



Do you know what it's like to finish as the runner-up? Do you know the frustration of being a few split-seconds behind or a couple inches away from the clinching goal; to be so incredibly close, and yet still feel so gut-wrenchingly far away? And do you know the feeling when someone, out of their best-hearted nature, to be sure, tries to push the moral victory speech, even if competitive philosophy 101

demands you not cave into that mindset, lest you lose your edge in whatever life enterprise you're attempting to master at the time? And yet, I also recognize that professional sports fans in northeast Ohio are the absolute last people on the entire face of God's green earth, who need to hear such a lecture.

And I also recognize that I have absolutely no idea if any of this applies to Peter from long ago, but I cannot help but find this to be a rather interesting detail to include from the Gospel writer, who insists on letting us know: "the other disciple outran Peter and got there first." Even though Peter had hit his own spiritual stumbling block, of sorts, only a few days earlier with flat-out denying even knowing Jesus, all while the Lord is being interrogated and conspired against to set some not-so-pleasant proceedings into motion. Regardless, Peter is still a rather big deal amongst the close-knit team of disciples. That, even if you do not want to go along with the whole Roman Catholic Church idea of claiming him to be the first Pope and all, he would still rank near the top of the most important spiritual players in the early church. So, he should have gotten there first, out of seniority respect, at least. After all, he had put in more than his fair share of putting his faith into practice, even if he dealt with his own growing pains in figuring out what following Jesus should look like. He should have gotten there first. That's just the way it should work. That's the way faith should work. That's the way the church should work. That's the way God should work: giving the Peters first dibs on all that God's Paradise on earth should have to offer. But as the story so goes, and even how our story so goes sometimes: he didn't get there first, and even far better yet; the other disciple didn't either. Someone else had arrived well before anyone on the veteran-laden soon-to-be church hierarchal team of the supposed closest inner-circle to Jesus.

Now, some would say Mary Magdalene was actually a part of that tight-knit group: just as devoted in following this Messiah of not the cliché kind of hope, but the authentic, world-shaping hope. But she arrives first on the scene not with an extensive running list of religiously impressive accolades, not with moving up the ranks in the emerging Jesus movement; just with her own cherished passion of her Lord, just with her own hopes and dreams and deepest desires for a better world, including clinging to someone who actually adored the authentic Mary. She beautifully and wonderfully shows up with her own real human vulnerability. And yet, oftentimes looked down upon Mary by the supposed insiders of Christ, Jesus insists that she gets to initiate the Greatest News shared with the world.

Now, even though she gets there first in this particular holy instance, some would say it took her a little while to come around to the whole following-Jesus thing, which only makes her witness to the Resurrected Christ all the more powerful. Because whether we as the church like

to accept it or not, more and more children of God, are not coming straight to houses of worship after birth, immediately into baptism and just keep on going through our ranks of organized religion operation. More and more children of God are arriving in our midst a little further down the faith season of their life, for a variety of reasons, not always under their control, but sometimes it is because they do not feel like they are good enough to be on any God insider-circle church membership roster. And if that is the case, that is on us as the church. But thankfully, Mary Magdalene still has something incredibly beautiful to say to the church now.

Because, it is not just about welcoming people who felt as if they were made to be outsiders at some point in their experience with God or with the place that is meant to be the physical embodiment of God's grace; it is not just about welcoming them, it is about believing in them so much, and believing in this Resurrection story so much, to empower those just-as-precious children of God, to claim them as desperately needed messengers of authentic, world-shaping hope: to be the living holy rendition of Mary Magdalene today. They may not have gotten to the whole Gospel proclamation ministry thing first, but this Risen Lord is still calling them forth anyway. Because sometimes the Mary Magdalene's of the world have their moments of awe-inspiring appreciation of just how far God's grace can captivate someone else who was given up on altogether.

Do you know what it's like to not get there first? Do you know what it's like to go through so much of life trying to figure out whatever it is that seems to be missing? Do you know what it's like that no matter how hard you try, you still feel so incredibly far away from real love and compassion and mercy? But do you know what it's like to find a place or a people or even a person who doesn't seem to judge you for not getting there first? Do you know what it feels like to find a place or a people or even a person who won't respond with clichés to your fears and worries? Do you know what it feels like to find true and authentic love and compassion and mercy? Do you know what it's like when someone will just sit there with you and let you be you, as if that is just the way it's supposed to be all along. Do you know what it's like to feel as if God is captivated by you? Do you know what it feels like to be convinced that you are just as filled with the Holy Spirit as anyone else in church life or otherwise, and that God may very well be calling you to share your real story with others? Do you know what it's like to find a place or a people or even a person who actually sees a glimpse of the Divine in you? Because that is what the Risen Christ sees in you, no matter what you bring to this place or anywhere else you go, because all of this is for you, too. And so for that Greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed!