

An anchor for the soul – HOPE (*uncover wooden plaque*)

We all have our personal hopes and recently we have been focused on hope for the children...for the children cruelly separated from their parents and for the young boys in Thailand, children in cages and children in caves... and the hope that our children have a country to be proud to be a part of, that our leaders are compassionate role models for them, and that our planet is a place for them to grow, be happy, and take care ...

Kaethe Weingarten says, in her writing, *Reasonable Hope*, that how we think about hope has all to do with whether we can maintain our own. She believes the following activities sustain reasonable hope: believe that the small is not trivial, understand your witness position, welcome joy, accept proxy measures of success, seek inspiration in the arts, use global resources, and embrace resistance.

It is a daily challenge to not feel hopeful, to be anxious and angry, to feel alone, not understanding what is happening in our world, when the news is bleak and confusing and when we are sick.

...HOPE frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present, with the deep trust that God will never leave us alone, but will fulfill the deepest desires of our heart... words of Henri Nouwen, a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian.

Today we celebrate Mary of Magdala. Paintings depict Mary with red hair or wearing red with long blond hair and her head not covered, possibly a sign of royalty. She was black or dark skinned, looking like an Arab girl, either Jewish or Egyptian, certainly Middle- Eastern.

Mary of Magdala got it, she got Jesus!

Mary was Jesus' hope of passing on his teachings about Love and loving your neighbor.

Pope Francis called Mary an "apostle of hope".

Joan Chittister, in her book, *The Friendship of Women*, in the chapter, *The Mary Magdalene Factor*, describes Mary as Trust without Measure, Love without End.

In the first reading Judith is from the old testament, a widow who liberated her people, a remarkable heroine to her community. She prayed for strength to be God's servant, not the servant to the arrogant powerful men, but the helper of the oppressed, weak, forsaken, despairing, to bring hope for the hopeless.

The book of Judith tells the story of the defeat of the Assyrians, an army bent on world domination, by the hand of a Hebrew woman, Judith.

She slaughtered a world class bully.

Not that I want a slaughtering, but it's difficult to hope with 'our world class bully'.

Judith prayed and liberated her people.

May we pray, listen, and answer the call from God to be God's prophet, doing what we can for the hopeless, even ourselves, when times and world events are hopeless.

Even when we fail, God calls us back over and over again.

In the second reading Paul is telling the Galatians, Galatia is an early Christian community, that everyone is welcome, everyone is born of God, 'there is no longer Judean or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, all of you are one in Jesus, the Christ.

As you will hear later in the liturgy, "All are welcome to the table, no matter where you are in your faith journey, what denomination, what doubts or fears you think distance you from God.

Come. where all are welcome...Jesus welcomed everyone, just as the magnificent lady in New York Harbor welcomed all, (past tense right now).

I HOPE our country's leaders will have the Statue of Liberty welcoming all again.

In spite of the difficult passages about women in Paul's writings, there is abundant evidence as researched by Christine Schenk, CSJ of the activity of women in various kinds of ministry in the Pauline churches. They collaborated with him and were his co-workers. Their leadership roles included hosting house churches, evangelizing, teaching, travel, and offering hospitality to visiting church members.

Articles from Future Church state that the early female disciples of Jesus assumed leadership in the earliest Christian Churches alongside their brothers. This is reflected in Paul's letters, the Acts of the Apostles, and other early Christian writings. In the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, ten of the 29 church leaders whose favor he seeks, are women. Phoebe and Prisca, head the list.

Paul's letters (excepting Timothy and Titus which were not written by him) are the earliest Christian manuscripts we have, and constitute strong historical evidence for gender balanced leadership in the infant church. The Book of Acts refers to "Phillip's prophetic daughters" (Acts 21:9-10).

By the end of the first century the leadership of women was already meeting resistance: Paul's delegate Timothy writes, "A woman must learn in silence and be completely submissive. I do not permit women to act as teacher, or in any way to have authority over a man; she must be quiet..." (from 1: Tim). Nevertheless, archaeological, literary and epigraphical evidence confirm that female leaders flourished alongside male leaders well into the fourth century.... However as Christianity became more mainstream, worship moved from the private space of house churches to public spaces. ...The inclusive, charismatic discipleship of equals which enhanced Christianity's rapid early growth slowly disappeared, only to re-emerge in the rise of religious communities which continued the prophetic tradition in Catholicism for over 2000 years" and can be experienced in our Dignity Boston and Dignity USA's liturgies.

In the article Mary of Magdala: Witness, Leader, Friend & Apostle to the Apostles, written by Sister Christine Schenk, CSJ, Christine finds "that nowhere in scripture is Mary of Madgala identified as a public sinner or a prostitute. Instead, scripture shows her as the primary witness to the most central events of Christian faith, named in exactly the same way in each of four gospels written for diverse communities throughout the Mediterranean world. It was impossible to relate the story of the Resurrection without including "Mary, the one from Magdala."

...Had accounts of Jesus' Resurrection been fabricated, women would never have been chosen as witnesses, since Jewish law did not acknowledge the testimony of women.

Early non-canonical Christian writings show faith communities growing up around Mary's ministry, where she is portrayed as understanding Jesus' message better than did Peter and the male disciples... Eventually the memory of Mary of Magdala changed from that of a strong female disciple and proclaimer of the Resurrection to a repentant prostitute and public sinner. Scholars such as Dr. Jane Schaberg believe this was done deliberately to discourage female leadership in the church."

Woman Priest Janice Severe-Duszynska of Lexington, Kentucky at the July 18, 2012 CTA conference, asked us to think about the seven demons that Jesus is 'said' to have cast out from Mary of Magdala as deep emotional wounds from living under patriarchy which not only can damage and destroy women's souls and bodies, but also those of our children, sibling's, parent's and grandparent's. Janice suggests that Jesus taught her to replace her/our demons with: Take care of yourself so that you can take care of others.

All are welcome

Use your mind to learn and spread the gospel

You image God in an intimate way.

Trust yourself because you know God/Jesus

Respect yourself as God respects you and

Use your gifts to create beauty in the world.

In Patricia Russell's, Mary of Magdala Come to the Liturgy, sponsored by Dignity New York, the third Sunday of June, the Gospel chosen was from the Gospel of Mary. The Gospel of Mary's vision is of a collective human community beyond social constructs of gender.

Gospel of Mary 5; 1-7

The disciples were distressed and wept openly. "How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to preach the good news," they said. "If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?" Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, "Do not be distressed nor let your heart be troubled. For His grace will be with you all, and will be a shelter for you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true human beings."

Mary gave them hope and gives us hope.

In today's Gospel from John, Mary recognized the resurrected Jesus when he said her name. Jesus says her name in a way that helps her recognize who she is...who God has created her to be.

Years ago before we celebrated Mary of Magdala at Dignity Boston and before we called forth lay led presiders, we would have a Liturgy in Celebration of Women.

This was a chance to begin our vision of a progressive, discipleship of equals and gave us a chance to celebrate women and women and men prophets among us.

Take a minute to look around the church at the women and the women and men, who you get hope from. Don't forget the ones who may not be with us on this particular Sunday.

They are uniquely called by Jesus in some way and give us hope.

Include yourself, because the rest of us are including you.

“Your word has been spoken throughout human history through those you called as prophets, women and men whom we would disregard, we may seem like unlikely prophets but we are capable of revealing God’s truth.”

We are prophets to the world, as Judith, Mary of Magdala, and the women of the house churches.

Some of us are able to physically get out there, being present in person, in the marches and demonstrations giving hope for the justice event.

We pray and act differently in whatever works for us.

Give hope to God’s people in whatever capacity you feel called to serve.

We are the new hope for the human race.

Please take care and balance yourself with prayer, listening, putting yourself in peace, meditating, whichever way is your way to God.

I don’t know the following woman, but her reasons for being hopeful are familiar.

Emily Maynard, in her “How Feminism Saved My Faith”, which is part of the book, Included in Faithfully Feminist: Jewish, Christian & Muslim Feminists on Why We Stay states,

“So I remain a Christian, in spite of all the pain that religion has poured out on women. I stay because other women are showing me how to live and pray and lead and build new pathways in faith traditions that have kept us boxed in for so long...I stay because I’ve seen how Christianity can fuel justice, not just for women, but for all marginalized people.

I stay because I believe in regeneration, resurrection, and redemption, even when they exist in abusive patriarchal religious structures. I stay because I know that women matter.”

There is hope, encouraging and nurturing female leadership in the church and state.

As many of you know, Alice and I are on a journey of hope from her cancer diagnosis two years ago. From the onset we took strength and hope from you, our spiritual family, and we became involved in other hopeful communities also, the Mass General Hospital Cancer Center, the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden, and the Dana Farber Cancer Institute.

On our last trip to Dana Farber, as I had this homily simmering inside me, I noticed the people smiling as they made eye contact with me. I felt that we were sending each other hope as we passed each other on our individual routes to waiting rooms, tests, doctor’s offices, and treatment rooms, living life in the unknown, hoping for a quality of life.

I broke out into a large smile that filled my spirit when an elderly woman emerged from the elevator on a stretcher with a red ball on her nose. She made eye contact with me and I laughed and was filled with a joy of connectedness and hope.

At this time we have found out that the immunotherapy drug and clinical trial doesn’t work for Alice, but we are hopeful that when the time comes another trial may emerge.

Something that has helped me, besides knowing you are praying for us, is my daily practice of getting up early, walking, praying, and meditative movement, which starts my day with hope and gratefulness.

In summary may we choose hope for life everywhere.

May we find our calling to support the prophets and pass hope to the whole world.

The following poem, found at the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden, was written from the inspiration of a Garden Goddess Sculpture fashioned out of bits of crockery, colored glass, and mosaic tiles, which reminded the poet of the courageous women they have encountered along their journey. It also reminds me of Mary of Magdala.

(Show picture)

Beautiful Lady

Beautiful lady in all your splendor
Holding your head with grace and dignity
Speaking to me softly in heartfelt ways
How can I not respond to your courage
Which has given me strength for the journey
We have been chosen to experience
You are my sister and now I am yours
As we walk HOPEFULLY along this path
You carry the torch that will light our way
Down a road that can make no promises

By the way, Alice made this wooden plaque 'An Anchor for the soul – HOPE' and it sits in our living room.

