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## What the Lord Has Done in Me

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We serve a God who speaks all of creation into existence, who sees us in our affliction, and who hears our cries. Our God felt the dirt between his fingers as he formed Adam, and between his toes when he *walked right down to earth*, to be the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*. Our God is not like those idols. He acts, he promises, and he fulfills his promises. He is trustworthy. He is worthy of our trust and our praise because he is faithful, his steadfast love endures (Lam 3.22). We are created in his image: male and female, he created us. We are created to see, to hear, to speak, to smell, to feel, to walk. We are created to *do!* Psalm 115 describes pagan idols and it describes *us*: in our passivity, our sedentary lifestyles, our nonchalance about what's going on *in* and happening *to* our world. We don't have to be powerless. Our God is powerful, and he is ready and willing to work powerfully in us and through us. We have chosen inactivity long enough. God is a God of action. Do we trust him? Are we ready?

"Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. House of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is *your* help and *your* shield" (Ps 115.9–11). Israel faltered in their trust. They wanted freedom, and God provided. But when the going got tough, they began to doubt and they wanted to go back to Egypt, back to slavery. God provided manna, but they wanted more. He sent quail; still they complained and doubted God's promises. Moses was faithful. He trusted in the Lord, his help and shield. Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house, and his faithfulness was credited to him as righteousness. *Trust* in the Lord, he is our *help*. *Trust* in the Lord, he is our *shield*.

"The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great" (Ps 115.12–13). God is a God of remembrance. God makes covenants with his people and he is faithful to his promises. "The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us" (Ps 115.12). God is ready to act. God will bless our trust. Are we ready?

"May the Lord give you increase, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he has given to human beings" (Ps 115.14–16). We have a great responsibility as caretakers of the earth. God set Adam over the garden to till and work the land. He decreed that Adam and Eve would have dominion over the earth and all creeping things. We are called to be good stewards of this planet we call our home. We also bear responsibility for the earth's inhabitants. Jesus *commands* us to *go*, make disciples of *all* nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything he has commanded (Matt 28.19–20). And what is his promise? "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28.20).

God is faithful. God blesses. He keeps his promises. He acts! He is ready to act through us. Are we ready? In the words of our Lord Jesus: "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matt 10.7). "The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us" (Ps 115.12). May the *peace* of Christ dwell in your hearts, and may the *love* of Christ compel you to act.



## What The Lord Had Done In Me

AMY BOST HENEGAR

*Amy Bost Henegar is an associate minister for the Manhattan Church of Christ in New York City. Formerly a hospital chaplain, Amy received her M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary. Amy preached this sermon at the Manhattan Church of Christ on Mother's Day, May 13, 2007.*

The story begins with Eve, the first woman in the Bible, and the list of women in this story is long. The Old Testament is filled with stories of God's women. The wives of the patriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. In the book of Exodus we learn about Miriam, Aaron's sister and herself a prophet. Earlier in our service we heard the powerful story of the midwives who protected the Hebrew babies from the king of

Egypt. Deborah was one of the judges who led Israel, and Huldah was a prophet to the people of Israel. We heard a piece of the beautiful story about Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi led to a marriage and children, and King David was one of her descendents. And you have surely heard of Esther the queen—a woman called to the kingdom at just the right time for a very specific purpose.

If we turn to the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, we hear about the women of the early church, including Lois and Eunice, the mother and grandmother who passed on their faith to Timothy. The apostle Paul reminds Timothy to remember their teachings. Tabitha, a woman of the early church, was always doing good and helping the poor. Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia are women mentioned by Paul as his co-workers for the cause of Christ. And there are more, some named and some not, but the list of faithful women in the early church is long.

Now I want us to look at the women who came into contact with Jesus himself. These are the stories that have changed my life and profoundly shaped my faith. Anna. We heard her story earlier this morning. She was an elderly prophetess who met the infant Jesus in the temple when he was eight days old. She placed her hands on him and proclaimed the redemption of Israel through the life of this tiny baby.

Mary the mother of Jesus, whose song of amazing faith we shared at the beginning of our service today, is a woman we would all do well to imitate. When Jesus was eight days old she was told that "a sword would pierce her soul" someday (Luke 2.35), and we see that day in the Gospels when Mary is standing at the foot of the cross.

But there are so many other women. It is amazing to look at the list of the Gospel stories that tell about Jesus and women. If Jesus had been building an earthly kingdom, he certainly would have focused his efforts on the wealthy and powerful, and the majority of women in that society were neither. But Jesus ministered to women and changed their lives, one woman at a time. The woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil, and the woman who washed his feet with her tears. The women who went to the tomb and met the risen Christ—the first witnesses to the resurrection!

What about the woman who had been bleeding for years and had suffered at the hands of many doctors? She thought that if she could simply touch Jesus' cloak she just might be healed, and she was right. Jairus, the synagogue ruler, had a daughter who had died. When Jesus arrived at her bedside he shouted the words "Talitha cum!" which mean "little girl, get up!" (Mark 5.41). At that she was raised to life. How many times has he shouted those words to me, and raised me again to abundant life?

You see, these stories are our stories. And the stories in the Bible are no more important than the stories we heard told this morning—stories of women in our midst who have met the living Christ and been forever changed.

The sisters Mary and Martha, along with their brother Lazarus, were three of Jesus' closest friends. When Lazarus became ill Mary and Martha called for Jesus to come and help, believing Jesus could heal their brother (John 11.1–44). It took Jesus a few days to arrive and when he did Lazarus was dead. Martha expressed her frustration to Jesus, "If you had been here he wouldn't have died!" If only Jesus had been there. . . but he wasn't.

The conversation between Jesus and Martha didn't end there. "Your brother will rise again," Jesus said. Martha knew that. She believed in life after death and definitely believed her brother would rise again some day, when all the dead would be raised. But frankly, at that moment, she wasn't feeling very comforted by the doctrine of the resurrection. "I know. I know he'll rise again," she says.

But wait! Jesus was talking about something completely different. He went on to explain. "Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." In her moment of greatest trial, when Martha couldn't find hope, couldn't find comfort in a religious concept, Jesus called her to put her hope in *him*. "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in *me* will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in *me* will never die." Then he asked her, "Martha, do you believe this?"

She knew at that moment everything was going to be all right because Jesus, her friend, had become her Lord and her Savior. She knew he was the only one who could give her life in the face of death. So Martha, this woman of faith, confessed her faith in Jesus. It is her confession that every one of us makes when we accept Christ as our Savior. "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Martha's story is important to me because it intersects with my story. I was twenty years old when my mother was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease and her health began deteriorating rapidly. I remember standing in my dorm room when I got the phone call to tell me about the most recent blood test. The test indicated my mom had ALS, a fatal illness often called Lou Gherig's disease. I remember my shock and horror as I thought about my life, my future. I was supposed to get married some day and my mom was supposed to be there. I was supposed to have kids and my mom was supposed to be their grandmother. Some day I wanted to grow up and have my mother as a friend, but all of a sudden my life looked so different, so sad, and I couldn't imagine surviving.

But God came to me in the words that Jesus spoke to Martha. *Amy, I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though she dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* I realized that I believed. I believed that even if death came into my life I would be able to live because of Jesus, and that my mom, even if she died, would live. My mom didn't die, and her story is an amazing story of healing both from a medical and a spiritual perspective. I'd love to tell you the whole story some day. If I can just take a moment, I want to say, on Mother's Day, how thankful I am for my mom. I'm thankful she's alive and I'm thankful she's in my life. She's my inspiration in so many ways, and her friendship blesses me every day.

The lesson I learned when she was so very sick, lives with me still. Martha's story is my story. And Martha's story is your story. We face death every day of our lives, but Jesus is the resurrection and the life. *Jesus is the resurrection and the life.*

So as we conclude our service today, a service in which we've marveled at the many ways God has worked in and through the women of old, as well as the women among us, let's join together in speaking Martha's great confession of Jesus, her Savior and Lord.

*Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Everyone who believes in Jesus will live even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in Jesus will never die.* And Jesus asks us, "Do you believe this?" If you do, please speak these words with me: *Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God. Amen.*

