

The Monks and The Magdalene

I am struck by the parallels between the monks' "Walk for Peace" and Jesus's ministry.

They both were living during a time of great unrest, a time when a dictatorial government threatened the lives and religious beliefs of people who did not 'look' like them. A time when there was no good news, and fear walked the streets.

Most of us had never heard of the Vietnamese monks, or of their leader Venerable Bhikkhu Paññākāra.

What did we know about Jesus's life before his ministry began? A bit of his beginning and childhood, but little else.

They started at the Hương Đạo Vipassana Bhavana Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

Fort Worth? That such an event came from Texas is almost as unlikely as Jesus coming from Nazareth. In [John 1:46](#), Nathanael asks the question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Walking as a spiritual discipline, a time to pray, reflect, and listen to God's voice.

The monks practiced Vipassana meditation throughout, intentionally walking 108 sacred days — a number representing spiritual completion and wholeness in Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain traditions. They delivered a message of peace. Three of the monks, including the leader, Bhikkhu Paññākāra, walked barefoot for part of the journey. They traveled an average of 20 miles a day in all kinds of weather. Onlookers report feeling deeply emotional upon seeing the monks in person; many were moved spiritually.

For the three years of his ministry, Jesus and his disciples, including Mary Magdalene, walked everywhere. Walking gave Him time to connect with God, with His disciples, and with people in need. Matthew 9 shows us Jesus's healing while **on the move**. His walking wasn't wasted; it created spaces for conversations, life changes, and deep relationships. He taught while walking, and he prayed while walking.

The Crowds surrounding them.

Thousands came out to witness the Walk for Peace. People lined the roads on both sides as the monks walked by in single file. The onlookers offered food, flowers, and tokens of love, sending well wishes. Many knelt, hoping for a touch from one of the monks. Some bowed low, hands together in prayer. Many moved to tears as the Monks passed, knowing that they had received an unexpected blessing.

The New Testament mentions the word crowd or crowds in relation to Jesus 143 times.*

Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples, and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. (Mark 3:10) Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. (Mark 3:20)

The messages that each delivered.

The monks spoke of peace, Jesus' spoke of love.

As I followed the monks, I was surprised to realize that I had found a sense of peace. I looked forward to reading about them, learning about their next reception, and hearing their speeches. The stories of their journey seem to overshadow the wretched daily news. I found comfort in their words, comfort in the way they interacted with the crowds, comfort in their incredible faith that held a purpose. Even their dog, Aloka, was comforting.

But it was the end of their journey that moved me the most.

As the leader, Venerable Bhikkhu Paññākāra, returned to the Fort Worth Center, his teacher was the first to meet him. Paññākāra dropped to his knees, bowing low, his head to the ground. Then he grabbed the ankles of his Teacher and wept, his whole body shaking with emotion. His Teacher touched his shoulder, gently urging Paññākāra to stand, but the Monk remained, his fingers surrounding the Teacher's ankles as tears of thankfulness continued.

Later, as he addressed the huge crowd who had come to welcome the monks home, again he was overwhelmed with emotions. Paññākāra spoke with reverence of his teacher, and once again, he dropped to the ground, bowing to his Teacher and cried.

That is when I was struck by the profound similarity to the story of Mary Magdalene.

How many tears did she shed during her time accompanying Jesus on his journey? How many tears as she watched him die? Where did she find the courage to follow the body to the tomb or return once the Sabbath was over to attend to the body?

In the Canonical Gospel of John, we read:

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to ^[a]Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, **Teacher**).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' "

In other words, he is saying to her: Do not cry, do not hold on to me, but stand and go tell the world that I am risen. I am alive. Love is alive and Goodness exists. You have a much bigger task ahead of you now, Mary, for you must go out into the world, gather the disciples and spread the Good News.

In the Gospel of Mary, we see the Magdalene assuming that leadership role.

Then Mary arose, embraced them all, and began to speak to her brothers: "Do not remain in sorrow and doubt, for His Grace will guide you and comfort you. Indeed, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us for this. He is calling upon us to become fully human (Anthropos)."

Then Mary turned their hearts to the Good and they began to discuss the meaning of the Teacher's words.

Mary stood. She comforted the disciples. She shared the Ascent of the Soul experience with them. She stood up to their rebuke, she wept. *Then she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Teacher had spoken with her.*

In the traditional Canonical Gospels, there is no other reference to Mary Magdalene once she has told the disciples that Jesus had risen. She disappears. Never to be mentioned again.

We have a glimpse of Mary's role and leadership position, the visions she had, the encounters with Jesus post-resurrection, as told in the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Pistis Sophia. But beyond that she again disappears. There is no more mention of her, except in the legends of her time in France.

Will the same happen with the monks? They have returned to their Center, to their life of quiet meditation and prayer. We may never hear of them again. But I will never forget them.

Their "Walk for Peace" was not for public acclaim. Instead, they walked to remind us of the peace that exists. We must go inside and nurture it, but it exists. They instructed us to claim each day as Today is my peaceful day.

Did Mary Magdalene leave us with the same? A story we will never forget? Hers were the only eyes to first witness the resurrection, her story was the basis of Christianity. Hers was the command from Jesus to go tell the disciples and therefore the world of the Good News.

And she did.

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*Source: <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Crowds-Around-Jesus>