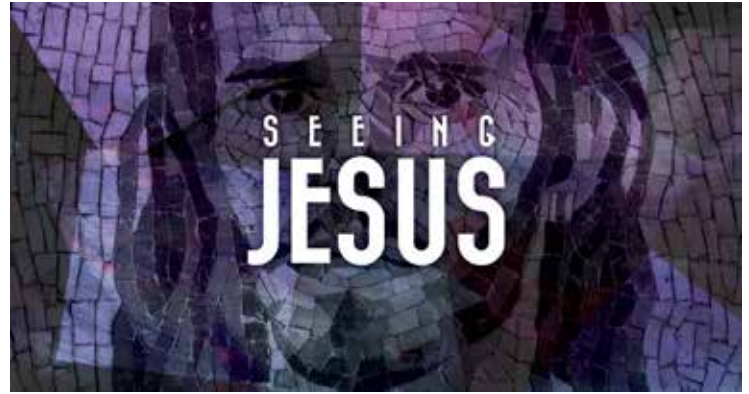


WEEK OF APRIL 9



DAY
1

The Burial and the Tomb of Jesus

Matthew 27:57-66

This week of devotional reflection will center around the resurrection stories in the gospels.

These descriptions obviously focus on Jesus, but they also focus on the followers of Jesus and what they saw. Our series "Seeing Jesus" is based on the request from Greeks who were visiting Jerusalem during the Passover: "We would like to see Jesus" (John 12:21).

That is what we want you to experience during this series, and above all, concerning the resurrection of Jesus. For as the Apostle Paul says, if Jesus is not raised, then our faith is in vain, we are without hope, and we are to be pitied for our foolishness (see 1 Corinthians 15:12-19). But if Jesus is raised, then EVERYTHING changes (1 Corinthians 15:20-58).

One powerful way to try to see Jesus is through the eyes of those who were there. See what they saw. As you see what they saw, seek to experience what they experienced.

Prior to the resurrection passages, today is about the burial of Jesus and the guard placed at the tomb. The people involved are Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, some chief priests, and soldiers.

Think about the story from where they each stand. What do they see? What are they thinking? Also ask this: Who is this Jesus and why does he matter so much to each person?

**It is the resurrection that
makes Good Friday good.
Without resurrection it
would be Horrible Friday.
Without resurrection it
would be Terrible Life.**

DAY
2

Jesus is Risen

Matthew 28:1-15; Luke 24:1-12

Today you will read about the resurrection in the gospels of Matthew and of Luke. They have some overlap, but they also tell different parts of the story the other leaves out. As you did yesterday (and certainly even more important), enter the story. Stand in the scene that unfolds. Be one of the participants. Hear, see, feel, experience, and respond as they do.

Look for the strong emotions. Remember, we stand 2,000 years AFTER the resurrection. This was brand new and radically unexpected. Along with the creation of the universe and the incarnation of God with us in Jesus, it is the GREATEST miracle of history.

Jesus is alive! Right? Isn't he? Is it possible? Is it true?

Pay attention to the strategic importance of the women disciples. They have the critical role of being the first witnesses and the first to preach the good news of the risen Jesus Christ. Can you imagine what they were feeling?

Be sure to look at what the enemies of Jesus were experiencing. In Matthew 28:11-15 a conspiracy develops to present an alternative story. The resurrection didn't happen. The disciples came, and in spite of the guards, rolled away a very heavy and sealed stone and stole the body.

To learn more about this and other attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus, visit the following website or do a Google search:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/answering-alternatives-to-the-resurrection/>

Every alternative answer utterly fails to explain the FACT that the body of Jesus is no longer in the tomb. The good news is simply that Christ the Lord is risen. Alleluia!

DAY
3

Hope Lost and Found

Luke 24:13-35

This is the primary passage used for Pastor Brian Rice's Easter message. It is the story of the two disciples who left Jerusalem and headed to a village called Emmaus. Jesus appears, but "they are kept from recognizing him" (v. 16).

They were discussing all that happened, and when Jesus joins them they tell him everything, including the hope they had for Jesus to redeem Israel. "We had hoped..." (v. 21). And now they don't know what to think and feel. Is Jesus actually risen? We don't know for sure. Now Jesus launches into a time of explaining the entire Bible that speaks about himself. They still don't know it is Jesus.

And then their eyes are opened. They recognize Jesus. And he disappears (vv. 30-31). They exclaim, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened up the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32).

These two followers had doubt and some curiosity. They had hoped. They lost hope until they met Jesus and experienced his presence with them.

We all live with some doubt, some faith, some trust, and some hope. We all live with problems, disappointments, challenges, and life not working out the way we hoped it would. We are discouraged, anxious, and at times, angry. We need hope. That means we need to see Jesus. We need to see Jesus with us. He may be hidden. We may not recognize him. But he is with us—speaking, leading, loving, teaching, and then revealing himself.

That is your hope. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is with you. That is our only hope. All other hopes will fall short and let you down. Jesus alone is the strong and certain hope.

You can read more about other disciples finding hope in Luke 24:36-53.

DAY
4

The Empty Tomb in John

John 20:1-31

This is the story of Mary Magdalene and her encounter with Jesus. Peter and John have roles as well. Carefully read the story and see the emotional roller coaster ride she was on. As you read this story, put yourself in Mary's place. What is she feeling at the different parts of the story?

Also sense the energy and urgency of Peter and John. They are running to the tomb to verify Mary's story. See what they each do. Can you imagine what each was experiencing? They are living with defeat and despair, and suddenly there is possibility. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is not dead.

The story shifts back to Mary encountering the risen Jesus. It is a precious story of tenderness, love, and then amazement.

Notice verse 17: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." This is amazing language. Jesus tells Mary her real hope. God is not only God and Father for Jesus, God is God and Father for Mary. That is what resurrection means. It means the closest, most intimate relationship with God the Father is now possible.

There are more stories. Jesus visits all the disciples. Be sure to read verses 21-23. Here are more results of resurrection—peace, the Holy Spirit, a new mission, the ministry of forgiveness.

And then there is the story of doubting Thomas who has to see before he will believe. It is better to believe without seeing, but Jesus accepts his need to see to believe. Doubting Thomas becomes HOPING Thomas.

The final words of this chapter reveal the purpose for the entire Gospel of John, and certainly for the focus on the cross and the empty tomb. It is for you to know and believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by your belief, you will have eternal life in his name (v. 31).

Jesus wants you to have his resurrection life. He is risen so you too will be free from sin, evil, and death.

Personal Reflection & LifeGroup Conversation

ONE: The most important reflection is at the end of Day 4. Do you personally believe that Jesus is the crucified Savior and the resurrected Lord of Life? Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God and God himself? Do you have a real relationship with God the Father?

Jesus died and rose again for you to have that relationship. If you don't, you can pray right now and ask Jesus to forgive you for all the wrong you have done. Ask Jesus for healing in all the places of your life that are hurting and broken. Ask Jesus to be your Savior and Lord. Tell Jesus you want to follow him and learn from him.

If you do this, please let us know. Tell someone. We have much more for you that can help you grow in your NEW life with Jesus.

TWO: Hope is one of the most powerful realities of life. We all need hope. We are all looking for someone or something in which to hope (and trust). What are some of the more common people, places, and things we look to for our hope? Which of those things do you look to for hope?

THREE: Can you remember a time when you felt very hopeless? What was going on in your life at that time? It was certainly something difficult, and apparently, Jesus was not coming through for you. What do people feel and experience when they are WITHOUT hope?

FOUR: Is there anything going on in your life right now that is difficult and about which you could use some more hope? How will you get/find more hope? How do Christians grow in our hope?

FIVE: Here is a spiritual practice. Pray daily for Jesus to open your eyes that you might see him with you, see him at work, see his love, and see where he is taking you.