

# "And Also Some Women" Episode #001: Mary Magdalene (Interview with Nikole Mitchell)

**Anne:** Can you briefly introduce yourself?

**Nikole:** I'm Nikole Mitchell, I am a pastor turned sex worker, and I'm here to talk about what a badass Mary Magdalene is.

**Anne:** What are your general thoughts on Mary Magdalene?

**Nikole:** I think she's widely misunderstood. You know, it's interesting now that I'm no longer part of the church and I've had some time and space away from the Bible and its characters, I now see more clearly how very indoctrinated I was on who these characters were. They were oftentimes very one-dimensional, and the longer I'm away, the more I'm like, wait a second - none of us are one dimensional. We're all multi-dimensional, multi-faceted people, and the same thing is true for Mary.

**Anne:** How did you see her when you were a pastor, when you were deep in that Evangelical tradition?

**Nikole:** What I'd been taught was that she was a prostitute turned saint, right? She had fixed her wayward ways and had come to Christ, and I had never really questioned that. It wasn't until I got into my adult work that I could see this incredibly strong narrative, especially in America, and particularly in Evangelical realms, of women being either/or. They're either sexual, and vilified because of it, or they're saints and they're pure. There's no spectrum, there's no nuance.

I look back at Mary and I think, wait a second they just pigeonholed her exactly where they wanted her to be, in this role that was convenient to their overall narrative. It's crazy how that narrative has not changed that much over the centuries.

**Anne:** How do you feel about the current work being done to debunk the narrative of Mary Magdalene being a sex worker?

**Nikole:** I think it's incredibly important. As someone who comes from that Evangelical background, I see how important this work is, because we need this infiltration of women's agency being taken back. We need them writing their own narrative, and being known in their fullness, instead of letting an outside source and outside power dictate and determine their story and their plotline.

So I think it's incredibly important, and as someone who is no longer part of the church, I'm so grateful there are people still connected to the church to debunk and transform that narrative,

because it is so important. And I, unfortunately, can't be that person, so I have so much respect for so many of the people who are willing to stay in the trenches and do it, because we need it.

**Anne:** As a sex worker yourself, do you think there is any value in this narrative of Mary Magdalene as a sex worker? Do you find it empowering at all?

**Nikole:** It's interesting when people ask about how people feel about her as a sex worker or a non-sex worker because people feel strongly about both. There's people in the sex work industry who are like, we want that. We want her to be known as that, because it puts us in the narrative. And then there are those who are like, but that's not actually who she was, it's being put on her. And I actually have a both and response. I think both are really important. I think. Having her as a sex worker can help put sex workers into the narrative. And it has to be something that's talked about. And we can't just be shoved under the rug, pushed in the back. And no one has to talk about us or know that we exist. And I also don't think it's OK to just put it on someone if that wasn't their story, and especially if it's to vilify them. Right?

It's one thing to be - to be a sex worker. It's one thing to say she's a sex worker who's repented from her ways when her way is pure and true and. That is her expression, so why does she have to repent from it? So I'm a fan of both. I think it highlights sex workers if that is going to be the narrative, but let's just make it more nuanced. But in the circles where it's not part of her narrative, and they're reclaiming her from that, then let's talk about why, and make sure we're not we're not comparing it to sex work as the bad thing and she's a good thing. I think there's too much binary and not enough grey and nuance in the conversation

**Anne:** What do you think it is that makes the sex worker narrative so persistent?

**Nikole:** I think what makes the sex worker narrative so prevalent in the text is, I think men have an obsession with keeping women in their place and they will do it one way or another. And I think there's an obsession with this narrative of the whore and if we can label a woman a whore, she is discarded, she is disposable, we can then throw her in at any point of our narrative to make it work for us.

Which is why it's so frustrating to men in power when a woman voluntarily, enthusiastically chooses sex work, because it contrasts this fallible very thin narrative of the whore who's forced in it, who's pathetic, who has no power, who's disposable. A woman who shows up in her power and says, "This is me, I chose this, I want this, I like this" - they don't know what to do with that, and I think that's actually a good thing.

Anne: You've written and spoken about sex work as sacred work for you. I would love if you could speak to that.

**Nikole:** I think sex work is so sacred. I really believe it is some of the the most sacred and holiest work I've ever done. Sex work, to me, is very embodied work. I have to be in my body, I

have to be very present, and I'm using my body, my presence, my energy to connect with someone else, whether it's virtually or it's in person.

I have found that in the three years I've been in my sex work there is a deep hunger in people for connection, and I think sex work is one of the most incredible ways to fulfill that connection, because you are paying someone for the professional service who is good at connecting and caring and fulfilling your fantasies or your desires. Someone who is good at being the soft space for you to land, who helps you express parts of you when you have nowhere else to express it. It means so much when people will come to me and pay for my time and my services. It means so much when people are being ethical about it, when there are all kinds of ways to be unethical about it.

And so the fact that there's a hunger for it, and there are people who are willing to pay for it and go about it ethically, shows how healthy it can be, how meaningful it can be, and how holy it can be. It is so clean, pure, and true, and it's not at all this like dark, gross, evil thing that I was taught it was

**Anne:** Does sex work give you a similar feeling to being a pastor, or at least what you thought being a pastor would feel like?

**Nikole:** Yes, the answer is yes. Yes, I actually have been surprised at how much my sex work and my pastoral work have in common. I did not see that coming, just because, again, sex work was so vilified and was such a sinful thing, and then when I got into it, I was like holy goodness, there is overlap here, right?

Like, in both the church flock and with my adult flock, there is still the same hunger. There's a hunger for being seen and known and loved and cared about. And in the church, we try to fulfill that need through community, through service, through songs and action and potlucks. And then in the adult work that's done through conversation, custom content, one on one calls, and a sense of community. My fans in my adult world are friends to each other, and they hear each other, and they connect with each other, and we have our own little flock in the adult world. And so I think there's actually a lot of commonality.

The reason I am more drawn to my adult work than pastoral work is that in my adult work we talk about spirituality *and* sexuality, we talk about fears *and* fetishes, we talk about our kids *and* our kinks. In the church, it was only one side. We can only talk about our spirituality, we can only talk about community, we can only talk about church, and we completely deny, bypass or suppress human sexuality, which is a core experience in our lives. But in my adult space, in my sex work, there's room for it all. I love it

**Anne:** Another thing I know you've spoken and written about is how, in the church you grew up in, women weren't allowed to be leaders, so even stepping into a pastoral role was a break with that tradition. So I'm curious about how you view Mary Magdalene in her role as the apostle to the apostles, as the first the witness to the resurrection and the person first spreading that

gospel.

**Nikole:** Mary Magdalene is such a badass, like, I just want the whole world to know her as a badass. This woman was an apostle to the apostles, as you said. She had freaking money, she was loaded, she was Jesus' sugar mama! I mean, if we want to talk about sugar mama, sugar daddy situations, Jesus was part of that.

I love a powerful woman, and especially in a time where that was so hard to become, and there are so many obstacles to overcome for her to be a woman in her own power, in her own standing, with her own wealth, supporting the ministry of Jesus. I'm like, all the disciples owe Mary everything, and yet they get all the credit. She's discarded as the whore, and this is why this work is so important because it's reclaiming her narrative as the badass that she is, as the sugar mama that she is, and the fact that Jesus' ministry and the Christian faith was only able to begin because of her bearing witness, and her staying by Jesus' side, and her being willing to be misunderstood for the sake of fulfilling her mission.

So yes, all hats off to Mary. I think we should all retake Sunday school to learn who she really is, and I think as a powerful business woman, I look up to her for that. Because growing up. women weren't allowed to be leaders in my church. My only examples were men, and you better believe no woman was highlighted as a hero, they were all the whores, they were all the sinners, and it was the men who were the saviours. They always highlighted the male disciples, when there are so many strong women in the text of scripture and we just either overlook them or we change the narrative. We need to stop doing that.

**Anne:** Do you think early church fathers were intimidated by Mary?

**Nikole:** I do believe men were intimidated by Mary, because we still have that today, right? We're in the twenty-first century and powerful women are still seen as not only mysterious and mischievous, but mistrusted, right? I recently moved into my new house, it's my biggest and nicest home yet. I'm a single mom of three, I make lots of money, and my income was constantly questioned and interrogated. They've seen my income, it's gone up dramatically every year for the past four years, and if that was a dude, they'd be like, "Bro, you're crushing it!" But since I'm a woman, they're like, that's suspicious, how are you making that much more money every year? That's not stable, even though it's going up every year, that's not stable, how can you afford this home as a single woman? Where is this money coming from?

I was constantly questioned, belittled, put down in the twenty-first century. So I can only imagine a woman back in that time, where she had this money and this influence, and Jesus chose her, Jesus wanted her, and she's traveling with him at that time - that wasn't really a thing. My theory is as long as Jesus was around, there was a little bit of a protection there, because he vouched for her. The moment Jesus was gone, it's like, how can we discard her? She's not necessary to this anymore - even though she was the one who birthed the beginning of this faith after Jesus was gone. So yeah, I do think she was misunderstood, and I think sometimes, because we still experience it today, some men were champing at the bit to finally write her out of the narrative

and no longer have to deal with her.

**Anne:** How do you now understand Christ's relationship with Mary Magdalen?

**Nikole:** So, I'm a very sexual person, I'm a pervert, so I always want to make things sexual. It's just really healing for me, especially because of my background and how sanitized and whitewashed scripture was and had become in my environment, that when I go back and look at it, I always try to read through very sexual lens, because it's funny and it's healing and maybe there's a hint of truth to it.

So, I obviously don't know the details of the relationship between Mary and Jesus, but I kind of like the idea that there is something sexual there, just because it messes with the narrative of Jesus being so pure and untouchable and so not human, right? He was so divine that he basically wasn't human. But I'm like - but he was human, so how can he not have human experiences? So I like to blur the lines, that's where my pervert mind goes.

Then there's also the scholar in me. I have my masters from seminary, and there's that side of me that doesn't want to put a narrative on Mary that is not true, because she's had that her whole life and for so long afterwards. I've experienced it where people put things on me and say, well, this is probably her truth, this is probably her story, and they don't know anything about me and I wish they wouldn't do that to me. So it's kind of, again, that both/and approach. I like to make it a little sexual, because I think it's fun, but at the end of the day I try to be respectful and I want to make sure I give her credit where credit is due and not put that on her.

**Anne:** Can you tell us a little bit about your background, and the religious tradition you grew up in, and what your relationship is to it now?

**Nikole:** I was evangelical, I grew up Independent Baptist, and in my denomination I saw no female leaders. It was all male leaders, and women were either in the kitchen or in the nursery, so very quickly I picked up on the messaging that I also belonged in the kitchen or nursery. But as I grew up, I realized that I was a leader, and I was a speaker, and I was good at it, but I had no evidence that I would be allowed to do those things, so I kept shoving it down. And so in my twenties - my late twenties, I believe - when I started studying to become a pastor, that was like the big first breach in my relationship with my family and with some friends, because women are not allowed to be leaders in this denomination. So when I became a pastor, it was a huge deal - so you can imagine how they responded to me becoming a sex worker. It did not go over well.

**Anne:** And so when you became a sex worker, did that blow your entire life apart in a good way or a bad way?

**Nikole:** I mean, it depends on who you talk to. For me, it blew things up in the best possible way, but it also blew things up in really hard ways. It's interesting.

I joke that I have become everything my family wished I would never be, and I feel for them,

because, you know, when you have children, you have certain hopes and aspirations for them, and being a sex worker was definitely not on their list. Never anywhere on that list. So I joke that first I came out as a pastor, and that caused a big rift, and then I came out as queer, and that also caused a big rift, and then I came out that I wanted to be rich, because I was tired of being broke, and then that caused a big rift because they thought I was selling my soul to the devil to get rich. And then I came out as a nude model, and then I started doing sex work, and then I got divorced, so all the cardinal sins that a person can do, Nikole has fulfilled.

And from the outside it can look like Nikole has been rebellious. I mean, I've heard this so many times - she's having a mid-life crisis, she's gone off the deep end, when really I was so restrained, and so repressed, that no one - including myself - ever knew who I was really meant to be. So when I finally stepped into who I was really meant to be, it looked like rebellion, when really it was a return home. And now I do this work full time, and I'm the happiest I've ever been, I'm the most at peace I've ever been, I'm the wealthiest I've ever been, and I believe that's because I'm finally living my truth.

**Anne:** How many years has it been since you've been living this new life? I know there isn't really a clear line of before and after.

**Nikole:** I started the path of deconstructing in 2017. I felt like Elsa being called into the unknown to let it all go. I felt like that song was channeling my inner thoughts - I had to follow the whisper. That was so terrifying, but I just could not live in the life I was living anymore. In 2019, I started my online adult work, so it's been three years that I've been doing the adult work full time and I love it.

**Anne:** What is your favorite biblical passage with Mary Magdalene?

**Nikole:** I love when Mary was the first one who saw Jesus after the resurrection, like I cannot get over that when all the male disciples ran, she stayed. She was the first to the tomb, she was the first to hope, the first to believe, the first to see, and then was the first to deliver this message, only to be made fun of. And man, I'm just, like - sucker punch all those dudes, Mary! Take over! You need to run this ship, forget them.

I have so much respect for her, and yet all the credit is given to the men when all the credit should go to her. And so even though she didn't actually get that in her lifetime, because of conversations like these, hopefully she feels a sense of justice in that we are holding that narrative and that truth and see her for who she really is in the life-changing impact that she had. And even though they tried to take that from her, we are giving it back, and we see her, and we think she is a freaking badass.