

Reflection for Tuesday 9th June

Luke 8: 1-3 Soon afterwards, Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna and many others who provided for them out of their resources. (NRSV)

'The role of some walkers with Jesus is to use what they have to enable other walkers to make the journey.' Barbara Easson

Without all the razzamatazz of the red -carpet ceremonies, the award season is going ahead. Nominees and winners will be celebrated in their homes. Cue - an even bigger opportunity for cringe-making speeches and for us to spy into celebrity living spaces. With time to prepare, I wonder how long will be the list of people, credited by the actors, for their success. On a live screen it can seem interminably embarrassing – especially when someone important has been overlooked and a camera pans in their direction.

The above Bible passage is one which is often overlooked. Yet Luke is very particular to mention some people by name. Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. He credits them with an important influence on Jesus' success in carrying out his ministry. They provided for Jesus and the disciples 'out of their resources'. As they travelled across Palestine, the group could not live on fresh air or even manna from heaven. They were dependant on others for hospitality, food and finance. The key supporters in this regard were women of means.

Mary Magdalene has been maligned over the years, painted as a reformed prostitute in Jesus Christ Superstar or as in Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci code' the woman who bore Jesus a love-child. We know three things about her. Jesus cured her of seven demons. In our terms, she may have suffered from a devastating mental illness. Any kind of demonic stigma in Bible times would have made her a social outcast. In gratitude for her healing, Mary followed Jesus and used her resources to support his mission. She followed even to the foot of the cross, where she stood alongside Jesus' family. She was the first to meet Jesus in the garden of the resurrection. Jesus called her by name.

While Mary was a social outcast, Joanna, because of her husband's status, belonged to high society. Chuza was effectively keeper of King Herod's coffers. A powerful man. His wife would have been wealthy and influential. Yet she too is credited with being an important part of Jesus' mission, providing resources. Extraordinary when you think Herod was the opposition, a puppet of the Roman occupying force, with title King of the Jews. Because Luke mentions her husband's name Chuza, I wonder too whether, because of his wife's influence, he eventually became a follower of the Way and was known to the early Christians?

Susanna is a bit of a mystery, other than she too was a provider, and like the others she had been cured some disease. She too must have been a woman of courage to fly in the face of convention and be counted as a follower of this rabbi. All of them had the courage and the faith in Jesus to step out of their comfort zones, to be part of a diverse movement, which included fishermen, tax collectors and zealots.

What links these three women is that they had all found healing and meaning through Jesus. By supporting his mission they were making this new life available to others. They were signing up to his message of forgiveness, peace, justice and love.

Perhaps, as Luke names the women, he is crediting them with some of his source material for the gospel. Imagine: here is a man with a medical background, a sensitive listening ear wanting to pull together information about the life and teaching of Jesus. The women have experiences of healing to share, first-hand knowledge of Jesus teaching. Their stories would be an important part of Luke's background research for his gospel in an age when the testimony of women was deemed worthless. The mention in these overlooked verses are perhaps part of his 'thank you' speech to them.

Different as we all are, we are called to be companions on the Way. Men and women together, we are called to share our stories of how Jesus still heals and brings meaning into our lives.

In gratitude for grace in abundance we offer to him all we have and are.

'The role of some walkers with Jesus is to use what they have to enable other walkers to make the journey.'

Coming out of lockdown, this is a role we all need to embrace, in the power of the Spirit.

A prayer by Kathy Galloway

God of our lives,
You are always calling us
to follow you into the future,
inviting us to new ventures, new challenges,
new ways to care,
new ways to touch the hearts of all.
When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage.
When we worry that we are not up to the task,
remind us that you would not call us, if you did not believe in us.

When we get tired,
or feel disappointed with the way things are going,
remind us that you can bring change and hope
out of the most difficult of situations. In Jesus' name, Amen.

HYMN STF 513

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EFbMwM4aWo>

Take this moment, sign and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours and yet,
let it still be me.

John Bell & Graham Maule