Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



A Mary Magdalene and Jesus mosaic mural, in a chapel in the Duc In Altum March 31 at Magdala (OSV News photo/Debbie Hill)



by Eilis McCulloh

Contributor

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

April 14, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I spent a lot of time during Lent reflecting on the Resurrection and, more specifically, on who has the power to tell the story of the Resurrection and who is allowed to be resurrected. I asked myself, "Who is deliberately silenced and cast aside while their public image is tarnished?"

My reflections centered on Mary Magdalene, who not only accompanied Jesus during his ministry, but was also the first disciple announcing the unbelievable news of Jesus' resurrection. In her book *Truly Our Sister*, St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson describes Mary Magdalene as one of the women who was "Jesus' friends and disciples who supported his ministry, witnessed his death and burial, and bore the earth-shattering responsibility of being chief witnesses to his resurrection whether the men believed them or not." Despite this awesome responsibility and the role Mary Magdalene played in our Christian story, she has been continually silenced and cast aside as a prostitute.

As I spent time with Mary Magdalene, I found myself seeking out modern-day Mary Magdalenes — the people silenced by our church, the government, and the news when they are just trying to share the good news, announce the change needed in our world to be an authentic disciple, or dare to claim their role in the Resurrection. I found myself paying attention not only to these people, but also to the people to whom they are calling attention.

During this season, I prayed with parents, children, teachers, medical professionals, and everyone else who has been calling for gun control in the United States after each massacre. On Holy Thursday, I journeyed with the "Tennessee three" as they shouted into the void of the Tennessee state legislature.

Like Mary Magdalene, they were not believed when they said gun control could end the epidemic of gun violence we have endured without a policy change. Instead, the

Tennessee three were deliberately silenced by people protecting the interests of the gun lobby instead of the innocent people they were elected to serve. They are modern-day Mary Magdalenes.

Advertisement

I journeyed with members of the nonbinary and transgender communities as pastors and elected leaders attempt to discredit science by banning gender-affirming care, spiritual nourishment, education and employment. In Texas, I watch in horror as parents of transgender children are threatened with child-service investigations as they attempt to obtain gender-affirming care, as children are kicked off sports teams, and as they are denied Eucharist and a spiritual home. In turn, I joined with thousands of allies, including my own religious sisters and pastors, who dared to publicly support the transgender community. They are modern-day Mary Magdalenes.

I found modern-day Mary Magdalenes at our southern border, where they cried out in anguish as a fire at a Ciudad Juárez immigration detention center killed dozens of migrants. They bore witness to communities of migrants who attempted to navigate an asylum app that didn't recognize the Black or dark-brown faces of our siblings seeking asylum. Instead, the story of a "new country free from migrants" took hold on news programs as we criminalized families seeking a new life by risking all to make the harrowing journey to the border. We ignore their fears, and we silence them each time we put them on a plane back to their country of origin and label them as "bad." They are modern-day Mary Magdalenes.



A Venezuelan migrant mourns outside an ambulance for her injured husband while Mexican authorities and firefighters remove injured migrants, mostly Venezuelans, from inside the National Migration Institute building during a fire, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, March 27, 2023. At least 39 people at the immigration detention center on the U.S. border died in the fire that broke out at the facility overnight, according to a statement issued by the center. (OSV News photo/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters)

I think about a quote from Indian author Arundhati Roy, who says, "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." For millennia, Mary Magdalene — and her courageous witness to the Resurrection — was deliberately silenced. The Tennessee three were deliberately silenced by the silent forces of racism and the gun lobby.

Children, bank employees, teachers and our neighbors are deliberately silenced when their deaths are glossed over by elected officials who refuse to enact common-sense gun legislation. Migrants at the southern border are deliberately silenced, first

by their own government and then by us each time they are forced to return home or go underground. The LGBTQ community is deliberately silenced each time a church, official or state leader says they don't exist.

These modern-day Mary Magdalenes risk their lives to call our attention to the new life that is on the brink of changing the world as we know it. Are we going to allow their witnesses to the resurrections around them transform our lives? Or are we going to be like the disciples who doubted Mary Magdalene, and wait for something else to convince us of this new way of being?

These modern-day Mary Magdalenes do tell the story of resurrections happening each and every day. We just have to dare to listen to them.

Related: Fatima nuns accompany transgender community in India