

Parish Life

AUGUST 2023

Change and Renewal

I have been particularly aware of the seasons this year, having flown from a sunny summer in Australia to a freezing, icy winter in Europe at the beginning of this year, then on to the hot, dry Holy Land before returning home for our transforming Holy Week and Easter journey.

It is not only the seasons and the weather that continually change. Our own lives, even when we are not acutely aware of it, are constantly changing, also. And while change can be scary, confronting even, it can be a very good thing; a chance for growth, development and renewal, physically and spiritually.

As previously announced, our Organist and Director of Music, Callum Tolhurst-Close, is moving to Canberra in August to pursue new career opportunities. We hope he will also find plenty of chances to continue his music ministry and organ recitals. Callum's final Sunday at St Luke's will be 13 August when we will observe Mary, Mother of Our Lord at a 10am Eucharist, followed by lunch in the Seddon Hall. Please ensure your name is added to the attendance list, if you plan to be present. Callum leaves St Luke's with the love, prayers and

goodwill of us all. There will be a formal application process to find a suitable candidate as our next Organist and Director of Music – and so another chapter in the life of our parish begins.



It is with great pleasure I am able to announce that on Saturday 9 September and Sunday 10 September, the Mosman Symphony Orchestra will be performing at St Luke's under the direction of their Conductor, Andrew Del Riccio. The concerts, entitled *The King of Instruments*, will feature Barber's Adagio for Strings, Poulenc's Organ Concerto and Saint-Saëns' Symphony No. 3. The organist will be former St Luke's Director of Music, Brendon Lukin. Tickets will be available through the Mosman Symphony Orchestra website.

We will celebrate our Patronal Festival on 15 October when our Regional Bishop, the Rt Reverend Chris Edwards, will be our Guest Preacher. After the 10am Eucharist, we will enjoy a traditional Patronal Lunch in the Seddon Hall.

And so life continues apace, in some respects staying the same, but also ever new. Thinking about these things, I

have been reminded of the passage of scripture in the letter to the Hebrews (Chapter 13.8-21) in which we are reminded "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever." It is good to know in our fast-paced, ever-changing world, that the love and grace of God is everlasting and never changes. Like St Paul, my prayer for us all is: "Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Every blessing!

Fr Max Wood, Rector

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The Feast of Mary Magdalene

The Reverend Elaine Farmer, Associate Priest at St Paul's Manuka in the ACT, was our Guest Preacher for the Feast of Mary Magdalene on Sunday 23 July.

Mary Magdalene has been such a controversial figure through the ages, with claims and counter claims as to whether or not she was a prostitute or, in fact, a chaste disciple of Jesus. Imagine the wild media speculation and paparazzi entourage, if these events from 2000+ years ago were happening today!

It was most interesting to hear Revd Elaine's sermon, in which she outlined the biblical evidence that very clearly indicates Mary Magdalene was a devout disciple of Jesus and someone whom he loved, respected and trusted, which is why he chose her to be the first person to witness his resurrection and proclaim the good news to the heart-broken disciples.



I Have Seen the Lord

SERMON:

St Luke's Mosman, Feast of Mary Magdalen (Transf.), 23 July 2023

TEXTS:

Song of Songs 3:1-4a; Psalm 63; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; John 20:1-18

Mary Magdalene. Intriguing woman. I became interested in her because I was baptised, as an adult, on her feast day in 1980. My question then was: who was she?

All I knew were snippets from literature and art which I suspected were products of that blend of history and imagination which gives us the traditions and myths we love because they colour life with a little romance, give communities perspective, distinction and pride in their origins. But what does this image-creating and myth-making do to real people? Was there a real Mary Magdalene behind the myths, I wondered. And did it matter? Our questions for today.

Art and literature gave me two contradictory images of Magdalene to think about. The first, a beautiful red-robed woman with long flowing hair, and sultry eyes confidently returning the world's stare. The woman who, the poet said, 'naked, o'covered by her hair alone':

... was the most glorious courtesan.
Her body was a precious vessel
of joy;
Nothing lovelier has this world
beheld.¹

The second image, a weeping, penitent Magdalene. Eyes demurely cast to the ground. "Where is now my consolation," the poet has her cry before the empty tomb,

"the one who redeemed me from sins,
I, poor wretch, was lost,
He was born for my salvation."²

The first image: model of unmanageable womanhood, challenging and dangerously alluring. The second: model of manageable womanhood, repentant and self-sacrificing. Was either image real or believable?

When I turned to the Bible for clues in my search for a real Mary Magdalene, I discovered nothing in scripture supports the first image, the one grounded in the myth that she was a prostitute. But that absence didn't save her. Medieval theologians were astonished – perhaps affronted – by the scriptural witness that the resurrected Christ appeared first to *this* woman, supposedly a sinner whom Jesus had cured of whatever had ailed her.³ So poor Magdalene was made over by that process which distorts real people into personifications of human virtues and vices. She couldn't be allowed to join the Virgin Mary as a personification of purity because scripture *did* call Magdalene 'a sinner'. She couldn't join Eve, that personification of guilt – Eve blamed for bringing death to humankind. Magdalene hadn't been around way back then so she ended up somewhere in the middle. I imagine those old theologians rather liked the image of the Magdalene as weeping red-eyed penitent so they found a convenient compromise. Blinking at the Bible's silence on anything more than the word 'sinner', they branded her with the ancient symbol for female impurity. Whore. Prostitute.

But despite the myths, contradictions, and the church's ultimate sidelining of the feminine for male only apostles, the biblical witness still gave me a lead



(The Rev'd) Elaine Farmer

to a different Mary Magdalene: the resurrected Christ first appeared to *her*. That was *the* one consistent thread I found in my quest. And if I didn't follow it, she'd have to stay unfairly condemned as an unmanageable and uncontrollable scarlet woman, *or* be condemned to languish in that garden, model of manageable, repentant and self-sacrificing womanhood, weeping into the gaping blackness of the empty tomb. And I would have no choice – and nor would you – but to flop down beside her – with nothing to look at but empty blackness in our lives. 'Whom are you looking for?'⁴ Jesus would ask us and we, like Magdalene, stuck in the garden, would not recognise our Lord. We'd sit there, silent and befuddled with nothing but a new question: "is this all there is?"

Well, I wasn't ready for that. I still wanted to resurrect a real Magdalene, so, I wondered, were there other ideas about her? In time, I learned of an early document called *Pistis Sophia* which named her among four women and eight men as disciples who would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel, as Matthew's and Luke's gospels say Jesus promised would happen.⁵ And, I stumbled across the Gospel of Mary which didn't make it into the New Testament. It suggests

1 Georg, untitled poem in Ingrid Maisch, *Mary Magdalene. The Image of a Woman through the Centuries*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1998, p.ix.

2 *Magdalene's Lament*, found Maisch, *ibid.*, p. 85.

3 Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9

4 John 20:15.

5 Matthew 19:28 & Luke 22:30. This from Maisch p.21.

6 needs ref

Mary Magdalene possessed knowledge confided by Jesus to her alone. It has Magdalene and Peter as rival apostles in an intensely human picture of jealousy with Peter acidly demanding, “Did [Jesus] speak privily with a woman rather than with us, and not openly?”⁶

Next I came across the Gospel of Philip – another failure with the bible selectors – which goes further. Here, Magdalene became, not only mediator of revelation, but life-partner of Jesus who loved her and, it says, kissed her on the mouth. So this document turns “Magdalene-searching-for-Jesus-in-the-tomb” into “woman-seeking-her-bridegroom”. Hence, the Song of Songs reading we heard. “*I sought him whom my soul loves.*”⁷ In this school of thought, I learned, Magdalene became model for the soul seeking Jesus, held up as example to sinners of the need for penitence and conversion. Then, she got muddled up with other New Testament Marys, such as Mary-sister-of-Martha, and ended up model for the church and for Christian life. Are you confused?

It seemed to me it all made for quite a job description and my search wasn't even finished! A ninth century abbot, Odo of Cluny, elevated Magdalene into “messenger to the other apostles” who reflected to them the light of the resurrection.⁸ And two hundred and fifty odd years later, Peter Abelard turned “messenger to the other apostles” into “apostle to the apostles”, *apostola apostolorum*, the first to proclaim the good news of the resurrection.⁹

Her job description gets defined further in a fifteenth century play, *The Digby Play of the Mary Magdalene* which provided wonderfully light moments in my Magdalene researches. Whoever wrote it had a busy and florid imagination. It's a great rollicking thing with a cast of thousands and more scene changes than any modern script writer could get away with. It teems with

biblical characters including Herod, Pilate, Christ, Peter and the devil. There are kings, queens, deaths in childbirth, abandoned babies, re-enactments of biblical miracles and sundry new ones. Now, I discovered Mary Magdalene was a *healer*. Then Christ sent her as ‘holy apostyllesse’ to Marseilles as *missionary* and *preacher*. She ended up in this play as a *hermit* in the wilderness but not before her preaching of Christ's gospel had won over hordes of pagans, including the king of Marseilles. Eventually, Magdalene died and went to heaven where she was received in a style more often associated with the Virgin Mary, and crowned by choruses of angels! The End.

It's all terrific stuff, obviously more fiction than fact, but I realised its central theme of Magdalene as ‘preaching apostle’ is really important. It took me back to John's gospel and Jesus saying to Magdalene, “*Go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*”¹⁰ Here was Magdalene being commissioned as an apostle of salvation! Among all the myths about who she might be as a real woman – prostitute, weeping penitent, judge, lover, model for the church and for Christian life, apostle to the apostles, healer, hermit, missionary, preacher – I was maybe finding something here about a real person: Mary Magdalene, “preacher and apostle of salvation”. A difficult job description. It's got quite a number of the saints killed, Jesus not the least among them.

So I found my Mary Magdalene, doubtless both virtuous and flawed, but a real woman, and honoured by Our Lord. However, even in those days of my early ignorance and hunt for her, I knew there was more to it all than what made sense to me alone. There was another question for me – and for you. It wafted around outside the empty tomb when Jesus asked, “*Whom are you looking for?*”¹¹ This is our “what next”

moment. And the question I mentioned earlier: does any of this matter?

The English poet, Janet Morley, imagines Magdalene facing that moment and that question – in the garden, an uncertain and reluctant Magdalene, but saying nevertheless, “I have a gospel to proclaim.”¹² So Mary Magdalene, apostle of salvation, did Jesus' bidding. She went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”. Classic gospel testimony, those five words. Her first sermon.

In the end, for us, just as for Magdalene, Christ comes into our lives if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Most of the time, we don't. Mary Magdalene didn't recognise Jesus by the empty tomb because she was looking for the man she had known in the past. Someone familiar. What she expected to see. She didn't expect a dead man walking, or calling her by name. She was being taught that relationship with the risen Christ is a *new* thing, not at all the same as knowing a flesh-and-blood-friend and neighbour. Embracing the new means not clinging to the ways of the past. “*Do not hold on to me*”, Jesus said to her.

Which leaves us with one final question: do we really *want* that? Are we ready for that – as Magdalene was – in the end? Our ways are safe, familiar, but the Christ demands we question them and go forth like Magdalene saying, “*I have seen the Lord!*”. So this is our ‘what next’ moment! We could sit safely staring into dark empty tombs in our lives. Or we could hear Christ call our names and pointing to something new. Like discovering the face of the Christ in anyone we meet and not just those we know. And then putting our discovery into words and deeds of love that say: ‘I have been commissioned by the risen Christ, and I will walk with Mary Magdalene saying “*I have seen the Lord*. Now I have a gospel to proclaim”.

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7 Song of Songs 3:1.

8 John 20:17b

9 Peter Abelard was the first to use this term of Mary Magdalene. [needs ref]

10 John 20:17b

11 John 20:15

12 “They Have Taken Away My Lord”, Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*, SPCK, London, 1989, p.104.

The Day of Pentecost

The Parish celebrated The Day of Pentecost on 28 May with a 10am Eucharist and traditional celebratory morning tea.

It is our custom to have a cake with red icing, representing the flames of the Holy Spirit alighting on the apostles and other followers of Jesus after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Pentecost marks the birth of the Church, if you like, or at least the beginning of the Church's undertaking in the world – to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

It was a pleasure, as always, to have Bishop Richard Hurford, sometime Bishop of Bathurst, as our Guest Presider and Preacher on this special occasion. It was also a particular joy for Bishop Richard, myself and Danielle, as our son and daughter, Thomas and Madeleine, were both admitted to Holy Communion during this service. St Luke's parishioners are an integral part of their faith journey and it was good for us all to share in this significant step in their lives.

Fr Max





13 August 2023

Mary, Mother of Our Lord and Callum's Farewell

In our Parish Eucharist at 10am on 13 August we will observe the Feast of Mary, Mother of Our Lord. Our guest preacher will be the Rt Revd Peter Watson, formerly Bishop of Parramatta (1989-1993) and then Bishop of South Sydney (1993-2000). Subsequently, he was appointed Archbishop of Melbourne in 2000 and retired from that ministry in 2005. We are delighted that he will be with us for this special occasion.

There will be a Farewell Lunch for Callum in the Seddon Hall immediately following the service. All are welcome. For catering purposes, please add your name to the attendance list available at the back of the Church on Sunday morning, or contact Helen in the Parish Office to let her know you plan to attend.



Mid-Winter BBQ

The parish has traditionally held a social event in the middle of the year to help brighten up the dark, cold days of winter.

Invariably, it has been a themed event – either a dinner or a lunch. This year, it was decided we would hold an informal event, a Mid-Winter BBQ on Sunday 25 June, three days after the winter solstice. It was a cold but sunny Sunday and the aroma of the BBQ whetted appetites as the congregation began to leave the Church.

Friends of the Rector, Steve and Joanne, generously cooked the onions, sausages and beef burgers on the BBQ in the courtyard, from where the food was rushed, piping hot, to the Seddon Hall and guests were able to serve themselves from the buffet table.

The event was deemed a great success with everyone enjoying themselves and many guests declaring the parish should have another BBQ, sometime in the future. All the food and drinks were donated by parishioners and guests were encouraged to make a donation to further the ministry of the Church. A total of \$480 was raised by this event.



St Luke's Oldest Parishioner

July 2023

We meet many people in the course of our lives who make a lasting impression on us. Some are positively inspirational – like St Luke's oldest parishioner, who also happens to be NSW's oldest living woman: Betty Gemmell, who turned 106 years of age on the 11th May this year. I had the pleasure of celebrating Betty's 100th birthday with her and was delighted to be able to catch up in person with her very recently.

Betty was a teller with ANZ Bank for 38 years (with a regulation loaded gun under her counter!), retiring in 1977. Her career began in regional NSW (she was born the eldest of seven children in Deniliquin in the Riverina) but she transferred to Sydney's lower north shore with the bank in 1954 and after ten years settled in Mosman, where she has lived for over 70 years. She never married. After retirement, Betty was an avid volunteer and always busy. She was driving and swimming daily at Balmoral until the age of 98. Betty still lives independently and thoroughly enjoys life.

Betty suggests her long life is the result of enjoying small meals, a regular whisky, and having a sunny disposition. Her advice is: "Don't smoke. Don't overeat. Don't commit adultery. And a swim at Balmoral every day will do wonders for your health."

All her life, Betty has had a firm faith. She was a devoted member of our congregation until mobility issues made attending church just too difficult. Since then, Betty has been one of those who receive home pastoral visits, our weekly pew sheet and sermons digitally or via the letterbox; and she is warmly remembered in our parish prayers, always.

We are very proud of our oldest parishioner – and Betty, we pray you will have good health and every blessing in the years ahead.

Fr Max, Rector



Parish Gardens: Autumn – Winter 2023

A number of parishioners have commented on how lovely the gardens around the Church are looking. Indeed, they have had something of a reputation for being well cared for throughout the history of the Parish! For many years, parishioners who were keen gardeners tended them and kept them well maintained, which was a wonderful blessing. However, in recent years, eager volunteers have been few and far between.


We are grateful, therefore, to our current professional gardener, James, for his hard work and attention to detail. The results speak for themselves. He has even “cloud pruned” the bush at the top of the courtyard stairs, which looks suitably dramatic by day and by night!

Thank you, James. We love your work.



As one of his other ministries to the church, our Rector is a Clerical Fellow and Deputy Chairman of St Paul's College, Sydney University. Recently, the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency, Margaret Beazley, AC KC, was a guest of the College.



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St Luke's is a place of rich and diverse liturgy, where life and faith connect.
We are a progressive community that welcomes all people regardless of gender, age, race, sexual orientation or religion.
We support the full and equal role of women in society and in the ministry of the church.

To stay in touch at St Luke's, check the weekly pew bulletin regularly, read the quarterly *Parish Life*, visit our website www.stlukesmosman.org and follow us on 