

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

MARY MAGDALENE

John 20:1–18

When I say the word *orchestra*, you probably picture woodwinds, brass, and strings. But one orchestra is made up of kids who play instruments made out of trash. It's called the "Recycled Orchestra of Cateura" (in Paraguay). Cateura is not really a town. It's actually a slum built on a huge landfill.

Every day, about three million pounds of waste is dumped in Cateura. Many families eke out their existence by scavenging trash from the landfill to resell, and kids get pulled out of school to help. "To be honest," violinist Noelia, age 16, said, "there was nothing in Cateura. What there was most was drugs." Her violin, like many in the orchestra, is made out of cans, wooden spoons, and bent forks. One of the ensemble's cellos uses an oil drum. Another teenager plays a saxophone made out of a drainpipe, melted copper, coins, spoon handles, cans, and bottle caps.

Several years ago, a short video was made. The hope was to raise \$175,000 to make a full-length documentary. Not only did they raise the money, but also the video went viral. Since then, the Recycled Orchestra has performed all over the world. The group plays Mozart, Paraguayan folk music, even Frank Sinatra.

An orchestra made up of kids who play instruments made out of trash! God makes music with misfits. That's what Easter is all about! *God loves to make music with misfits!* I'm a misfit. You're a misfit. We're all misfits! We all fall short of God's will and ways. But fellow misfits, today, it's time to make music!

What do I mean? God's orchestra is made up of the most unlikely musicians. There's Peter -- he denied Christ - three times! And Paul plays in the orchestra, but there was a time when Paul played a religious thug and persecuted Christians. And the guy on the harp? That would be David. Womanizing, bloodthirsty—yet repentant David. Today, on this Resurrection Day, we add another

person to the misfits who make music. Her name is Mary—Mary Magdalene.

There are five Marys in the New Testament, which is why this one is identified with “Magdalene.” Magdalene isn’t her last name. Magdalene refers to her hometown—a little fishing village on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee called Magdala.

Mary Magdalene’s life used to be a MESS! ***“Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out”*** Luke 8:2. Luke tells us that Mary had been demon possessed—with SEVEN demons! The number 7 is often used figuratively in the Bible. Like when we say “Thanks a million!” we don’t literally say the words “thank you” 1,000,000 times. We mean the person deserves the most gratitude we can give. Seven is the biblical number for a complete set. Mary is **COMPLETELY** demon possessed. Can you imagine being *that messed up*?

Of course, you and I can get so completely messed up that our compulsions pull us away from a relationship of trusting in Jesus. any time we trash our relationship of trusting Jesus, the Evil One is behind it.

Here’s how it happens. **Compulsion to prove.** We begin a job or a task or a class with high hopes and high endeavor. “I’ll show them! I’ll be the best!” **Intensity.** We arrive early. We stay late. We give it *all* we’ve got. **Subtle deprivations.** To keep going, we begin to deprive ourselves. Maybe we stop exercising, stop getting enough sleep, or stop reading our Bible and attending church. We pick up bad eating habits. “More donuts will do the trick!” **Distorted thinking.** We tell ourselves, “Things will get better *after* I finish this project.” “I’ll get back on track with my family *after* tax season or *after* this business trip.” **Heightened denial.** People close to us begin to see what we can’t see. We have less joy in a hobby, in a sport, or in life in general. We’re often tired. We begin watching too much TV.

Disengagement. Life becomes a checklist of things to do. One thing after another. We live for vacation, and then vacation never

lasts long enough. **Observable behavior changes.** People who *don't* know us see that something is wrong. Our **survival strategies** become **unhealthy**: too much internet, too much eating, too much sleeping, too much shopping, too much caffeine.

Depersonalization. We become robotic. We just go through the motions. We play the part, we put on a face, but we've got nothing left in the tank. *We hit rock bottom.* We **internalize everything**. We talk to no one. And we feel as though we've got at least seven demons. Messed up *completely* – so much that there's no way we can fix ourself by ourself.

We can all get in a mess like Mary's. We can all get down, depressed, and hit rock bottom. Did you know that 20 percent of all people on disability are on it because of severe depression? Did you know that, inspite of being the richest nation on earth, the United States is, according to the World Health Organization, also the most depressed nation on earth? Did you know that in the last decade, depression among American teenagers has increased 200 percent? What these numbers tell us is that **our lives are not working!** We are KILLING OURSELVES.

Our compulsions may bring us more money, more toys for more fun, and good times with friends. Our compulsions may lead to looking slim and more attractive, kids with above average GPA's, and better career prospects. That's what makes them so dangerous if that's ALL we got going in our lives!

If all you live for is things that don't last beyond this life, your life is messed up! Your priorities become compulsions that ruin your relationship with God, just as the demons in Mary ruined her relationship with God. The Evil One was the one behind Mary's problems, and the same is true for you when the most important things to you are temporary and all-consuming, and push Jesus out of the picture of your life. The way most people in America live their lives for the hear-and-now is short-sighted, and ends in an eternity without God in forever hell. This Mary's mess and ours as well.

And music? *Music?* We have no song to sing!

Mary was down, but her Messiah had lifted her up! Jesus lifted Mary up from her pit of seven demons. That's why Mary Magdalene follows Jesus all the way to the cross to watch her Savior bleed and die.

Mary's Messiah is your Messiah too. To lift you out of being completely messed up by your heart and mind that constantly turn away from Jesus, still, He took onto Himself all results our sin and compulsions bring. Christ didn't deserve any of what He went through. But He chose to go through the suffering and onto the cross to set you free. There, His face is caked with spit and blood. His throat is so dry He can't swallow. His voice is so hoarse He can scarcely speak. To find the last time moisture touched His lips, we need to rewind the clock twelve hours to the meal in the Upper Room. Jesus was betrayed, condemned, mocked, beaten, and crucified. No liquid has quenched His thirst. The Savior has no song to sing!

That's how things stand just before dawn on Sunday. There had been so much hope, so much promise. But now, it had all come to what? Nothing! *Nothing!* The famous Rabbi? Dead. His disciples? In hiding. Other followers? Scattered. One disciple, Judas Iscariot, has even killed himself. MESSED UP for sure! It looks like NO HOPE, NO FUTURE. No joyful song to sing, that's for sure!

Mary Magdalene gets up early on Sunday to anoint Christ's dead body for burial. But the body isn't in the tomb! Mary breaks out crying. She tells her story, first to Peter and John, and then to the angels, and now, for a third time, to a man she thinks is the gardener. ***"Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away"*** John 20:15.

"Mary." The voice is unmistakable. **"Mary."** No one ever said her name with such tenderness. **"Mary."** She looks up and, in sudden recognition, cries out, "Rabboni!" **"TEACHER!"** It's Jesus. *It's Jesus!* He's not dead. He is risen from the grave. He's alive. *Christ is alive!*

Emotions flood Mary's heart—can you imagine?—as she transitions from the depths of grief and sorrow to the heights of ecstasy and joy. Just when it appeared as though it was all over—to the shock and surprise of everyone—the Father raised Jesus bodily from the dead. Mary's song—better, *her symphony of celebration*—begins with great joy!

Mary's music is a five-word song: ***"I have seen the Lord"*** *John 20:18*. "Lord" isn't just a polite way of talking about Jesus, like "Sir" or "Mister." With "Lord," Mary is saying, "I have seen God, the King of the universe." "I have seen the One through whom and for whom all things were made." "I've seen the One who is coming again, riding on the clouds, as King of kings and Lord of lords!" That's why Thomas's parallel confession, in John 20:28, has these words: "My Lord and my *God!*"

What's it all mean? It means that there's more to our lives than what we think. It means that there's more to our story than what we see. It means that there's more than just death and taxes. Christ's resurrection means that, just like Mary Magdalene, YOU have a song to sing!

A SONG? A song to sing? YES! Jesus is ALIVE! There is meaning that goes beyond this life – purpose and hope that stretches into forever. Jesus died but came out of the tomb alive. He defeated death and the grave, and **you will too** because of what He has done! Your past has been paid and removed. No matter how messed up your yesterdays were they are erased in Jesus' forgiveness. His open tomb guarantees it. He offers this new kind of life, this joy-filled, hope-full, loving Jesus kind of life to you – free. As a gift, pure and simple. Believe it! Receive it! Take His gift to you with both hands and – with the power of God – never let go!

Remember? *God loves to make music with misfits!* It's time, it's high time, for all of us misfits to make some music! I'll take the tuba. You take the trombone. You take the tambourine! And you? What instrument will you play today?

One thing's for sure. We have a song to sing! And we sing it with our lips. And we will sing it with our lives. What's the song called? Our song has six words? What are they? *I know that my Redeemer lives!*

Amen.