

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • October 16, 2022



THE SCRIPTURE
John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

THE MESSAGE
“You Need to Get Out More: Spin a Yarn”
Terry Overfelt

There you hold a red thread, it will take on many meanings for you today, and for some, it may just be a reminder in the hour, before we recycle our worship guides that we are all knit together by the stories we listen to and tell. We all show love in the mutuality of the shared story.

Today’s commandment, the new commandment to love, is well actualized in the power of our stories.

Today, we all spin a yarn. A red thread.

In Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, the red thread is worn on the left wrist because the left side of the body is considered “feminine.” It’s the receiving side, the side where our anatomical heart beats, and it’s worn there both for protection and allow us to receive spirit.

Red threads around the wrist are common in folklore. The Japanese legend relates the red thread as invisibly tying us to others we are to meet as preordained soul mates. Red threads are following me around now.

In June, the fiery paraments of Pentecost were up, and baptisms had gone down. It was a beautiful time in the church, and we all gathered for one worship to witness the birth and rebirth of the church. One of the silken paraments on the pulpit had a long frayed red thread. I watched it dance throughout the service in a wind I could only sense. At the end, I drew in a beloved, discipling sister with eyes to see, to be a witness, and then I gently snapped the thread, and we tied it around our wrists as reminders of the mystery of love we know.



In July, I was making a pastoral visit at Boone Hospital. As I began to drive off, there it was, lopping from a dumpster behind the parking garage, across Bass Street and up against the parking lot curb. I picked up the ball of red yarn and rolled it up all the way to the dumpster, where I cut and carried it back with me.

It was the very same day that our church friends were returning from weeks in France where they experienced sacred encountering in the cave grotto of Mary Magdalene where they fell more deeply connected to her sacred story.

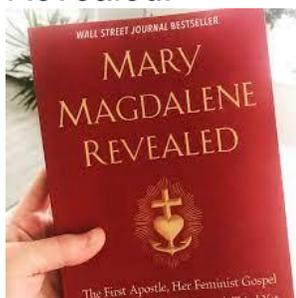
The red thread has become associated with the spirit of Mary Magdalene and this is the “yarn” to unpack today.

Here is an inspired reflection she wrote.

*We were all born with a red thread,
our first attachment,
the cord that kept us nurtured and growing inside our first mother.
The constant flow of all that we needed so we were never without.
But then we came out, and that cord had to be cut.
You can't go around tied up with that umbilical cord.
It's not that long-it's just not functional!*

Someone cut the cord for us. They had to.
The doctor, maybe your dad, or another partner parent,
they severed that physical cord.
And that was that.
No more frictionless flow of love and nourishment.
But this is when life begins!
You go out untethered but connected. If you are lucky, you stay connected in a
different way to that mother.
A mother's love that is never far.
And you also find all sorts of new connections along the way.

I have been profoundly inspired by Meggan Watterson, author of *Mary Magdalene Revealed*.



She says (p63): “I still don’t know exactly why the red thread means so much. I’m not sure if I’ll ever take it off. When I look at it, there’s this echo, like a radio frequency, or like those little bars that light up as my laptop searches for an Internet connection. It radiates. It transmits. And deep down, in this place that exists before words or thoughts, I just know what the red thread ties me to.”

She calls it a connection, a legacy, that this inheritance of radical love that the world is asking, demanding, that we embody now in the Divine Feminine along with the Divine Masculine that we know in Jesus and Mary is the gate.

Mary Magdalene has 12 mentions in the New Testament, second only to Mary, mother of Jesus. We know that Jesus cast seven demons from her. We know that she was at the cross when Jesus said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son,” and then said to the disciple *whom he loved* standing there, too, “Here is your mother.”

We know that Jesus called her by name at the tomb when she was first to see the resurrected Christ and that perhaps her presence there completed the transformation that allows us to see him from **within** ourselves, as was the base of Jesus’ teachings; a foundational sacred wisdom. Her message was allowing people to see their humanity not as cursed or meaningless, but as powerful and good. Mary defines and addresses God was neither masculine nor feminine but rather, “the good.”



We know that she was the first female disciple, whose Gospel came in alongside that of Matthew, Luke, or the letter to the Timothy and Ephesians, but it was excluded from the canon because the only female gospel writer could not conform with the doctrine

being established under the exclusively patriarchal leadership of the church. The gospel portrays her as one of Jesus' closest companions with intellectual and spiritual connection between them.

Two copies of her Gospel have been discovered and both have the six-page first chapter and four pages in the eighth chapter torn away. The church was so threatened by Mary's intimacy with Christ that a fourth-century bishop ordered her writings destroyed. Oh, to unearth an intact manuscript! Makes you want to keep throwing stones into caves in Northern Egypt where ancient gospels were found in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. Actually, Mary Magdalene's gospel was discovered not far from there almost 50 years prior.

Mary Magdalene has been vindicated from the lies that have discredited her for two millennia. In 1969, The Catholic Church apologized for centuries of labeling her as a prostitute, which Pope Gregory shaped as her narrative in the sixth century. A recent comparison of her importance aligns Mary with Peter. She the "Migdal" or tower and he the "Petros" or rock.

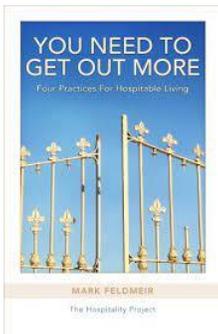
She is called the "apostle to the apostles" and a prominent early church leader. Now, this beloved disciple's voice is heard, and we hear her stories of greatest love and closeness to Jesus and the creative power she expresses. Can you imagine how our story as Christians would have evolved differently had her voice not been torn and buried? Can you imagine the sacred feminine thread that would be woven into the tapestry of our faith? I invite you to love her story and witness.

In today's Scripture from the gospel of John, which has strong echoes of the voice of Mary Magdalene in its spiritual revelations on love and belovedness, we are encouraged to be revealed as disciples by this love.

This is today's invitation in our series: *You Need to Get Out More*; we wear the yarn of remembrance, and we spin the yarn of story in this day.

One of the very best ways of expressing a love for another is to listen well. What does it mean to one-another in this way? It means to invest, to know, to listen to the stories of each other lives and to find the **sacred thread** in the stories that connects us all to the holiness and belovedness in God. We all have **yarn to spin**.

Maybe we find it as inspired by Mark Feldmeir, in *You Need to Get Our More*, by learning to find and tell our own stories. God who...as the stories go, knit us together in our mother's womb, pitched a tent with us, became flesh as with us. Name your story. Is it one of triumph? Of tragedy? Do you remember being drawn to another person by an unforgettable, long, or short story that they told you of their lives or legacy?



The author encourages us to think on our “furthest-back person” in our life. What do you know about the oldest, family story told? When did you last tell a story about your late father, or your mother’s mother or a two-thousand-years-ago disciple?

Stories have the power to bring us out on the porch and call us together. We are living in a time where connections are strained, severed, and still may remain painfully distanced. We are created for relationships. Could

getting out more: sharing our stories, **spinning a yarn**, unite us in the **thread of God**, woven throughout our createdness; our belovedness, and therefore affirm and embolden the bringing and seeing, the hearing and the telling of the kin-dom of God among us? Blest be this tie that binds?

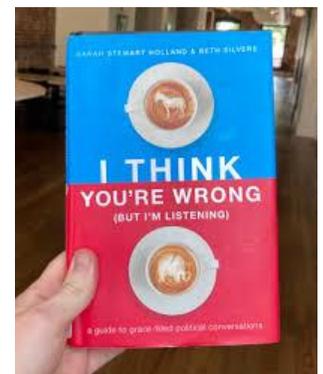
A story needs a listener and a voice. The more we train ourselves to be good listeners, the better we get...and you know the more we train our hearts to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the more in tune we become. The most often spiritually audible message I hear from the Holy Spirit in the midst of conversations or the goings on is, “Listen now.” And what follows is usually a part of the story that clearly connects with God.

When Jesus said, “Lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart and should be converted and I should heal them.” - Matthew 16:15, and from Mary 3:10-14, “Anyone with two ears capable of hearing should listen!”

How do we apply this encouragement for story now, when we seem to find ourselves so often in a no-listening zone?

Our relationships, our culture, our values, and our politics are still strained, severed, and may remain distanced. What are we to do to enter and repair the breach in these sometimes paralyzing, polarized times? There is an idea presented in a book written by Sarah Steward Holland and Beth Al Silvers entitled, *I think You’re Wrong (But I’m Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversation*.

These two women reconnected from college days in their common postings of zeal for home births. One was Democrat, the other Republican, both were mothers and Christians. They coined an approach to discourse that was “nuanced” by their willingness to listen deeply to the other and to find common ground foremostly in respect. Here’s what they said: “*More than ever, politics seems to be driven by discord. People sitting together in pews every Sunday*



feel like strangers and loved ones at the dinner table feel like enemies. Toxic political dialogue, hate-filled rants on social media, and agenda-driven news stories have become the new norm. But it doesn't have to be this way. We can talk about reproductive rights and welfare without thinking that the differing opinion is exactly, 'What's wrong with this country.'"

They give us these tools to move us to respect and care to policy discussions that we bring to the rest of our lives:

Respect the dignity of every person.

Recognize that issues are nuanced and can't be reduced to political talking points.

Listen in order to understand.

Lead with grace and patience.

Their book is a gift to our culture; teaching us to tell our stories, to talk about them, and not feel as if there need to be winners and losers, but connection.

It all stems from *Listening*. Christians, do you know how much dearer or clearer someone comes to us when we hear their story? Or how we feel when we have entertained, honored, and made ourselves vulnerable with someone by trusting them with ours?

I would love to hear how you have seen the red thread as a surprise prompting to listen more.

God is tossing us 'a yarn' to knit with... to remind us to go and tell in love.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples."

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH