### “Doing Good and Healing” Steve Finlan for The First Church, April 20, 2025

**Acts 10:36–41**

36[Peter spoke to the believers in Caesarea:] “You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

**John 20:11–18**

11Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Luke, the author of Acts, says Jesus went about doing good and healing. He was known as a good person, a prophet, and a healer. Luke says he and others were “witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem” (10:39). Jesus did go about doing good and healing. Part of this caused a problem. As a prophet and healer, he was opening the door to spiritual freedom for people. He revealed that anyone could get healing and truth without any priestly intervention, they could talk to God directly. Now they could understand themselves as sons and daughters of God. All this undermined the specialist pretensions and claimed authority of the priests and the purity rules of the Pharisees. Jesus told people they needed inward purity, rather than outward purity (Mark 7:18–20). This implied that the system of ritual purification through sacrifice was unnecessary. And on at least two occasions, he quoted the radical prophet Hosea, who heard God saying “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13; 12:7; Hos 6:6). Both the priests and the Pharisees felt their power threatened by Jesus, so they conspired against him.

Luke says the resurrected Jesus did not visit any of those who had put him to death, but only his followers. One of those followers was Mary Magdalene, and in John’s gospel, she is the first to meet the resurrected Jesus, though she doesn’t recognize him at first. She thinks he is the gardener and asks where they have taken the body. When Jesus says her name, she recognizes him, just as you might recognize your husband or wife saying your name. There’s something recognizable in the voice, even if the visible form has changed, as appears to be the case.

Jesus then appoints her to take a message to the apostles. In a way, then, she becomes an apostle to the apostles. There can be no question that Mary was *some* kind of leader in the Jesus movement. The message she is to carry is that she saw the risen Jesus and that he said “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17).

This saying shows a certain parallel between Jesus and the individual believer, that they share the same Father, the same God. It implies, though it does not *say*, that we will ascend to the Father, too. But there are many other passages where he speaks of believers having eternal life, and of God and Jesus abiding with the believer (John 14:23; 15:4). In any case, the message given to Mary was one of intimate fellowship between God, Jesus, and believers. And Mary fulfilled her assignment of “announcing” it to the apostles (20:18).

Also in the Gospel of John, there is a scene where Jesus tells his closest followers that he does not call them servants, but friends (John 15:15). And he speaks to Mary as to a friend. That is what is so appealing about this passage. He wants her and his other friends to be reassured about his teaching that there is life after death, that he, the Son of God, had the power to lay down his life, and he had the power to take it up again (John 10:17–18). And he has the power to bestow eternal life on *us*.

Jesus came to reveal God’s love and mercy, and to make us see that we are all brothers and sisters in the family of God. We are all children of God, meant to learn our love lessons here on earth. Jesus has shown us that we need not fear death, that when our time comes we will go to see him and our loved ones. We will bring our earth love lessons with us as we grow closer to the Father, to partake of the divine nature. There is joy in the morning for He is risen. He is risen indeed!