

I HAVE
DECIDED
TO
FOLLOW
JESUS

July 28, 2019

We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Gratitude Moments

***Call to Worship**

L: Welcome! We gather today because of the risen Christ who is in our midst.

P: We worship a risen Savior.

L: When we gather together in Jesus' name, we remember him and celebrate what God has done for us.

P: Let us worship our God who has given us life in Christ!

***Hymn:** "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" TFWS #2129

A Time for the Child in all of Us

Prayer (unison)

Loving God, we thank you for the witness of Mary Magdalene, who was among the first people to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection. Thank you for her love and faithfulness as Jesus' friend and as one of his companions. May we learn from her and claim Jesus, not only as our friend, but as our Savior. And may we share that good news with others. Amen.

Sung Response: "I Love You, Lord" TFWS #2068

Ministry of Music

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word: John 20:11-18

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message: "Faithful Follower"

We Respond to God's Word

***Hymn:** "He Lives" UMH #310

Prayers of the People

Silent Prayer and Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

***Doxology:** (*Please join in singing the following:*) UMH #94

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below; Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

***Prayer of Dedication** (unison)

Gracious God, our gifts are small compared to Jesus' gift to us. But we offer them with sincere and grateful hearts and ask that you use them to reach others who are in need of knowing your love and grace. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

***Hymn:** "O How I Love Jesus" UMH #170

***Choral Benediction** (*Congregation encircles the Sanctuary*)

May the Lord, gracious God bless and keep you forever. Grant you peace, perfect peace, courage in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and seek His face, and His grace forever. May the Lord, mighty God bless and keep you forever.

***Pastor's Charge**

Postlude

**Please stand as you are comfortable*

*TFWS = The Faith We Sing UMH = United Methodist Hymnal
Large print bulletins are available from the greeters*

Welcome!

Whether you are joining us for worship for the first time or after many years of attending here at First UMC, we want you to know that you are welcome!

We are an inclusive community that invites everyone to be part of our church fellowship. Thank you for being here, and we hope that you have had a meaningful experience of worshipping our God so you leave this place feeling that you have been blessed to be a blessing. Please join us again!

Rev. Deb Hanson




Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson
Pastor's Assistant - David Richards
Liturgist - Sue Richards
Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek
Acolyte - Linda Reiber
Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal
Greeters - Yvonne Griffin
Ushers - Ken Young, & Ken Westbrook
Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek
Worship Service Tech - Nancy Chesser
Photographer - Dave Atkinson

WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER...



Gayle Gardei
Marion Collinshaw
Sue Goodhue
Hunter Pinkley
Sylvia Bartlett
Brian Thompson
Malia Broe
Gil Stebbins
Rev. Bill Gardei
Woodie Lange
Roseanne
Rev. David Kerr
Jim New
Bobbie Noble
Pastor Sue Ellery
Judy Doyon
Charles Gilman
Diederich Family
Our Church Family
Barbara & Jim Slater
Barbara Sylvester
Pauline Boynton
Barbara Millar
Irene Derosier
Barbara Clement
Joette MacKenzie
Vicky Fernandez
Alissa Fernandez
Jessie
John Richards
Dotty Prince
John Erickson
Maria Fernandez
Anne & Mike Coffey
Gigis Family



Come join us for coffee hour
after church service in
Sanborn Hall.. We'd love to
catch up with you and see
how your week has gone.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Summer Sunday School

Sunday school will continue for the summer. The children will be watching DVD's on the "Ten Commandments" as well as learning about some of the biblical stories we will be focusing on during our worship time. All are welcome, and if there are those who would be willing to give the regular teachers a break, even if it is for one Sunday, please let Rev. Deb know.

SPRC has been rescheduled to August 4th after worship.

The **Finance Trustees** and **Church Council** will have a combined meeting on August 13, at 6 pm in the church office.

CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events) will be held on Saturday 8/24; 10-12 at FUMC. The Portsmouth police department is conducting training for businesses, schools, churches, and community members for direction what they should do if confronted with an Active Shooter event. it provides strategies, guidance, and a plan. This is a church - wide training. *All are encouraged to attend.*

On **8/31/19**, at 5:30, the Saturday Night Supper Club will meet at The Old Salt in Hampton. Please see Ken Westbrook for more information.

11th Annual Golf Tournament will be held on Weds., September 11 at Pease Golf Course. For more information check in the office or the August Beacon.

Save the Date, September 28, Pumpkin Delivery!

Just a friendly reminder, please try to keep your pledge up to date so we can meet our financial obligations as a church. Thank you for your faithful giving!

School Supplies Collection

Starting August 1, the Sunday school children invite everyone to help them collect school supplies for foster families and a school in Cameroon, Africa. A link to the school there is at the bottom of this article. A box will be in the Narthex for the collection. Please see the insert for types of supplies needed. Thank you!

Reverend Deb will be on vacation starting August 5 until August 19. We hope she has a great time!

Our guest musician for this week is Asel Sat. She is a Clarinet Performance student at Rhode Island College. Please give her a warm welcome and our appreciation for volunteering.

As we are celebrating those in Senior Living, feel free to grab a card from the table in Sanborn Hall and send a quick note. Stamps are available in the office or leave on counter for mailing. Thanks!



In celebration of all
those in Senior Living



**KIDS HELPING OTHER KIDS!
SEE HOW YOU CAN HELP...**

Starting August 1st, the Kids in Sunday School invite everyone to help them collect school supplies for local foster families and for a school in Cameroon, Africa. A box will be in the narthex for all of your donations.

Thank you!

Here's what the kids are asking for:
backpacks, pencils, lined paper, markers
crayons, glue sticks, liquid glue, rulers
notebooks, composition books, pocket folders



FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



New England Annual Conference Tri-State District
The Rev. Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop
The Rev. James McPhee, District Superintendent

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Office Phone 603-436-6038 office@fumcportsmouth.net
Pastor office hours - Tuesday and Thursday 9 am - 12 pm
[call to ensure availability]
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

Check out our website at www.fumcportsmouth.com

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

“Faithful Follower” – 7/28/19
First UMC – Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

SCRIPTURE: John 20: 11-18

THEME: God calls us to be faithful followers of Jesus.

This summer I have been presenting a variety of sermons around Biblical people who have been faithful in their relationship with God, even though at times they may have faltered and encountered obstacles that drew them away from God. My hope is that we can learn from them – the ordinary, everyday person with faults and foibles just like us – as we discover the journey of how living in God’s ways and following Jesus is our calling and our joy. Mary Magdalene is one of those people.

Some of you may have been a bit startled to hear the story of Easter this morning, but as we look at the person of Mary Magdalene, we can find verses here and there throughout the gospels about her, but none as involved as John’s story of the resurrection. It is in this story that we find strong evidence about Mary Magdalene and Jesus and the friendship that they shared, the depth of anguish she felt at his death, and the joy that filled her when she realized he was alive, raised from the dead.

Because the name “Mary” was a common name during Jesus’ day, Mary Magdalene is identified mostly by the town where she had lived – Magdala which was a busy and thriving fishing village on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. In Luke 8:2-3, we find a passage that tells us that Jesus had healed her of seven demons. Mostly likely, Mary had experienced many hardships in her life, and she may have struggled with illness, depression, or other debilitating emotional and mental conditions. We are led to understand that following her healing, she immediately became a loyal follower of Jesus.

Not only did she follow him, but she was one of the providers among a group of women also mentioned in Luke 8, who took care of and helped Jesus and his disciples to fund their ministry, which had started in the Galilee area. By travelling with Jesus and the disciples, Mary and the other women would have learned from Jesus’ teachings and example along with the twelve male disciples, and the women may very well have been treated as equals, at least from Jesus’ behavior. Some of the Gnostic gospels, such as the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip, imply that Mary Magdalene may have been closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples, thus causing some jealousy, especially with Peter. It’s hard to know.

What was it about Mary that might have drawn Jesus to confide in her, talk with her, and care so much about her? We can only guess, but I think we can learn from our own friendships and relationships about what “clicks” with us and what doesn’t. When we think about people who are our friends, we might begin to notice certain characteristics and qualities about them that drew us to them from the start. Who are the life-long friends that we have had for a long time? What connected us? How have we maintained those friendships? Who among us hasn’t had a friend whom we don’t see often, but when we do, we can sit down and start a conversation as if we never had been apart?

Who are the ones to whom we turn when we need support and encouragement? Who are those who stick with us through thick and thin? And who are the one we trust with our deepest secrets, worries, and fears, the ones who see us in the unabridged edition without any editing and love us anyway?

I know that Jesus is one who fits all those characteristics in my life. And with my here-on-earth-relationships, the people who are in my life now, I can name several, especially my husband, who fortunately for me, is my best friend as well as my spouse. Yet I have asked myself, to whom would I turn if something happened to him? It’s something to really think

about. We know that God is with us, but who are the people around us now who help us to stay on track, stay connected with God and with each other?

Last week we celebrated the life of a faithful member of this church, Fred Pettigrew. I never had the privilege of knowing Fred, but in the short time I worked with the family and talked with some of you about him, I learned that Fred was someone who touched people's lives with kindness, compassion, wisdom, support and encouragement, and was a witness to his faith. Fred's service was one that reminded me again, that I hope I can aspire to living my faith as a witness to others. While I know I will never be famous – nor do I want to be – I hope that, even if people can't remember my name or even know about me in any way, the way I have lived my life has created a ripple effect that touches many, many lives for Christ. That's what I saw in Fred, and that is what I believe happened with Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend and faithful follower.

History has not always been kind to Mary Magdalene. In my research for my doctoral project on Single Women in Ministry, as well as the research for this week's sermon, I found many references to Mary as a prostitute, which is a misnomer. In fact, the title to one article read, "*As you preach this Sunday please note: Mary Magdalene was NOT a prostitute.*" (Gail Wallace, Juniaproject.com/mary-magdalene-5-things-should-know/) How did such a label come to be placed on her?

Apparently, around the year 591 AD, Pope Gregory the First thought that there were just too many Mary's in the Bible and decided that, except for Mary of Nazareth Jesus' mother, they all must have really been Mary Magdalene. He made what author Gail Wallace calls, "a composite Mary." (*ibid*). Over time, the claim was that Mary Magdalene's seven demons included prostitution, and she was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive oil, was the woman caught in adultery, and other negative connotations. As Biblical scholars have tried to unravel the mystery of Mary Magdalene, they agree that Pope Gregory did an injustice in vilifying Mary, and in making her the representative of all the Mary's in the gospels. What they saw most clearly was that Mary Magdalene, after being healed, became a faithful follower of Jesus and one of his closest friends.

There is no real proof that Mary and Jesus were married, as the book *The DaVinci Code* implies, but it is clear that Mary was a close friend of Jesus. And speculation is that Mary was treated unjustly by the male disciples as well as the male dominated church, because, as a woman, she would not have been recognized as one of the apostles. Yet, she is often called the "apostle to the Apostles" since, as we heard in our scripture passage today, she was the first, according to the writer of John's gospel, to see and have a conversation with Jesus, and then she was sent to share the message with the disciples who were in hiding for fear of also being arrested.

When my husband, Dave was living Downeast Maine, he was attending a church where the pastor regularly said that women were supposed to be subservient to men. During a worship service one Sunday, the pastor made the comment again, and Dave asked, "So, if women are second class, why did Jesus pick a woman to announce that he was raised from the dead?" I can't really remember what he said the pastor's sputtering answer was, but I know Dave and a bunch of other men got up right then and there, and left the church.

The culture of Jesus' day did not give women a voice, so it's logical that Mary would have been marginalized even though she had been very close to Jesus. Legend has it that, after Jesus' ascension, Mary Magdalene went to France where she lived and taught and witnessed to her faith. We don't know any of what really happened after Jesus' ascension for

sure, but what we DO know is that Mary was an example of faithfulness, a true follower of Jesus, and someone who shared her faith in many ways: words, actions, and friendship.

To understand her faithfulness, we can read the scripture passages where she was named among those who stayed at the cross when Jesus was crucified. It took courage to be standing there at the execution of someone who had been labeled a dissident to the Roman Government. She could have been stoned to death by staying at the cross, but she put her life on the line to be there with Jesus' mother and several other women. Her report of the resurrection to the disciples is described in Luke as the disciples thought the report from the women was an idle tale (Luke 24:11). But she didn't waiver in her witness to the resurrection or her friendship with him.

The power of the exchange between them that Easter morning at the tomb is a testament to Mary's love for Jesus. We know what it is like to lose a loved one. Often we find comfort in visiting the grave sites or looking at pictures and remembering. On the first Easter, according to John, Mary must have walked in the early morning to the grave to be there, to feel some connection in her grieving. When she saw that the tomb was open and empty, fear gripped her, and she ran back to tell the disciples. In John's version, Peter and another disciple also ran to see, but they couldn't figure out what had happened.

Mary's assumption was that someone had stolen Jesus' body. Imagine the heartbreak: her friend, teacher or Rabbi, the one for whom she had given her all, was – at least in her mind – now totally gone. She thought even his remains were taken away from her, and she slumped down in the garden weeping, sobbing. When Jesus speaks to her, she doesn't realize who it is – why would she? She had seen him die on the cross, wrapped in a shroud, and buried in a tomb! She, like all of his followers, still didn't realize what he had been saying all along – that he would be raised from the dead.

It isn't until Jesus says her name, that recognition hits her. Stunned, she must have had to let it sink in, and then she probably just wanted to hug him (even though men and women didn't usually even touch each other in public places during that time). Jesus acknowledged her joy and then sent her running again to the disciples to share the good news. She must have burst into the room, out of breath, announcing, "I have seen the Lord!" then sharing what had happened. Some people have called her the first evangelist. The news was so good, she could barely contain herself.

When has news been so exciting that we can't keep quiet? When has our faith been evident even when we haven't spoken? How do we build our friendship with Jesus? Who are the living examples from whom we learn about living as faithful followers of Jesus, as Mary was? How do we as a church, share that Good News? I think I may have mentioned this before, but earlier this year, I was talking with someone – I think it was a clerk in a store somewhere in this area, and we somehow started talking about what I did for a living. When I told her that I was the pastor at First UMC in Portsmouth, she said, "I hear good things are happening there!" Good things ARE happening here!

Yes, we face challenges, but we also see many groups using our building, a growing Sunday school, lots of outreach, and fellowship that is welcoming and inviting. We aren't perfect, of course, but we are on the journey to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ and to be his faithful followers. Let us work together to live out our ministry in the world. Remember, when we go through those doors, we enter the mission field, and we don't just represent the church, but we **are** the church in the world. We are called to make a difference, and we can do that because, like Mary, we have the Good News of God's love that is meant to be shared and lived. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we give you thanks for people, like Mary Magdalene, who are faithful followers of Jesus and who share their faith openly with others in the way they speak and live their lives. Inspire us and lead us so that we may continue to grow in our own faith journeys and bring the message of your love to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

