



The Bellringer

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Why did Jesus Appear to the Women Instead of the Disciples?

by Jess Holland and Matthew Boffey

submitted by Stacie Koochek

On Saturday, they rested. But early Sunday morning, the women leaped into action. Motivated by love, they gathered spices and perfumes to honor the body of Jesus. Little did they know that Sunday morning marked a new day in human history. God chose a small group of women to share the greatest news of all time. Why? Jesus was different.

Let's first begin by looking more broadly at the role of women in the Gospels and how Jesus interacted with them.

One thing we see immediately is that Jesus valued and respected women. For

example:

- He loved his mother, Mary, caring for her even while he was dying on the cross (John 19:26-27).
- He showed kindness to the woman at the well when even she saw no value in herself (John 4:1-42).
- He rebuked the disciples and defended the woman who poured expensive perfume on his head, honoring her faith and humility (Mark 14:1–11; Luke 7:36-50).

We also know from the Gospels that many of Jesus' followers were women. They traveled with the disciples, financially supported their ministry, and served Jesus however they could.

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means (Luke 8:1-3).

The Gospel accounts also tell us that some of the same women who followed Jesus were present during his crucifixion. David Rhoads writes:

"The narrator [Mark] tells us that 'Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, along with many other women' had been serving Jesus, had followed him in Galilee, and had gone with him up to Jerusalem."

Indeed, these women continue the discipleship character role. Apart from Jesus' mother Mary and Herodias, these are the only other women to be named and, like the twelve, they have an ongoing role in the narrative, albeit brief.

They take risks by being at the crucifixion and by going to the grave, and they show their willingness to serve by buying spices and going to anoint Jesus. The women minor characters in particular exemplify the way of discipleship amid the failure and absence of the twelve.¹

So we know that women were an important part of the budding discipleship community, but why did Jesus appear to them and not any of the twelve disciples?

An Unlikely Source

We can't know for sure why Jesus appeared first to the women and not the men, as the Scriptures do not say why.


But we can infer a reason.

First, note that all four Gospels affirm that women were the first to see the empty tomb and encounter an angel or angels (Matt 28:5-8, Mark 16:1–8, Luke 24:1-8, John 20:1ff). Matthew and John also affirm that Jesus appears to the women after these encounters.

This unanimity of detail is significant. The accounts all align.

But more significant, and indeed puzzling, is why Jesus chose this unlikely source for spreading the news.

It is well known that women's testimonies carried little if any weight in the ancient world:



The exclusion of women from courts was normative... Courts were made by men for men. Babylonian, Egyptian, and Canaanite women did not go to court, nor did Greek women even in later times. Roman women could give testimony in court but could not be witness to a will.²

Joel Green, in his commentary on Luke, affirms this as a reason for the disciples' disbelief of the women's testimony:

The dismissive response [is explained by the fact that] those doing the reporting are women in a world biased against the admissibility of women as witnesses.³

So then why would the gospel writers include these details? Wouldn't readers of the Gospels have the same response? And why wouldn't Jesus appear first to the men, so that the testimony of his resurrection is more widely accepted?

Probably for this simple reason: to squelch accusations that the accounts were fabricated.

Unbelievably believable

If the apostles fabricated the resurrection, they certainly would not have written that women witnessed it first.⁴

Michael Licona elaborates:

"The main argument posited for the historicity of the appearance to the women, and the empty tomb for that matter, is that the early Christians would not have invented the story, since the low view of women in first-century Mediterranean society would raise problems of credibility. Bauckham provides evidence that in the Greco-Roman world educated men regarded women as 'gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy and excessive in religious practices.' A number of Jewish sources indicating the low view of women in Jewish culture may likewise be cited, although those from the Talmud are admittedly later. We may also note Luke 24:11."

Precisely because of the low view of women in antiquity, many see the appearance to the women, and to Mary Magdalene especially, as historical given the criterion of embarrassment. It seems unlikely that the Evangelists, especially Mark, would either invent or adjust existing testimonies to make the women the first witnesses of the risen Jesus if that is not what was remembered in the earliest traditions. Why fabricate a report of Jesus' resurrection that already would have been difficult for many to believe and compound that difficulty by adding women as the first witnesses? If Matthew originated the story of the appearance to the women disciples, it seems far more likely that he would have depicted men as being the first to see the risen Jesus, especially if Mark did not provide such an appearance in his Gospel. Why not list Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, and avoid the female issue altogether? Thus, as Bauckham assesses, the reason for the report's lack of credibility in the first century is a reason for its credibility in the twenty-first: "Since these narratives do not seem well designed to carry conviction at the time, they are likely to be historical, that is, believable by people with a historically critical mind-set today." Accordingly the most plausible explanations for

the inclusion of women witnesses in the resurrection narratives is that the remembrance of the tradition was so strong and widespread that it had to be included.⁵

Imagine the scene in court.

Accuser: "You're making this whole story up. You just want to start a conspiracy."

Apostle: "If I wanted to start a conspiracy, why would I choose unreliable witnesses? I'm not looking to cross my t's and dot the i's. I'm looking to tell the truth."

By subverting expectations, the story stands out.

Indeed, everything about Jesus' death and resurrection was unique: Betrayed by a friend. Rejected by his people. Silent before his accusers. Forgiving his killers. Then rising from the dead?

The whole story is incredible; why stop with the witnesses?

The apostles affirm that women were indeed the first witnesses, because that's how it really happened. Throughout the whole story of redemption—from barren women giving birth to waters parting to boys taking down giants—God does the unexpected.

As the saying goes, "You can't make this stuff up."

Jesus took those whose word society said wasn't trustworthy in court and made them the most reliable witnesses to the greatest event in history. He went against the societal norms of the day to show that he came to seek and save all who were lost, women included. And, in Christ, men and women are absolutely equal (Galatians 3:28).

Footnotes:

¹ David Rhoads, et al., *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Fortress Press, 2012).

² Judith S. Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997).

³ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series* (Eerdmans, 1997).

⁴ Tom Constable, "Notes on Matthew."

⁵ Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (IVP Academic, 2010), pg. 349. Filed Under: Bible Study, Digital Discipleship, Practical Theology Tagged With: gospels, jesus, resurrection, women



Things are happening in the parish hall!


Renovation of the parish hall is progressing well. Here's a picture of the fun machine they used to take up the floor. The parish hall will look great when we open up again--which we hope to do in late May. (Watch for more details to come out about that in future announcements.)



Transformed by Easter

*by Richard Rohr, O.F.M.
submitted by Stacie Koochek*

Christian history reaches its crescendo point in the resurrection of Jesus. The risen Jesus is the final revelation of the heart of God—a God who teaches love rather than hate, forgiveness rather than blame, nonviolence rather than violence.



Recall Jesus' encounters with his disciples after his Resurrection. He comes to the circle of followers with whom he had spent three years, the people closest to him who had nevertheless rejected, betrayed and abandoned him. Following his Resurrection, Jesus has the opportunity to chastise them. And yet, in all four Gospel accounts of the risen Christ we see that Jesus neither berates nor blames his disciples. Indeed, Peter, who had betrayed him three times, is given three chances to say "I love you" to his Master.

There is nothing to be afraid of in the risen Jesus. We have in him the perfect icon of a God who is safe and a universe that is safe. We have a God who does not blame, does not punish, does not threaten, does not dominate. We have a God who breathes forgiveness. The whole biblical tradition has been moving to this moment where God is identified with universal forgiveness.

The Resurrection of Jesus tells us that there is no victory through domination. There is no such thing as triumph by force. By his life, death and resurrection Jesus stops the cycle of violence and challenges the notion of dominating power. He invites us to relational or spiritual power, where we are not just changed but transformed. And not transformed from the top down but from the bottom up, not from the outside in but from the inside out.

Redemptive Forgiveness

Many of us identify more easily with the judging God we may have encountered in childhood: the one who knows our every sin and metes out punishments, the one we must attempt to placate and please. Often, we are more comfortable living with a fearsome God than a God whose love knows no bounds. But by his life, death and resurrection Jesus challenges us to new heights through redemptive forgiveness.

Most of us cannot go for long without thinking a judgmental or accusatory thought about others. So often, there is someone we're judging, accusing, blaming. To live in the good, to live in the love, to live without a need to judge or accuse - this is major surgery! None of us gets to that point by a nonstop flight early in life. But when we're there, we know we're transformed. We're free. We are at one with the risen Jesus.

Once we have a personal experience in our own life of the risen Christ upholding us, naming us, loving us, freeing us, then we have nothing to fear. That's how secure Christ makes us - because we have a reference point, we have a center point. We have received the gift of the Spirit.

'Divine Lure'

During a retreat I made some years ago, my fellow retreatants and I were asked to

list the adjectives each of us would use to describe Jesus. My list included words such as compassionate, self-confident, humble, forgiving. When our retreat leader brought us back together as a group she suggested that the qualities we had each identified represented not so much what Jesus was like but what each of us wanted to be ourselves. Jesus is the divine lure who invites us forward in our humanity, who entices us into these very virtues by his own full living of them. The qualities I had on my list are indeed qualities Jesus possessed. But the reason we want to embrace them is because Jesus has set the standard, the goal and the ideal for our humanity.

In Jesus we see the divine being who is also the perfect human being. Jesus comes in a human body to show us the face of God, who is eternally compassionate and eternally joyous, who stands with us in our sufferings and our joys. As Christians, our vocation is to unite with Christ crucified and Christ risen.

RICHARD ROHR, a Franciscan priest from Our Lady of Guadalupe Province in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque. His newest book is *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

The Poet Thinks of the Donkey

by Mary Oliver

submitted by Stacie Koochek

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with
understanding,
he stood and waited.

How horses, turned out into the
meadow,
leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual,
waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.
I hope, finally, he felt brave.



I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Read the poem prayerfully a couple of times. Sit with it in silence for a while. Read it again and then pick the one verse, the one image that strikes you the most. Carry that one verse or image with you throughout the day.

Poem: by [Mary Oliver](#), from [Thirst](#)

Image: Palm Sunday (Stained glass window, Taizé Community)

Spring is here!



Bulbs are popping up, flowers and trees are budding out, and temperatures have warmed up. Spring has sprung! And all the gardeners are springing into action, too. Are you thinning beds right now? Buying 6-packs? Planning new beds? At St. Luke's, we are refreshing beds and planting flowers and bulbs. We hope to plant several areas with flowers that can be cut for use in decorating the altar. If you have a favorite flower or bulb, we invite you to drop it by to be placed in one of our beds. Alternatively, you can make a special donation with a note "to flower beds" and we will use it for flower beds around the property.

We need you...

During this time when we are closed, we still have costs related to keeping the church running. Please remember to continue your giving during this time to help us continue the work of God that we do at St. Luke's. You can mail your pledge, drop it by, or go to the "Donate Here" button at the top of this email. You can also give at the Diocesan website ([click here](#)); indicate that it is for St. Luke's and they will route the gift to us. Thank you for your support.

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Come join us as we stay connected

Online gatherings at St. Luke's include:

- Men's Spirituality Group, 1st Mondays at 9 am
- Men's Cursillo Group, Tuesdays at 9:00 am
- Don Freeman Study Group, Wednesdays at 10:00 am
- Photo Club, 4th Wednesday at 1:00 pm
- Interactive Bible Study, Thursdays at 10:15 am
- Centering Prayer, Thursdays at 12:00 pm
- Women's Cursillo Group, Thursdays at 1:30 pm
- Grief Support Group, 2nd and 4th Fridays at 10 am
- Caregivers Support Group, 2nd and 4th Fridays at 1 pm
- Morning prayers, Wednesdays at 8 am

And of course, we have worship on Sunday mornings at 10 am on Zoom,
followed by coffee hour in breakout rooms.

If you would like information about joining any of these meetings,
contact the office at officeatstlukes@gmail.com.

