



SCRIPTURE + SHARED

Week 7 – John 19:31-20:23

Day 1 – John 19:31-37

³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

Understanding the Passage:

Crucifixion originated with the Persians about 400 years before Jesus’ time, but came into widespread use by the Romans during their rule. It was an unusually cruel method of capital punishment. In addition to its public nature, which was meant to humiliate the crucified and teach a lesson to potential criminals, crucifixion was horribly painful. It was a slow process, sometimes taking as long as several days for someone to die. Death was caused by a combination of asphyxiation and loss of body fluids which led to multiple organ failure. The person’s arm and leg strength, which is what they would use to hold themselves up enough to breathe would eventually give out and they would be unable to take deep breaths. If death was taking too long, the executioners would sometimes break the legs of the person hanging so that they would not be able to support themselves to take any more breaths.

As we read in today’s passage, the executioners broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus, but they stabbed him with a spear instead. In the Hebrew Bible, instructions are given to the Israelites for the first Passover lamb – Exodus 12:46 says, “It must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones.” Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation (preceding Passover), which was the day that the lambs for the Passover meal were slain. Since Jesus is the Paschal lamb and is the sacrifice through which the world is healed, it is a fulfillment of scripture that his bones were not broken.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When you read about the cruelty of crucifixion, how does it make you feel? Does it change the way you feel about what Jesus did for you?
2. Why is it significant that Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation?
3. What flows from Jesus’ side after he is pierced? Why is this significant?

Day 2 – John 19:38-42

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Understanding the Passage:

The Gospel of John uses light and darkness as foils in order to make a point. As it is mentioned in this passage, the first time that Nicodemus approaches Jesus, it is night. He is able to come to Jesus in the cover of darkness (John 3:1-2). He was a leader of the Jews, which made his statement to Jesus in that initial meeting very peculiar:

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

While he was alive, Nicodemus only felt comfortable approaching Jesus in the dark even though he truly knew who Jesus was. However, now that Jesus is dead, Nicodemus is willing to risk association with him by claiming his body. It is a generous and thoughtful act, but it would have been more meaningful during Jesus' life. This should serve for us as a reminder not to pass by opportunities to claim Jesus and share what we know about Jesus with others rather than just keeping that information to ourselves in order to “save” our reputation.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Read Matthew 27:57 and Luke 23:50. What do you learn about Joseph of Arimathea from that passage?
2. The amount of spice that was brought in order to prepare Jesus' body for burial is larger than what would normally be used. What does the amount tell you about the economic class of Nicodemus? What does it mean to you that Jesus' followers ranged from completely impoverished to very wealthy?
3. What details about the tomb are given in this passage? What makes the tomb significant?

Day 3 – John 20:1-10

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Understanding the Passage:

When they are having supper on the night that Jesus is betrayed by Judas, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be going away and they do not understand. They question Jesus in order to gain clarity about what he means. As the readers, we assume that they aren't able to make sense of what Jesus is telling them. However, we see in this passage that when Simon Peter and the unnamed beloved disciple arrive at the tomb and see the linen wrappings still laying there without a body, they believed that he rose from the dead. The passage says that though they still did not *understand* the scripture, they believed it.

Our faith journeys are similar. As we trust in Jesus and believe the gospel, we begin to understand more and more about who Jesus is. In his classic work on grief, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, Rev. John Claypool writes:

“The Bible arranges life and thought in just that sequence. First, we are called on to live passionately and openly and then to use our minds to try to understand and interpret what we have experienced. In this way life moves on and whatever insight is possible is born. If we turn the whole process around and try to put understanding before the living of life, however, everything freezes and we become immobilized.”

Similarly, Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote that people “can put off making up their minds, but they cannot put off making up their lives.” Our understanding of God comes through our experience of God. That is why John Wesley made **reason** and **experience** two of the cornerstones of his method of theological reflection.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is significant about Mary Magdalene being the first one to arrive at the empty tomb?
2. What would you have thought if you arrived at the tomb and only saw the linen wrappings?
3. How has your faith changed or grown through experience? What are some specific instances you can point to in which you grew to understand God more after an experience?

Day 4 – John 20:11-18

¹¹But Mary 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 around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” 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.

Understanding the Passage:

Though we read the Bible with an understanding that God raises up the least and gives power to those usually thought to have none, this is not the norm for the culture of Jesus' day. It would have made more sense in that culture for Peter or John or one of the other disciples to be the first witness to the resurrection. Women couldn't even give testimony in court at the time because they were not seen as reliable witnesses, so having a woman be the first person to share the gospel was a counter-cultural move. And for it to be Mary Magdalene at that – a woman who had seven demons cast out of her (Luke 8:2). She would have probably been regarded with some reservation or distrust. And yet, God chooses her to deliver the message and by doing so God reminds us that we don't have to be in worldly positions of power for God to use each of us in really important and life-changing ways.

A note on the title that Mary calls Jesus when she recognizes him: there were three levels of rabbis in Jesus' time, each with a different title that corresponded to their level of authority and each commanding a different amount of respect. The lowest level was that of the Rab, which means "master/teacher" and was given to certain learned men who had laying-on of hands in rabbinic schools. Rabbi, which means "my master/teacher," is a higher designation than Rab and was a person that had disciples. The highest level of teacher was a Rabboni, which means "great master/teacher." Jesus was referred to as both a Rabbi and Rabboni throughout his ministry.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Mary uses the term "Lord" to describe Jesus when she is talking to the angels. What is the significance of it? How would you describe Jesus as your Lord?
2. Jesus tells Mary not to hold on to him, but rather to deliver the message of his resurrection. Have you ever had a time in which you were trying to hold on to the comfort of Jesus rather than doing something brave on his behalf?
3. Who are the rabbis (teachers) in your life? What are you learning from those people in this season?

Day 5 – John 20:19-23

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Understanding the Passage:

In the Jewish tradition, sabbath was observed on the seventh day in remembrance of God resting on the seventh day of creation. The last day of the week was Saturday, so Jewish people observe sabbath from sundown on Friday night through sundown on Saturday night. But the Christian church observes sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week. Two very important things happened on the Sunday after Jesus was crucified that elevated it to a holy day in the lives of Christ-followers. Of course, the resurrection is one of them!! But the other is that the church is imbued with the Holy Spirit, bringing it to life and empowering all of Jesus' followers the ability to continue his work.

We don't know much about what our bodies will look like or be capable of after we are resurrected. But we can assume, based on the fact that Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus and that Jesus had to show the disciples his wounds, that he didn't look the same as he did before. Additionally, the doors were locked in the room where the disciples were meeting but Jesus was still able to get in.

Why were the doors locked? The disciples were probably fearful of the Romans. They were already being persecuted while Jesus was alive, and once he was gone, they may have been even more fearful of persecution and potential arrest. Yet they had been told over and over by Jesus that they were to continue his work. They probably knew that they shouldn't be behind locked doors and yet they let their fear drive their actions.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have there been times when your fear, rather than your faith, was the main factor in your decision making?
2. What message does Jesus give to the disciples to share with the world after breathing the Holy Spirit on them?
3. How has the Holy Spirit been present in your life?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. What are some possible reasons that Mary did not recognize Jesus? Would she have been expecting to see him alive? What did Jesus say that prompted Mary to recognize him?
2. Have you ever felt God call you by name before? What does it mean to you that you are individually recognized and loved by God?
3. How does it reinforce the notion of an upside-down kingdom that the first person to preach the gospel of resurrection was a woman?
4. Simon Peter and the unnamed beloved disciple see the empty tomb and believe that Jesus has risen (John 20:8-9), but Mary is distraught and believes that Jesus' body has been stolen. Have there been times in your faith journey that you have "given up" and realized later that God was there all along?
5. Mary is comfortable weeping to the angel and doesn't try to hide her grief. Are you comfortable sharing your deep grief or do you try to cover it up or bury it? What do you think God wants you to do when you are grieved?