesus actually let me stay – they didn't even try to shoo me out! In fact, Jesus actually included me in the conversation and asked me what I thought! That NEVER happens! I was in heaven – what a great man this was who cared about the thoughts a woman might have on a subject! He even seemed to make my Brother a better man in the process too. Jesus made all of us better by treating us as if we had value in the world because, to him, we did. So even when my sister complained that I wasn't helping with the chores, Jesus supported me and said I could stay – and he did it in a way that didn't belittle Martha. That was just his way.

Our friendship with Jesus made us all better people. We learned to open up our entire household for people to be in conversation with one another. And Jesus taught me a way of living that helped me see something special in every person I met. Through this I developed many other close relationships and entered into many more conversations – even with my sister Martha!

That's what made it so very hard to understand why our good friend Jesus, who loved and appreciated ALL of us in our family, wasn't around when we needed him the most. Our Brother Lazarus grew ill and his health just got perpetually worse. Martha suggested that we send for Jesus because we knew he would help our brother feel better, as well as helping all of us be at ease from the worry for our brother. But Jesus didn't come. Thinking something must have happen to our courier, we made a second attempt, but still no Jesus. It was really odd, because we had never gone so long between visits with him.

When he did finally show up, it was too late. My brother had lost consciousness and died peacefully in the night. By the time Jesus arrived, my brother had been dead four days. No one could help him now. Martha and I both asked Jesus why he did not come to see Lazarus, when he was the one person who could have healed him. But Jesus just wept. We knew he loved Lazarus.

Then he asked me to take him to Lazarus's tomb and commanded the people who followed us to remove the stone at the entrance. No one wanted to since the stench of a person dead four days would be awful, but they obeyed Jesus and opened the tomb. Through his tears, Jesus called with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" and he did! Our brother came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus told us to "Unbind him, and let him go." That was truly an amazing day! We can never tell that story enough, and people never stop coming around the house to hear it.

Jesus's friendship taught us all not to box people into roles, especially the roles of men and women. He always let me sit with them and learn, even though that was not usual for women in my time. In being received for who we are, Jesus gave us the model and the love to receive others in the same way. I think this is the real reason people came around to be with us, although the story of Lazarus coming back to life was pretty compelling too.

Mary Magdalene (Dinah Gomez)

My name is Mary. That could be said of a lot of women, I know, but I'm the Mary who comes from the town of Magdala, a small fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Because of this, I am often called Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus came through my village proclaiming his message and curing people, I was one of those he healed. My body was full of demons, making me very ill, indeed, but Jesus commanded the demons to come out of me, and they obeyed! What a miracle! I vowed then to follow Jesus and assist in any way I could to help him spread the words he spoke about the Kingdom of God, words that healed people and made them whole again. This would be my calling, to help Jesus fulfill his calling. Me, and all the other women he healed, pooled all of our resources to help the ministry.

We became very close friends, Jesus and I, and I learned so much being with him all that time. We were such close friends, that often people thought there must be something "going on" between us. It wasn't usual for men and women to be just friends in my time, so it was only natural for others to presume there was more between us. I did love him, and I know he loved me, but it was a healing love, a love that filled me with wholeness and value. We were true friends, people who supported one another. It is hard to explain, really. It was quite an unusual relationship for our day.

Women weren't often included in the work or ministry of men in my time, but Jesus always included us. There was a group of women who stayed close to Jesus, learning from him and wanting to live life in the manner he did. Because of this, we, together with the men who followed Jesus in the same way, were referred to as Jesus's "disciples." That title got lost along the way for many of us women. Like I said earlier, most folks in my time didn't think much about us women when it came to sharing stories, so when folks told the great stories of Jesus and his ministry, we women were often overlooked. But Jesus knew us all, and many of our other disciple friends mentioned us in their stories, so a few folks have heard about me and the others.

I was there when Jesus taught the crowds and when he healed the sick. I was there when he spoke in parables and when he fed the hungry. I watched Jesus as he did all these things and learned how to live this way of life, and now I'm committed to it. Sadly, I was also there when Jesus was crucified, and was buried. I was one of those who would have prepared his body for a proper burial, a burial of the honor he deserved as a Rabbi, but when I got to the place where they had laid his body after the crucifixion, he was not there! I ran and told Simon Peter, and another disciple, that someone must have taken Jesus's body since the stone closing the tomb had been moved and the body was gone. They ran to the tomb to see for themselves that what I was saying was the truth. When they arrived, they saw what I had seen: Jesus was not there. Peter and the other disciple returned home, not knowing why Jesus was not in the tomb, nor what they should be doing with this news. All I could do was cry. I had lost my teacher. I had lost my friend. And now I could not even give him a proper burial.

As I sat by the empty tomb crying, two angels appeared and asked me why I was crying. When I answered, they disappeared without offering any advice. But then a man appeared and asked me the same question. When I answered him, he looked me in the eye and called my name... "Mary," he said. My eyes filled with tears. "Rabbouni! Teacher!" It was Jesus! He was alive and standing with me, as we had stood together so many times before. My friend was alive! My tears fell again, but this time in great joy! I urged him to come with me to tell the others he was back, not dead at all – but he said he could not go with me. He told me to tell the others that he was going to be with our Father, our God. So, I let him go, and I ran as fast as I could to tell the others everything Jesus had told me! "I have seen the Lord," I told them. And I have told everyone I meet, ever since. I now live the life Jesus taught me to live, knowing my friend and teacher continues to walk with me, always.

Mary, Mother of Jesus (Jessica Johnson)

My name is Mary, too. I'm the one that doesn't necessarily need a last name or description to let you know which Mary I am. I guess this is because I was around even *before* Jesus. I'm not exactly the *first* Mary, but I might be the one you think of first when others mention my name. You see, I am Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Sometimes, I'm referred to as the "Virgin Mary" or just "The Virgin." But I was the vessel the Spirit chose to carry Jesus and bring him into this world. I was not alone on this journey, however, even though the paternity of Jesus was always questioned. Wonderfully, and somewhat miraculously, my fiancé Joseph was with me as well. I worried there for a while that he might not believe the story I told him about speaking with the Spirit of God and how it was revealed to me that I would carry a son who would change the world. I'm not sure he would have believed me if it were just me who told that story. Rumor has it he was considering dismissing our engagement and sending me away quietly, but thankfully, the Spirit of God spoke to Joseph as well, assuring him that things would work out just fine if he honored our engagement and stood with me. Joseph is such a good man, he not only stood with me through all of it, but he always honored me through his behavior.

Joseph and I did bring Jesus into the world and raised him as we were called. We learned quickly that just because Jesus was sent to us by God, he did not always act the saint! There were some worrisome

times when Jesus questioned our authority and intent, especially when he was a mere child, testing his own strength and possibilities! One of the times I remember well was when he was older and maybe should have trusted me a little more. We were at a wedding, and the wine had run out. We both knew that he could be of help to me by replenishing the supply, but he was being obstinate and not wanting to help me when I asked. I usually did not push him into doing things he did not want to do, but this event was important to me. I was one of the people charged for helping to make the event festive and engaging, and I really wanted the guests to stay longer and celebrate together. That was not likely if the wine disappeared. I have been to plenty of weddings where people left almost immediately after the taps were turned off.

So I turned to my son for support. After all, he was the one who was always teaching that community was very important and that being with one another allows the Spirit to dwell among us and bring us most fully alive. I believe him when he says these things and I have been trying to pattern my own life after his teachings. I truly want the community to reflect God's love for us, so I did my best to remind Jesus of this way of life he taught me, in that moment, so that he might be held accountable for his own words. Moms are like that – always reminding their children who they are and what they are capable of. Jesus not only replenished the wine supply so the festivities could continue, but many in the community commented on the high quality of the wine he provided. That boy always comes through in the end. His love for me and the community is steadfast, just like his Father's.

That steadfast love in Jesus continued even in his final hours. My Son had been arrested and sentenced to be killed by way of crucifixion like a criminal, even though he was never convicted of a crime. It was a very sad time for all of us to see him suffer as he did. He assured us that this was his burden to bear and that he was not alone, that his Father, *our* Father, was with him and would carry him through to a most abundant life in God's Kingdom.

I am ashamed to admit I had my doubts. I could not bear his suffering. Watching him in pain was my own cross to bear. But I stayed with him, at the foot of his cross. What else would a Mother do? Other disciples were there with me: Mary Magdalene, and my sister, as well as the one I know Jesus loved so very much, for this is the disciple whom he gave to me to love. Right there, as he was hanging on that terrible cross, Jesus was concerned for my welfare. He knew that women left widowed or without children were ignored, marginalized, and excluded from the community. He did not want that life for me, so he called us toward him saying "Woman, here is your son." Then to the beloved disciple he said. "Here is your mother." And from that hour forward, the beloved disciple took me into his own home, and I loved him as my own Son.

Jesus's steadfast love for all of us continued even beyond his death on that cross. He continues to live in each of us, so that his love for us enables us to love one another, constantly creating community and gathering people together in God's love. And I, as a disciple, continue to magnify the Lord for the gift I have been given in my Son, just as I did when I was 15 years old and first found out I was to carry a child. I praise God in everything I do. The love given to me always leads me out into the world to love another.

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;*

*he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

- Luke 1:46-55

Discipleship: (Chris Alexander)

In first century Judaism, a disciple was a graduate level type of education where the student followed the teacher to learn and to act like the teacher. The goal was to actually live into the way of life being taught and then to teach others in the same way. The ministry of Jesus was often referred to as “The Way” by his disciples and the apostles.

The teacher picks the students at this level of education in the Jewish tradition, so at this level they are the very top students who study directly with a Rabbi, to become a Rabbi. And Jesus, as the Teacher/Rabbi, did pick his students, but they were regular people living regular lives. Those asked to follow Jesus were already rejected by the rabbinical schools and were learning the trade of their families in order to make a living. Many, like Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene, were people who weren't even educated at the primary level because they were women. But Jesus chose them, and they sat at his feet, asked questions and tried to figure out who this man was and why he would ever choose them. It is a strong connection between teacher and student when the student's worth is determined by the one who loves them, rather than for anything they have achieved. And these students loved Jesus.

Communion

Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, said to his disciples, and to all of us, you are loved – you are worthy because you are created and loved by God, not because of anything you do or say. This is my way of life, love one another as I have loved you, in remembrance of me. This is my body and blood shed for you, a sign of the new covenant. As we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we build community with one another through the love God first gave to us. Do this in remembrance of me.

Amen.