



Sermon Outline

SEASON ONE - I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME

LUKE 8:1-3

(AND THOUGH IT IS NOT INCLUDED IN SOME OF THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS
OF MARK'S GOSPEL, SEE ALSO MARK 16:9 AS A CORROBORATING TEXT)

COME
And SEE

The
CHOSEN



I Have Called You by Name

This resource helps you tell the story of Mary Magdalene (see texts listed below). It includes a clip from Season One, Episode 1 to show to the congregation, a suggested script for setting the scene before you show the clip, and a short sermon outline with main teaching points and pastoral prompts.

Sermon Title: I Have Called You by Name

Text: Luke 8:1-3 (and though it is not included in some of the earliest manuscripts of Mark's gospel, see also Mark 16:9 as a corroborating text)

Dominant Thought: You are what He calls you.

[Download Episode Clip Here: Jesus Heals Mary Magdalene](#)

Setting the Scene (suggested script)

Though most everyone recognizes the name of one of Jesus's earliest followers—"Mary Magdalene"—there's very little we know about Mary, because there's very little given to us in the four accounts of Jesus's life. So what is given to us is precious—and one particular detail is *startling*. This, from the start of the eighth chapter of Luke's Gospel: "Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases, [including] Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out." *Seven demons*. Can you imagine how such pervasive darkness would have ravaged her body, her mind, her heart? From the very first episode of the first season, the creators of *The Chosen* paint a picture of what life might have been like for Mary. She never knows when she'll be laid low once more by spiritual attack. Her room is perpetually ransacked, and she's disheveled and dejected. People stare at her with disgust when she walks along the street—if they even look at her at all.

With disdain they don't even call her by her real name of Mary—which we'll come back to in a moment. The only peace Mary has is reluctantly poured for her at a local tavern. And another cup is poured for her in the scene we're about to watch together—but you'll see that she never gets to drink it...

***If you've never introduced your congregation to *The Chosen*, consider slightly tweaking the last line of the script above:** *The Chosen* is a television series that explores the life of Jesus through the eyes of those who follow him. In the very first episode of the first season, viewers are introduced to Mary Magdalene, and the creators behind *The Chosen* paint a picture of what life might have been like for her...

Sermon Outline

Introduction

*Show the clip from *The Chosen*, using the suggested script above to set the scene.

*This resource makes use of a thought from writer Frederick Buechner (pronounced 'beak-nur'). Here is the quote in its entirety, *though it is parceled out* in the sermon outline that follows:

"Buechner is my name. ... If somebody mispronounces it in some foolish way, I have the feeling that what's foolish is me. If somebody forgets it, I feel that it's I who am forgotten. There's something about it that embarrasses me in just the same way that there's something about me that embarrasses me. I can't imagine myself with any other name. ... If my name were different, I would be different. When I tell you my name, I have given you a hold over me that you didn't have before. If you call it out, I stop, look, and listen whether I want to or not."

*After showing the clip from *The Chosen*, you could transition to the sermon proper with this introductory word: "When reflecting on the power of names, Frederick Buechner writes, 'When I tell you my name, I have given you a hold over me that you didn't have before. If you call it out, I stop, look, and listen—whether I want to or not.' He's right, of course. People have such power over us simply in always having our names in their back pocket. Whenever someone yells your name from the end of a grocery store aisle or from across the lobby at a hotel, you can't help but spin around to see who's calling. And their power isn't limited to speech, is it? When they *write* your name in an email or a text string, you see it and they lay hold of you. Now, to be clear, names are necessary. We have to have ways to address one another, so that we can

be called to attention for purposes of communication. But what about the moments our name is spoken in a way that allows *too much* power over us? What about the moment our name is said in a tone that shames or silences us? Or what about the moments when we're given a new name? While nicknames are often harmless, they're also often *not*. Or worst of all, what about the moments when our name bleeds away altogether, and we're reduced to nothing more than a label or a category or a title?"

Sermon Body

I. You are called by many painful names in this world.

Main Teaching Point: When Mary was first taken hostage by evil, surely the way her name was said changed dramatically. Those closest to her probably spoke her name in a grieving whisper. Others might have said it with a wince, as if being stung. Still others would have spit it out, rather than speak it, and with such disgust that you would think "Mary" was a cussword, more than a name. And can you imagine what all of this would have done in Mary? How easy would it have been to think of herself as nothing more than a sad story, a searing sting, or a social eye sore worthy of scorn. That's what she was being called in *how* she was being called. In the context of that quote from Buechner, he also writes this: "If somebody mispronounces [my name] in some foolish way, I have the feeling that what's foolish *is me*." But let's go deeper into Mary's pain—the agony that's stirred by the new name that is given her. As mentioned before the clip was shown, the creators of *The Chosen* imagine a life in which Mary wasn't even called by her real name by those around her. With pity at best and a sneer at worst, they call her "Lilith." In fact, if you listened closely while the clip was played, the barkeep calls her by this second name—though to soften the blow a bit, he opts for "Lily". It's a powerful creative decision by *The Chosen's* writers, because if you rummage about in ancient Jewish literature, "Lilith" is the name assigned to the demonic children born to the mythical second wife of Adam. In wider Middle Eastern literature, "Lilith" is the name most often attached to female demons. Mary had been given a new name, and it was a devastating one. To call her "Lilith" was in essence to call her inhuman—as nothing more than a vessel for evil activity. And having been given this new name had to have been far more painful than what she'd experienced before—that is, the way in which her true name had been said. Because really, the assignment of this new name inched her closer to being robbed of a name altogether and reduced to nothing more than a handful of labels: *Troubled. Sick. Disturbed. Mad. Dangerous. Cursed. Evil.* Back to that Buechner quote—here's something else he writes when reflecting on names: "If somebody forgets [my name], I feel that it's *I* who am forgotten."

In the eyes of the people, the entirety of Mary's identity was being swallowed up by her condition, the state of her being—if hadn't been already. 'When I tell you my name, I have given you a hold over me that you didn't have before. If you call it out, I stop, look, and listen—whether I want to or not.' Indeed. We stop, look, and listen, and we are so often reformed—perhaps better put, *deformed*—into someone and something we're not meant to be.

Pastoral Prompt: What are you called, and how has it shaped you? Your circumstances are different from Mary's, but no chasm exists between her and you in at least one way: you, too, are called by many painful names in this world. Just as it surely did with her, it all starts with *how* your name is said—how it's mispronounced, so to speak. With a grieving whisper. With a wince. With disgust. By a father or mother. A brother or sister. Your own child. By a once-dear friend. By a boss or colleague. By an enemy. By *the* Enemy. And maybe someone in that list that's just been listed gave you a new name—a name that inched you closer to being robbed of a name altogether and reduced to nothing more than handful of labels: *Disappointment. Failure. Black Sheep. Cheater. Sinner.* They've forgotten your name, and with it, you. And it has reformed you—*deformed you*—into someone and something you're not meant to be.

II. You are not what others call you; you are what He calls you.

Main Teaching Point: The creators of *The Chosen* pack an awful lot into the scene that was shown. It opens with "Lilith" in a bar, wanting to drink to forget. But the hand of Jesus—a stranger to her at this time—is placed over her own as an effort to stop the cup from touching her lips. He insists this way forward in life is no way forward at all, but she can't accept it. Within moments "Lilith" rushes out and away from the bar, only to be stopped dead in her tracks by a voice—the voice of that stranger—that calls to her from behind her. "Mary!" he cries. He calls her by name. Jesus calls her by her true name. And can you imagine the pain that starts to fall away just in that one act of pushing past "Lilith" to call her "Mary"? Because to do so is to also push past all the labels—to push past "Troubled," "Sick," "Disturbed," "Mad," "Dangerous," "Cursed," "Evil". Jesus is telling her that he knows her name has been mispronounced for far too long. He is telling her even more so that her name has not been forgotten and neither has *she*. She is *not* what others call her. But then—*who is she*? Because even a return to "Mary" doesn't tell her just who it is that she is. And this leads to the most powerful part of the scene from *The Chosen*. Jesus doesn't stop at speaking Mary's true name; he also pulls truth from the Scriptures—from the first verse of Isaiah 43, to be precise. "Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'" Mary is not merely "Mary". She is Jacob. She is Israel. She is the people of God. She is a child of God—an identity that rests far beyond "Mary". In this moment she's given the only new name worth being given. And with that new name, labels, too—the only labels worth wearing: *Created. Formed. Unafraid. Redeemed. Called. His.* And when all of this is punctuated all the more by her healing—by the moment Jesus takes hold of her hijacked head and sends evil fleeing—Mary collapses into his arms, a believer. And what a long road to belief it's been for her. Something you would only know if you've watched *all* of the first episode from Season One of *The Chosen* is that the creators imagine those verses from Isaiah 43 as being passed along to Mary from her father when she was a little girl. Years before her encounter with Jesus outside of the bar, the truths of Scripture had been spoken to and over her. But finally—finally—she believes them to be true. About *her*.

Pastoral Prompt: It was said earlier that while your circumstances are different from Mary's, no chasm exists between her and you in at least one way: you, too, are called by many painful names in this world. But there's a *second* way in which no chasm exists between Mary and you: like Mary, you are not what others call you. You hold a name that is greater than any other name that's been given you, including the name that was assigned you at your birth. You are "son" or "daughter" of the Father. *This* is who you are. *But do you believe it?* To do so requires an aggressive "pushing past" of all other names and identities that have been given to you by others and perhaps even by you yourself. It requires a turning of your ear from the shouts that are all about you by those that are looking to reform—more aptly put, *deform*—you, while turning around to face the one who calls to you from behind you. You are "son" or "daughter" of the Father. *This* is who you are. But do you believe it? May this be a third way in which no chasm exists between you and Mary: *that you believe*. And once you do, the labels come, too—the only labels worth wearing: *Created. Formed. Unafraid. Redeemed. Called.*

Conclusion

*There are two possible ways to conclude the sermon that could be formative for the congregation: (1) You could circle back to how the creators of *The Chosen* imagine the verses from Isaiah 43 as having been passed along to Mary from her father when she was a little girl—how truths passed down in the Hebrew Scriptures had been spoken to and over her in the hopes that one day she would believe them as true. You could use this as an opportunity to spend time reading Scripture to and over the congregation—particularly passages from the Old and New Testaments alike that speak to who we are far beyond the names given us and the labels assigned to us. The litany of Scriptures could all lead to the reading of one final passage: Isaiah 43:1. (2) You can, of course, offer a conventional invitation for those who have not yet believed the truths that have been spoken to and over them and thus have not yet turned to Christ for a new name—for the label of "Redeemed". Depending on your faith tradition, you can offer an

invitation to baptism, using the next verses of Isaiah 43—verse 2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.” This verses appears to be in reference to the deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea (and later, the Jordan River), but both events are used as a way to speak to the deliverance that comes by and through the waters of baptism.

