

fig. 2



fig.1



THE STORY OF

awakening



fig. 3

Awakening This is the action of becoming conscious. We move from sleep to wake, from unfocused to focused. This series, our study focuses on many of the words that were said from the Cross of Christ that have evoked an awakening in people to the love, grace, compassion, and hope of Jesus. For two millennia these words have shocked humanity, divided them, and saved them. What we see of these final hours in the life of Jesus, by transcending the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John, is a Savior that is worth knowing, worth loving, and worth following.

We hope you use this guide to study with someone who might not know Christ, or has a curiosity about him. As well, if you are using this guide for yourself, then may you find the grace of Christ within these words.

Thank you for your continued commitment to studying the word of God and to agreeing to manifest him in your life. You are grace because of it.

Lovewell,

Pastor Tim

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Tim', written in a cursive style.



Awakening

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WEEK 01

Day 1-7

Daughters of Jerusalem. | Luke 23:26-31

Grace, Salvation

On the cross, Jesus promised complete grace when he said to the criminal, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Application Point: We can't do anything to gain or to lose our salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith.

WEEK 02

Day 8-14

Forgive Them... | Luke 23:26-31

Forgiveness, Mercy

On the cross, Jesus extended mercy when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Application Point: We can receive God's forgiveness for our sins and forgive others for theirs.

WEEK 03

Day 15-21

Woman... | John 19:23-27

Selflessness, Service

On the cross, Jesus took care of his family's needs when he said, "Woman, here is your son," and "Here is your mother." Application Point: The authenticity of our faith is exhibited by our serving others.

WEEK 04

Day 22-28

I am... | John 19:28; Matthew 27:45-53

Humanity of Jesus, God's Word, Prophecy

On the cross, Jesus showed his humanity and vulnerability when he cried out, "I am thirsty," and "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Application Point: Like Jesus did, we can draw near to God when he feels far away by connecting to him through his Word.

WEEK 05

Day 29-35

Father... | Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-30

Obedience, Finished work, Redemption, Completion

On the cross, Jesus completed his mission to redeem humankind when he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," and "It is finished." Application Point: We can rest in the finished work of Jesus for ourselves by believing in what he did for us.

WEEK 06

Day 36-42

Father... | Luke 23:50-56

Obedience, Finished work, Redemption, Completion

On the cross, Jesus completed his mission to redeem humankind when he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," and "It is finished." Application Point: We can rest in the finished work of Jesus for ourselves by believing in what he did for us.

WEEK 07

Day 43-49

Resurrection/Resuscitation | John 20

Resurrection, Salvation, New Life

Just as Lazarus was raised from the dead, so we, too, can move from death to life when we place our hope in Jesus's resurrection. Application Point: We must remove our old grave clothes, our old patterns of sin, and be transformed by the new, eternal life Jesus gives us.

WEEK 1

LUKE 23:26-31 (NLT)

26 As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. **27** A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. **28** But Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. **29** For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed!' **30** People will beg the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and plead with the hills, 'Bury us!' **31** For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

We begin with a well-known story of Simon of Cyrene. Perhaps we should get the particulars out of the way first. Where was Cyrene? It seems that it was in Northern Africa, what we would now call Eastern Libya. Herodotus tells us that it was established by Greek settlers in about 630 BC, but by the first century, there were about 100,000 Jews settled there.

We don't know why Simon was chosen and why Jesus was not made to carry his own cross. "Every Criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross on his back." Perhaps Jesus was so weakened at this point that he could no longer carry his cross with enough efficiency for the Romans. To say that Simon was coming in from the country was not too much of a stretch because it was Passover, and much too early in the day for Simon to have been coming back from work. He had probably spent the night on the Mount of Olives, like many who were visiting the city for the Passover festivities.

"Putting" the cross on him (Simon) means that we have to understand the right of the Roman army to conscript someone into service, even if for just a little bit of time. (Matthew 5:41: "And if anyone forces you to go one mile"...)

It was common for a Roman soldier to ask the populace to help them in a certain task, to carry their pack, to get them water, and it was best if you did what they asked. Occupying armies often made use of the populace to do work they would rather not do. They gave Simon the obligation to carry the cross (probably the cross-beam or patibulum). This would not have been a small feat, in that it would have been a piece of wood of some significant size.

Many of the traditional renderings of Simon show a man of some size and musculature. The truth is that we have no idea if he was someone who was built like a CrossFit fanatic or a guy with a Dad-bod. It really doesn't matter. What matters is that he was asked and he answered. Whether he was conscripted or was willing to help out Jesus because of his belief, Luke doesn't answer that question for us of whether or not Simon is a believer in Jesus or not.

What we see is someone who is available to what was needed at the time. In our walk with Jesus, we begin to hear the leading of the Holy Spirit. Call it intuition or call it divine leading, we begin to be ready to do what God would have us do at any given moment. That is the call for today: Be available for what is needed of you!

**1 – Have you ever been called upon to help someone out at the last minute?
Did you answer the call?**

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**2 – How do you think you would feel about being conscripted into service by
an invading force? Would that make you want to help or to be hesitant?**

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**3 – If you are studying this story for the first time, what questions do you have
that the person you are studying with can answer? We suggest that you
read the story that led us to this moment, starting from the beginning of
Luke, Chapter 23.**

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27 A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women.

Luke, the author of this book, seems to indicate that many of the people that were following Jesus at this point were there due to sympathy, rather than simple curiosity. He uses the term “followed,” while the NLT that we use contains the words “trailed behind,” meaning physically behind, not spiritually following. (This is why the NLT uses descriptive terms).

However, the second part of this text mentions some “grief-stricken” women. When we compare this to Matthew 11:17 and John 16:20, we see that there existed a group of women who wanted to give condemned victims a drugged drink (wine and frankincense) as an act of mercy and compassion. It is possible that these women belonged to that particular group. However, the language is inconcise, so we cannot be sure. It is also possible that these women believed and loved Jesus and followed him because they were grief-stricken by what was happening to their Savior.

When was the last time you felt as if you were stricken by grief? Grief is a difficult emotion because there is very little that we can do to stop it. It is usually the result of a loss or of a situation that is beyond our control. Once grief has taken hold, it is very difficult for us to do much about it. In Matthew 5, in

the famous “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus says “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4) He says this because he understood that mourning and grief are temporary for those who believe in Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection. Our temporary grief is nothing compared to the great reward of eternal life given to us in Jesus.

Many people feel like they are drowning in their grief. And grief can come in waves and in torrents. But the good news is simply this: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” (Revelation 21:4) This is the promise that has been given to us by Jesus, through John the Revelator. The question becomes, do we live as if it is true, or do we deny the promises God has given us?

A second question is appropriate for this text: Why do you follow Jesus? Is it out of curiosity, or is it out of a genuine faith in Him as Savior of your life, of your family, of your situation? Paul, the apostle, often considered himself the “first follower” of Jesus, and in that way, he understood that everything he said was to lead to a greater understanding of Jesus.

1 – Why is it important to try and “follow behind Jesus?”

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2 – Have you ever wanted to be a “first follower?”

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3 – What does it mean, in very practical terms, to be a follower of Jesus and follow him to the cross? Make it applicable. (This helps in a personal Bible study with a new or curious person. Often, they will not know what “following Jesus” entails. Make sure you don’t default to just talking about behavior, but speak of the outlook, of hope and dreams, and of the reality of your walk with Jesus.)

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28 But Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

We have reached an interesting part of the text. When Jesus recognizes the “daughters of Jerusalem, (Is. 37:22; Micah 1:8; Zech 9:9—All of these references are from the books of the prophets), it is given as a warning to the Nation of Israel. In essence, Jesus is saying: “You are crying for the wrong thing..” He doesn’t want them to cry for him, but he understands that the mistake that Israel was making would bring about their own destruction, while his death would only forward his work on earth in overcoming evil and sin.

His wisdom to them came from his understanding that by rejecting him, they were sealing the fate of their families and their nation. A few decades later, Jerusalem would be overtaken and the temple would be destroyed (70 AD) by the Romans. This would lead to what is called the “Diaspora,” or the dispersion of Jews beyond Israel. It was not until the 1940s that the Jewish nation would be restored, this happening after WWII.

While these women could not have understood all of the implications that Jesus was making at this point, we should be aware of the consequences of ignoring who Jesus is and what is really at stake when we decide to deny his grace and compassion toward us. It is not simply the destruction of a place, like the temple in Jerusalem, but it is a destruction of the possibility of an abundant life that is given to us through Jesus Christ.

You see, the invitation to follow Jesus is something that is always there for us, and was always there for them in the first century as well. While some saw this circus of a crucifixion as an end of an era, the time of Jesus on this earth, what it really began was an explosion of the kingdom of God into the world in a way that hadn’t happened since the fall of man as recorded in Genesis 3. With Jesus, there is a new opportunity to live, a new opportunity to grow, and a new opportunity to see the world and others through his eyes. These women couldn’t see beyond what was happening that day. To follow Jesus, you have to be willing to look into eternity.

This is hard, and most people in the time of Jesus couldn’t do it. But we are given that opportunity every day we follow Jesus. We are given the opportunity to lean into a different way of living, a different way of learning, and a different kind of life. It is a life filled with an abundance of love, worship, grace and compassion for others. It is not always the easiest way, but it is his way. Too often, we can only see what is happening around us, and the “tyranny of the urgent” forcing us into making decisions that deny who Jesus really is. If we can take a moment today and really listen, we can hear the underlying message that Jesus is giving to these women. He makes it more plain in the next verse we will study tomorrow.

1 – Do you think you have ever been like one of those grieving women, missing what is really happening when it comes to Jesus in your life?

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2 – How can you take a moment today and listen for the real meaning behind the words of Jesus in this text?

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3 – If you are new to following Jesus, or curious, does this sound like a threat coming from Jesus? How does that make you feel?

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29 For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed!'

This is the reason for the lament to the Daughters of Israel that was given in the previous verse. The truth is, this is a call to judgement, it is not really a call to repentance. However, throughout these pronouncements, Luke makes sure the reader understands that Jesus is fully in control. It is a dire warning, and a deeply sad state of affairs that Jesus is alluding to here.

To say that a barren woman, a woman who was not able to have children was fortunate, shows you how serious Jesus was about this warning. What He says here goes against every bit of conventional wisdom of the era. Barrenness is a big issue in scripture. From the Old Testament (Sarah, Abraham's wife) to the New Testament (Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist) we see a woman who was unable to have a child would have seen herself under the curse of God, and in no way fortunate. Childlessness was considered a shame and a disgrace in Israel (Isaiah 4:1; Luke 1:25; Genesis 30:23), and not something to be sought after.

Jesus is making such a strong statement here about the state of things once the opportunity to follow Him has passed. He has toiled, preached, struggled, and pleaded with them to understand who He is, how He shows us who the Father is, and how we can follow

him, but to no avail in many cases. This statement is not only difficult; it would be seen as horrible to the contemporary audience. We would have a hard time coming up with words that parallel the meaning and emphasis of this phrase.

But the point should be well taken: There is nothing in life that is more important than discovering and agreeing to follow Jesus in all things. This can be difficult to understand, but it is also the emphasis that should drive every Christian to share the good news of the gospel with everyone they can, whenever they can. We want people to be blessed and to live under that blessing, that abundance, and that deep and never-ending love that comes from Jesus. Every Christian should want every person they know to live with that kind of love in their lives.

Hopefully, the church shows this kind of grace, belonging, and love. Of course, we are humans, and as such, make many mistakes; but our first impulse, the desire of our hearts, should be towards expressing this kind of love to everyone who will listen. In this warning, we also understand there is hope, because as long as we are alive, there are more opportunities to discover the love of Jesus.

1 – Do these words sound harsh to you? What state of mind do you think Jesus was in when he uttered these words?

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2 – It was mentioned that these were not really words of repentance, but why do you think Jesus didn't give that opportunity? Was there enough time? Did he know their hearts? Muse on this a bit.

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3 – If you are new to following Jesus, you are beginning to see how human he really was. Remember, Jesus was fully human, but also fully divine. How do you think those things work together in one person?

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30 People will beg the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and plead with the hills, 'Bury us.'

Jesus is continuing his lament for the "daughters of Israel," which really means for the nation of Israel. He has spoken of how the barren women will be fortunate not to have had children, and now he broadens the spectrum of those in duress by saying that they will, essentially, wish the earth will kill them. This comes from Hosea 10:8 which says: "And the pagan shrines of Aven, the place of Israel's sin, will crumble. Thorns and thistles will grow up around their altars.

They will beg the mountains, 'Bury us!' and plead with the hills, 'Fall on us!'

These are simply statements of desperation, but ones that Israel would have known well. You can also look at Revelation 6:16, which has a similar sentiment. The point of all this being that things are going to get so bad that Israel will want it all to end, to end abruptly, even if that end is a violent shaking of the earth and its consuming them.

Pretty bleak, to be sure. Sometimes we might feel like we are in the same sort of bleak situation. I am not talking about behavioral health issues—because if that is something you struggle with, please, seek professional and community help—but sometimes we feel as if things would be better if we weren't around. At times,

the struggles we are going through bring us to the brink of breaking, to where we think things might be better if the world just swallowed us up. I don't believe this is where Jesus wants us to be in our outlook on life.

He is saying this to remind Israel they are making a grave error, one from which the consequences are substantial. They are eternal, and they mark a completely different trajectory for those who are rejecting Him.

But to us, this is not the message. To us, it is a message of hope, encouragement, and belonging. It is a message of grace and compassion toward us and toward those around us. Israel was on the precipice of disaster, and Jesus knew they would not step back, so a warning is given, a warning of impending judgment. For us, for you and me, those choices are not complete, they are not finished. The word that comes to us from Jesus is "follow me!" There is a constant call on our hearts, put there by the Holy Spirit, that we can come and find rest in Him. Our is not the hopeless call coming to us by one condemned to the cross; rather, it is the call of a savior who has bested the cross, conquered death, and now seeks to call us home! Incredible!

1 – When have you had a prayer answered and it became more than you bargained for?

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2 – Have you ever heard the voice of God asking you for something? Did you accept it, or were you incredulous like Zechariah?

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3 – How can you become more in tune with the voice of God in your life? Does worship help prepare you to hear His word?

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4 – Has there been a time when you denied hearing the voice, although you knew you were hearing it?

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31 For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

Okay, today is tough to understand. This is called an a fortiori argument. In other words, it is making a point by making an even stronger argument. This may take a little to unpack, so bear with me.

The argument goes like this: "When things are good (green), people can be so blind. What will happen when things are bad (dry)?" Hopefully that makes sense. But to say it another way: "If God has not spared his innocent Son from such tribulation [by permitting his crucifixion], how much worse will it be for a sinful nation when God unleashes his righteous wrath upon it [by permitting the Romans to destroy Jerusalem]?"

Essentially, if this is something that God is willing to have happen to His son, how do you (Israel) think you might fare any better when it was you who are actually guilty of sin? These are pretty strong words, and by using the metaphor and this a fortiori argument, we get to the heart of the matter. Jesus is making sure they understand what they are doing, and why their tears for him are much less than the tears they will cry for their own misfortunes in the future.

To be clear, in no way is Jesus cursing them. This is simply a precursor to the natural outcome of their actions. Jesus doesn't curse people, so please never think that. Because Jesus loves us so much, he is willing to allow us to

make free decisions on whether to follow him or not. There are, however, natural outcomes for not following Jesus, and his willingness to allow our actions to be our own, even if the outcome is wretched for us, shows us of his great desire to have us love him of our own accord.

Have you ever had to let something go? It can be one of the most difficult things. But when we try to compel someone to love us, there are really no good outcomes. If someone doesn't love you, and doesn't want to stay with you, to force them to not only hurts their freedom to love, but creates something in them that can be seen as resentment, and that rarely leads to more love and compassion toward you. Love has to be free.

I'll say that again: Love has to be free.

Without that freedom of choice, the freedom to love, what we are given or what we are giving is less than real, less than true and less than authentic. God wants us to love him out of our own volition, our own free will, or he understands it is something less than love. In fact, the Accuser has made the accusation that people only love God because he compels them to love him. Nothing could be further from the truth. And in this text, Jesus is giving them a warning about the choices they are making. While it sounds harsh, it is a warning that we should all heed.

1 – Have you ever tried to compel someone to love you? How did that work out?

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2 – Why do you think God does not force us to love Him?

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3 – If you are new to faith, have you ever thought that God is waiting to punish you? No way! The truth is that God is waiting to welcome you. But he will always allow you to make the choice to love!

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This week, we have spent time with the journey that Jesus embarked on from his sentencing to the cross. We see the soldier's interaction with Simon the Cyrene, we see the women who were grieving, and we see the words that Jesus had for the daughters of Jerusalem. Luke gives us the idea that the people who were there were not only curious, but also compassionate toward Jesus, which very well could have been true.

Also, there is a strong emphasis on the judgment that is coming to Israel, and Jesus uses prophetic terms, even Old Testament phrases in order to get his point across to those in Israel that were about to have judgment on them. While the destruction of Jerusalem would not happen for another 40 or so years, we see that there is a clear illusion to things getting worse, to judgment being expressed, and so much so that a woman would rather bear the shame of being childless than to experience what is going to happen.

These strong words can be seen as negative, and of course they are. However, they are not originating in Jesus, but rather, Jesus is "calling it like he sees it" in this instance. In addition, we should probably recognize the extreme stress Jesus was under as he was making his way to Golgotha, the hill of the skull. Jesus, being under Roman law, was looking at a very difficult day. He knew that when he reached the top of the hill, he would have the greatest trial of his life ahead of him, at least physically, if

not spiritually.

When we are heading into a storm or a trial, it is often then when we are the most stressed and we struggle to clearly make sense of what is happening. Jesus had no such trouble. He could clearly see the choices that were being made around him, and he used this stressful time to clarify and prophecy into the future of the nation of Israel. While these things did not happen for decades, the fabric of their society was beginning to unravel from these moments forward. This was a culture that was centered around their temple, centered around their traditions, and the sacrificial system that was set in place thousands of years before. Before the turn of the first century, all of that will be lost to Israel.

As we listen to the first sermon of this series, a series that will lead us to an Awakening, a series that will dwell on the words Jesus spoke from the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus, we will be able to recognize that everything Jesus said in those last few hours was to provoke an Awakening in us. He wanted all who would hear his words to wake up and begin to take stock of life in a different way, in a way that leads somewhere, a way that leads us to him. Without these words, at times harsh, at times easy, at times compassionate and at times desperate, we wouldn't have been able to experience the full breadth of life that Jesus had, and how he not only handled it, but how he was leading us to an awakening with every breath, even his final breath.

Take a look at these questions as you consider the sermon today:

- 1— How hard is it for you to see a loved one or a friend headed in the wrong direction, without being able to stop them?
- 2— Can you imagine how Jesus felt watching the majority of His nation not only ignore who he was, but utterly reject him? What do you think that must have felt like?
- 3— What is the hardest thing you have had to let go of? Be specific in sharing the details.
- 4— What would you have done if you had heard the words of Jesus to the “daughters of Jerusalem” that day? Would you have been concerned at what they meant? Would you have known where they were pulled from in the Old Testament scriptures? Would you have understood their significance?
- 5— What, in your opinion, is one phrase from the sermon that will stick with you today?
- 6— How can you really “follow behind” Jesus and become a first follower for your family and your friends? What would that look like in your life?
- 7— Have you ever considered running a small group? Do you think that God might be calling you to lead in this capacity where you are? (If so, contact mike@crosswalkvillage.com to get a starter kit).
- 8— What is the longest walk you have taken? What do you think Jesus was thinking every step along the way?
- 9— Would you be willing to sacrifice everything for others?
- 10— Do you think Jesus was really suffering? Or do you think that because he could prophesy about coming back, that perhaps it wasn’t such a big deal?

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Notes

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WEEK 2

LUKE 23:32-38 (NLT)

32 Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. **33** When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. **34** Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. **35** The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." **36** The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. **37** They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" **38** A sign was fastened above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

32 Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him.

While this is a short text, it is prophetic. This fulfills what is given to us in Luke 22:37:

37 "For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: 'He was counted among the rebels.' Yes, everything written about me by the prophets will come true." The reason it is fulfilled is self-evident; Jesus was counted among those who were criminals (rebels). Although he had done nothing to deserve this punishment, he found himself there, between the criminals.

I have always had a really specific phobia of going to jail. It is not really rational, as I don't do anything that would get me there. (Perhaps some driving issues...) I think I saw a movie back in the 1980's about life in prison and it freaked me out enough to have a fear that I would be put into prison by mistake. A few years ago, I was blessed to do a ride along with one of our church members, a sheriff for San Bernardino County. I was able to tour one of the local jails with him in the middle of the night. It was a sobering experience. I felt out of place, and I was so grateful for my freedom as we left to go back on patrol. It was certainly not something that I was used to nor wanted to become used to. I felt I would have a very difficult time connecting with those who were in there. (This also made me so grateful for those who are called to ministry in those situations; I continually pray for you.)

For Jesus, this situation had become a reality. Shackled, tried, sentenced to death on a cross, and in the company of criminals was adding insult to injury. But it was also what needed to happen in order for the prophecies about the Messiah to be fulfilled. Jesus, however, always seemed to be comfortable in any given situation. He was always able to keep his wits about him, but he always found a way to make each situation a teachable moment for those who both followed him and for those who wanted to cause him harm.

When we break up these texts (remember, the verses and chapters were put in later, and were not always accurate), we find that it is unclear whether this particular text should have ended the previous section or started this section. We chose the latter due to flow and sermon preparation, but it could be read as the end to the previous section as well. Regardless, it is important to note that Luke included this text in order for us to understand that there was not one bit of prophecy about the Messiah that was left up in the air. Jesus fulfilled all of it!

He continues to fulfill all of the Messianic prophecies today, as well. He can be just as much your savior as he was for those in the first century. There is no difference in what he could have meant to them and what He can mean to us!

1 — Have you ever been in situations that make you uncomfortable?

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2 — What do you do in those situations? Do you keep your cool?

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3 — Are there people around you at times you don't feel comfortable with? How can you change that feeling when you are with them?

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4 — Have you ever considered how much Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies about the Messiah? It might be a fun exercise to see how he fulfilled each one!

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33 When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

Today in Jerusalem, there are two places that have been claimed as Golgotha, or The Skull. One is inside the old city (which was expanded during the time of the Turks), and one is outside. One is an ornate church, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, shared by seven different Orthodox and Catholic churches. This church dates back to the 4th century and was identified as the site where Jesus died by Constantine's mother, Helena. (There is so much more to unpack about all of this. I suggest you consider going on our Holy Land Trip!)

This church is amazing, but it is crowded, it is very ornate, it is stuffy in places, like caves in places, and it is overrun by the religious traditions that are housed there. While it may have been the place--scholarship is still working on evidence and arguments--it doesn't feel much like a place where Jesus might have been crucified and buried.

The other place is called the Garden Tomb. And when you go there, it is still a garden. It was purchased in 1894 and has since been excavated and made to look like a garden again. At one place, you climb a short series of steps and find yourself on a lookout, looking over the back fence into a bus station. The guide, invariably a Christian believer who is donating their time and energy to the place, directs your eyes to the hill above the bus

station. If you are a little creative, you can see what looks like a skull in the hill.

While the first site may be more historically accurate, everything within you wants the second to be the place because it feels much more authentic.

Regardless of which site Jesus may have been in, the story and meaning remains with this text. As he came to the place called Golgotha, they nailed him to the cross. This would have been an excruciating process and one not to be underplayed. Can you imagine the physical pain of having a large nail (it would feel like a railroad spike to us) being driven into the bones of your wrist? All this after taking the lashes and beatings from the Romans and having to carry, at least for a portion of the time, the cross beam of the instrument to which they now nail you? It is as painful and gruesome as we can imagine.

Luke seems to breeze past the physical situation and simply says that there were criminals who were crucified with him, one on either side. This does not mean the physical suffering was less, but it could mean that Luke did not think the physical suffering was the most important aspect of the day. Rather, it seems the author believes the words from the cross and the context in which they were uttered to be very important, as he spends more time on them.

Take a moment today to consider the physical suffering of Jesus for you. As Jesus was fully human, the physicality of this experience would have been the same for you or I as it was for him. While the entirety of our emphasis, like Luke, should not be on the physical suffering, it was certainly something that we should consider when it comes to the sacrifice that Jesus has made for us.

1 – Have you suffered physically for someone? (Moms, this is obvious for you! And thank you!) What was that like? Would you do it again? What made it worth it?

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2 – How do you feel when someone gives up their seat for you on public transportation? Hardly the same thing as “suffering,” but there is a small sacrifice. How does it make you feel when this happens?

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3 – Does thinking about the physical suffering that Jesus went through give you a more urgent perspective on the sacrifice Jesus made for you?

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4 – What is also important when thinking about not just the physical sacrifice that Jesus made, but also the spiritual sacrifice?

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34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

This is perhaps the most famous of the sayings of Jesus on the cross. And to be completely transparent, there are some arguments against the authenticity of this phrase. However, after deeper study, we can see that this is a model used by the disciples/apostles later in their ministry (Acts 7:60), and this speaks to the authenticity of the original words coming from Jesus.

One of the most important aspects of this phrase is the “they” mentioned. Who are “they”? Are they just the ones who are crucifying Jesus, or is it a more global “they” that could include all of us? I favor the latter understanding.

Certainly, Jesus is not simply talking about those who nailed him to the cross, but at least about all those who were responsible in sending him to his death. We can extrapolate this concept to include us, as our sins, ultimately, are what led God to send Jesus to this earth in the first place (Incarnation—God in the flesh, God with us). However, the greater emphasis on the phrase that came out of the mouth of Jesus was certainly those responsible for His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. This, by the way, should make it impossible for us to have any

anti-Semitic thoughts on the basis of his crucifixion.

More than this, let’s take a quick look at the concept of forgiveness. I don’t believe this phrase was uttered without reason or as a simple kindness. I believe this is a model from which every Christian is to work towards making this a habit in their lives. The act of forgiveness should become second nature to a Christian, and this should be our “go to” response in the face of opposition, conflict, and misunderstanding. It is very easy for us, at times, to become very offended at much of what we see in society or about much of what is understood about God in the world in which we live. We need to have forgiveness, not being offended, as our first response to action with which we are uncomfortable or that makes us defensive.

Jesus, on his way to his death, was willing to extend forgiveness to those who were harming him. Can we do the same in our everyday lives? Can we create a culture of forgiveness that transcends hurt feelings and emotions, while still being thoughtful and intentional to not be abused? What can we do today to be proactive in our forgiveness of others?

1 – What does forgiveness mean to you? Do you like to receive it? Do you like to give it?

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2 – What can you do today that will help cultivate a culture of forgiveness in your life?

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3 – Can you think of one person you need to forgive? Can you think of one person to whom you need to apologize? Make it all happen today!

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35 The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

This text starts with an interesting juxtaposition: "Crowd-Watched/Leaders-Scoffed". Is Luke making a specific point here? Some scholars say that it might be an allusion to Psalms 22:7: "Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, . . ." This connection certainly makes sense, but the soul of the text does not hinge on this delineation. It might have been a simple reporting. What is more interesting is what the leaders said! It was a mocking and scoffing retort to what was happening on the cross. They were taking his name and his position and making fun of it.

Have you ever watched a video of someone who is being bullied or beaten on the Internet? I hope not, but sometimes curiosity gets the best of us all! I think the thing that sickens me the most is thinking about those who are simply standing around and letting it all happen. I wonder if the followers of Jesus were feeling the same way as they watched this all happen, listened to those who were mocking him, and had to experience the pain of someone they love suffering. That would have been torture, and I am sure a few of them would have been happy to trade places with Jesus if they could have.

What they didn't know is the power that Jesus had at his disposal! He could have stepped down from the cross and

taken his revenge on those who were mocking him, but that is not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus will always be a way of peace, of shalom, and of reconciliation. Jesus' forgiveness of them was proactive, for even as they were mocking Him, He was praying that they would be forgiven by God.

This is the first of three taunts directed at Jesus to save Himself. (Mark and Matthew have only one). It is possible that the readers of the Lucan account (Luke's gospel) would have sensed the irony in that the only way for Jesus to save THEM was to STAY on the cross and die for them.

Also, there is a contemptuousness to the nature of this language. Literally, the translation should say; "If this one is the Christ of God..." they are using this term derisively, as an insult. It would be akin to us saying; "If that one thinks he is something..." not even bothering to say the name of the person you are talking about.

Have you ever found yourself as the one who is mocking someone else? Have you ever been the one who was being mocked? How did that make you feel, in either situation?

How can you make sure you are never the one who is mocking another? What boundaries can you put in place in your life in order to make sure you don't fall into the trap of mockery?

1 – Are you usually the mocker or the one who is mocked?

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2 – What is the worst thing you have said about someone? (This is between you and God, so be honest)

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3 – How can you repair what has been said, and how can you make sure you won't fall into this behavior again?

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4 – Why do you think that this mockery was so biting toward Jesus? Was it because of what he claimed to be?

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36 The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine.

This is the first mention of the role of the Roman soldiers in the crucifixion. They seemed to have no love lost for Jesus at this point in time. It would not have been unusual for war-hardened soldiers to mock a man in such misery. The Roman army was not known for its compassion; rather, it was known for its severity. But what happened next is recorded in all four of the Gospels.

By offering wine vinegar, which was the ordinary wine drunk by soldiers, we see an interaction that is discussed widely, while no one is really sure if it was done through a compassionate spirit or if it was done in order to prolong the ordeal by numbing the pain that Jesus was experiencing. Because there is mockery on either side of the gesture, it would suggest that Luke did not think this was a positive thing that the soldiers did.

What is interesting to me is that verse 36 says that the soldiers mocked him "too." I think it shows us how easy it is for people to join a crowd of people that are insulting someone. A mob mentality is quickly adopted, and as Christians, I think we always need to rise above that sort of behavior.

What we also see is a callousness in the behavior of both the Jewish leaders and the Romans. Perhaps this is due to a

worldview that had as its priority the desire for self-preservation. In the end, this is much of what killed Jesus. The Jewish leaders wanted to preserve a way of life that had become comfortable to them. And the Romans wanted to preserve the peace that made their lives easier. Jesus was a threat to all of it.

Anytime someone's way of life, worldview, or comfort is at stake, you can be assured there will be a sudden amount of movement to remove the discomforting presence. Jesus had become that discomforting presence to all who did not believe in him, and therefore, it was serious business to get him removed as quickly as possible.

However, in their hastening to self-preserve, they lost everything. The only way they could have preserved anything for eternity was to follow Jesus. However, to follow Jesus demanded that they lose their position, their power, and their import. No one was willing to do this. Therefore, it was clear that they had to relieve themselves of Jesus. In so doing, they became even more callous to the needs of those around them, and this helped lead to the ultimate destruction of the temple and the complete breakdown of their way of living.

1 – Have you ever joined a crowd or been involved in a mob mentality situation? What led you to it, and would you have done things differently if you could have?

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2 – What do you seek to preserve in your life? What would you fight to keep?

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3 – How do you think following Jesus might change what you seek to preserve?

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37 They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38 A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

Again, there was a call for Jesus to save himself. The thinking seems to be that if he can't save himself, he must have no authority or power. But what they didn't understand is that Jesus was playing a very different game than they were. His was not a better game of checkers. He was playing chess, and they couldn't understand the rules of the game. While Jesus had tried to explain those rules to them throughout his ministry, they never got it, and now they were showing their ignorance. However, in showing their ignorance, they thought they were being clever. (1 Corinthians 1:18—The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.)

Have you ever said something that you thought was clever, only to discover later that it might have been pretty foolish after all? For those of us who speak publicly for a living, this happens much too often. Even when we think we have done all the research, understand all the arguments, and have tried many different and clever ways of expressing a given idea, there are times when we have said it, it's out there, and we find later we were wrong or foolish or ridiculous. It happens. And it doesn't feel very good at all.

I have always wondered what these people felt like the next week when the resurrection happened. It is certainly possible they denied it ever happened. But I would assume that years later, at least in their quiet moments, they realized the fools they had been and probably wished they could have taken back what they said. I might be dreaming, but I have always wondered.

This brings things back to us and what we can learn from these mistakes that each group made. How can we avoid the mob mentality, making statements that will be proven to be foolish, and how can we tame our tongues?

One way is that we can listen to the words found in James 1:19—“Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: you must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” With this simple request in mind, we could probably avoid a lot of heartache and drama. To take a moment before we speak, look into our own hearts and minds, and discover if what we are about to say honors God or not. When it does not, we should learn to keep ourselves quiet. Perhaps we should make this a habit!

1 – What is the worst thing you have said that came back to bite you?

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2 – What tools do you have in place to keep you from diving in when people are talking about someone else?

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3 – Do you think Jesus was tempted to come off the cross and give them what they deserved? Would you have?

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These texts are difficult for us to read, as they speak of the unspeakable; pain, suffering, and mockery of a savior we have fallen in love with. We can only sit and read about the mistreatment, the misunderstanding, and the misconstrued ideas under which they were suffering. This creates in us a sense of hopelessness as we see what is happening to our Savior. We, however, have the benefit of knowing that Sunday is coming. Friday is pain, but Sunday is power! Friday is suffering, but Sunday is salvation! Friday is here, but Sunday is coming!

However, for those who were experiencing this in real time, the horror was real. The unrelenting mockery of Jesus would have cut them to the bone. The physical suffering would have been unbearable, even to watch. The overwhelming juxtaposition of Jesus placed between two thieves. Every bit of the scene must have been surreal for them. It just couldn't be happening. Everything that they had hoped for was dashed. Every dream of salvation seemed to be crushed, and they could do nothing about it. They were lost in sorrow, witnessing the mockery and punishment, and without recourse.

When I was watching the movie "The Passion of the Christ," I was with a young man I was going to baptize the next weekend. As the suffering continued on the screen, I found my palms sweating, my brow wet, and my heart in my throat. I just wanted it to stop. I wished that they would have given us an intermission so I could absorb everything and just make it stop for a little while to catch my breath. None was to come. And truth be told, I am sure it was nothing compared to the real scene of degradation that those followers of Jesus had to witness on that day at the hill of the Skull.

Luke says these things with a matter-of-fact tone that might seem dispassionate. However, I don't think this to be true. No believer in Jesus can look upon this scene without an emotional response. We want to cry out to the mockers that they are wrong, cry out to thieves that they have no business being so close to him, and shout out to Jesus that he should step down, or call an angel army in to give respite to his suffering.

As we look at these texts in the sermon today, ask yourself these questions:

- 1 — What does the crucifixion story mean to you?
- 2 — Can you identify with any of the characters you have met so far? If so, which ones?
- 3 — How can you respond to what happened to Jesus that day? Is it possible to respond this much time later?

- 4 — How do you tell someone that this is the most important story that has ever been told? And how do you have them connect to this story as if it were their own?
- 5 — How can we avoid the mistakes of both the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers?
- 6 — What is it that you would preserve, rather than following Jesus?
- 7 — Can you spend an hour in prayer today, thinking of nothing else but of his sacrifice for us?
- 8 — When you tell someone of the crucifixion, what parts would you rather leave out? What parts embarrass you as a Christian? Is that a weird question? Be honest.
- 9 — How can a community, a church, be Christians that make the cross central to their theology and to their worship experience?

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Notes

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WEEK 3

JOHN 19:23-27 (ESV)

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, **24** so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing, they cast lots.

So the soldiers did these things, **25** but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" **27** Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,

We are getting a glimpse into the attitude of the Roman squad of soldiers as they had to attend and serve at yet another crucifixion. Obviously, this was not something new to them, and they didn't see anything different between this crucifixion and every other of the probably hundreds that had been their duty to oversee. Crucifixion was a significant tool used by the Romans as punishment, deterrent, and even entertainment; and if you could get all three for the price of one, that much the better!

In comparison to the other accounts of this instance in the gospels (Matt 27:35b; Mark 15:22b; Luke 23:34b), this is a bit longer and a bit more specific. It was not uncommon for soldiers to take the spoils of war and divide them up in order to enrich their service just a bit. For these particular soldiers, crucifixion was as much a business enterprise as it was a duty. They seemed to be dividing the basic clothing of each victim up evenly, but when they encountered the tunic, they saw its quality as something that shouldn't be torn apart, and so they engaged in a game of chance in order to see who had luck that day!

John saw this dividing of the garments of Jesus and the game of chance as a specific fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as found in Psalm 22:18: . . . they

divided my clothing amongst them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

(Quick note on Hermeneutics).

What is hermeneutics? Quite simply--and this is probably an oversimplification--it is the way that you consistently seek to understand scripture. It is how you read the Bible, what kind of interpretive tools you use, and what you think can be done with the biblical text. This is a pretty serious field of study. It is literally how you decide to study scripture.

Over the years there have been many different ways that people have understood the text. One of those ways is by making an allegory out of almost everything. For instance, in an allegorical understanding of the text, the seamless robe would have been seen as meaning that the church must represent the unity of the church.

Doing this with every piece of scripture, well, you can imagine that would become not only confusing, but almost ludicrous. This sort of hermeneutic was never really accepted in the Protestant church, and we still reject the major premise of this kind of interpretation today. John did not seem to be talking about the unity of the church through the allegory of the tunic; rather, he seemed to be making a connection with the Old Testament prophecies of the messiah.

1 – How do you interpret scripture?

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2 – What tools do you use?

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3 – Do you have a job that might make you more callous to human suffering, like these soldiers?

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3 – What can you do to avoid becoming callous or hard to the suffering of others?

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24 so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things,

Oviously, we are still considering the text that John uses to fulfill scripture. Why would this have been so important to John's audience? By the time John wrote his scripture, wouldn't there have been significant acceptance of Jesus as the messiah, and so perhaps the need to solidify Jesus as the messiah would have been less?

Actually, the opposite was true. John's gospel was the last gospel written, around the turn of the century. Because of this, John recognized that there was already significant heresy that was creeping into the faith. Most of this heresy, like most heresy, centered around whether or not Jesus was truly divine. Because of this heresy, John made it a point to connect his gospel to the Old Testament prophecies when he could, but he also was very serious about making the case that Jesus was God.

John's understanding that Jesus was fully divine and fully human cannot be lost on us when we read his gospel. He begins the gospel by saying "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word WAS God." (John 1:1) John seemed to have found this important as he refers to Jesus as divine consistently throughout his gospel.

Why is this so important?

Simply put, without the divinity of Christ, we can see Christ as simply a perfect human being, who by simply behaving correctly, became our savior. And that is not true! Jesus was fully human, yes, but not like us. Jesus was the second Adam, and therefore had the same nature as Adam did. However, he did not fall like Adam did! We are born as sinners, but Jesus was born without that burden. Now, you may say that it is not fair then, if we never had a chance at our own salvation. However, what is more fair: that we are left to our own devices in order to TRY and be saved, or that Jesus is willing to give us, freely, his grace so that we might know we are saved, regardless of our behavior.

In some ways, you are right, it is not fair. We probably shouldn't have such an amazing God who considers us as worthy of his salvation. If we were treated fairly, we would have been left in our hopeless state. But because of his "unfairness" toward us, we have the opportunity to accept his grace and mercy.

I'll choose the "unfairness of God" all day long if the result is not only the kingdom here, but the opportunity to enter into heaven!

1 – Have you ever thought that we have been treated unfairly by God?

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2 – What would be a fair way for God to treat us?

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3 – How can we recognize the grace that comes from God and its value in our lives? What can you do today to show God how much you appreciate what he has given you?

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25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

So who were these ladies?
Let's break it down.

Mary, you have met her before. Jesus seems to have continued a pretty solid relationship with his mother throughout his life. Have you? (If not, call your mother! She will appreciate it. And if you have kept a great relationship, call your mother! She will appreciate it!). It just seems appropriate that the mother of Jesus was there to witness. The pain must have been extraordinary, but also the love and compassion. We are never too old to be loved by our mothers.

The second person must have been Mary's sister, who we don't know much about. Then, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. So there are four women in total that are mentioned. And honestly, the language here is a bit confusing. This seems to be the most reasonable interpretation. Only two of these women appear in other places in John; the mother of Jesus (2:1-5) and Mary Madgalene (20:1-2,11-18).

So let's talk for one moment about the role of women in the life of Jesus and the life of the church. Jesus seems to have no issue with including women in his entourage. While they were not considered "disciples" in the formal sense, they certainly functioned as such in that they

were in proximity to Jesus, they learned from him, and they continued to share his gospel after he was gone. It is a shame that culture and power have often kept women from being numbered amongst those who can do ministry for Jesus.

I have made it no secret that I believe women and men are both qualified to share the gospel in any sense. I am saddened by the current state our world church finds itself in when it comes to the Ordination of Women into Gospel Ministry. At the end of Jesus' life, and right after the resurrection, women were seen to be closer to Jesus, and sticking more closely to him than most of the men. Perhaps this can give us a model to understand everyone's place in ministry. We are all qualified to share what God has done for us, regardless of any title, position, or perceived power that is available.

In the Valugenesis study it was discovered that the most important influence on a young person's spirituality is the spiritual journey of his/her mother. Women have been evangelists from the very beginning! I believe it is time to get over ourselves and move toward a more equitable expression of the gospel in our faith tradition.

Rant Over Have a great day!

1 – Was there a time that you heard the gospel in a powerful way from anyone?

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2 – If you were on a cross, who would you want to be there with you?

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3 – What do you think about where our church is with women in ministry (SDA church)? Of course, you don't have to agree with me! Put down your thoughts and do a study to back up your position. It is a good exercise in understanding scripture for yourself.

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26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”

“The disciple whom he loved!”
You have to love that description of John, written by John! It always amuses me a little when he refers to himself this way. John was writing after most of the other disciples were gone, so no one was going to argue with him.

So John was with the women. He seemed to be standing with the women at the time, as the conversation continues. Jesus does something that was not unheard of in the first century, nonlegal adoptions. They were relatively commonplace, and we get this from extra-biblical sources.

Interestingly, and again using allegory, some interpreters have turned this idea around to mean that the church was assigned to Mary as well. They even go as far as to say that this was the last and most important thing that Jesus did on the cross. Now, we know that is not true, as we know that

his redemptive death is the last thing he did on the cross. But this thinking has placed an undue emphasis on both Mary and the church, rather than the cross. This may be new thinking to you, but I wanted to point it out in order that you would not get stuck in that thinking if it came around someday.

What we see most profoundly here is that Jesus was concerned that his mother would be taken care of, and that his friend felt the responsibility to take care of her. Families should always feel the responsibility to take care of each other. This is something that is much more prevalent in many cultures than traditionally in North America. It is a good reminder for us to take care of our families.

In fact, I am stopping this devotional today about 100 words early so you can go and call your mother!

1 – When was the last time you took your parents out to eat, or for coffee, or just to hang out?

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2 – How can you make sure your kids understand the importance of taking care of each other?

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3 – Why do you think Jesus gave his mother to John and not any of the other disciples? Was it just that he was there at the cross?

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27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

You have to remember that the traditional role of the oldest son in a Jewish family was to provide care for the mother when the husband or father of the house was no longer around to care for her. Jesus must have taken this responsibility very seriously.

What is family to you? How do you interact with your family on a daily basis? How has it changed over the last few years? One thing we don't learn instinctively is how to deal with those changing relationships as we get older and our parents get older. Responsibilities change, roles change, and even our understanding of care changes. These are things that should be talked about before they happen. In that way you can prepare for the shifts that will ultimately happen as parents age.

Caring for family can be difficult at times. While we love family, roles that we have taken or have been given over the years are hard to overcome. A healthy family can see what is over the horizon and make plans in order to work through those transitions together. This seems to be what Jesus was doing for his mother by bequeathing his responsibility for her to his friend John.

The second part of the text seems to state that John was not only willing, but took her immediately into his home to care for her. We don't hear anything else about this situation, but his willingness to

take care of a friend's mother is deeply compassionate, and should be encouraging to think about in our communities.

What seemed to happen around Jesus is the idea that communities became families. It is important to see the way Jesus was able to bring people together and show them that the walls, even familial, that separate us just simply don't exist. Jesus made community into family, and family into purpose. There is a commonality in Jesus that should allow for us to see everyone as a sister or brother, father or mother. By Jesus giving his responsibility to John, and by John accepting this responsibility, we see this love played out in real and practical ways.

In one church where I served, we had a teenage girl run away from home. I went to do a visit with the family with another pastor. When we got there, he said to the family, "This is no longer your child." I was confused, so he explained more completely. He said: "Your daughter is God's, and he wants what is best for her. . ." We prayed with the family, and after this, the whole church took this girl's absence on as its own daughter. We were able to find her, reconnect her with her family, and all is well.

While it doesn't always work out this way, it is another example of how when Jesus is involved, we are all family and responsible for one another.

1 – Have you ever “adopted” someone into your family? What were the circumstances?

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2 – Have you ever been “adopted” into someone’s family? What were the circumstances?

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3 – How can you show someone that they belong in the family of Christ this week?

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This week we have seen some of the events that have centered around the crucifixion of Jesus. Particularly, the fulfillment of the prophecy from the Psalms about his clothing, and Jesus giving his mother to John to take care of, which John seemed happy to do and did immediately. While these texts may seem relatively mundane, I want you to remember that they all happened in the shadow of the Cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ has become a visual symbol of not only death and suffering, but of hope and mercy as well. Ancient Judaism stayed away from

visible symbology, a result of adhering to the Ten Commandments, but Christianity has gravitated toward a much more forceful visual approach to remind itself of the sacrifice that Jesus made from the Cross. While it took a good three centuries for the Cross to become the central figure of Christianity (we do have Constantine to thank for this), since then, it has become an incredibly powerful part of the Christian heart and mind and even theology. Truly, any theology has to be able to stand up to the shadow of the Cross, or it can only be seen as heresy.

What does the Cross of Christ mean to you?

It must have meant something pretty profound to Jesus as well. The fact that the early Christians doggedly pursued this symbol as their defining moment can only mean that Jesus had it in his mind as well. They could have chosen any of a number of symbols (Communion, the Ichthys (Fish), the manger, the feeding of the 5,000), but they were committed to this symbol being central to the Christian experience.

What we have studied this week is peculiar in that there is interaction between Jesus on the cross and those that he loved, who were present before the cross. Jesus did not complain, did not whine, nor did he wail. Rather, he continued to take care of not only his heavenly business, but that business of his hu-

manity as well. By having John take his mother, we see that he would not shirk from the responsibility of an eldest son.

If there is a lesson to be learned, it is that we are both spiritual and material creatures, and God has called us to responsibility in both of these realms. To lead spiritually does not mean to cast aside that work we do as human beings. Taking care of family is paramount to being healthy spiritually. It is sometimes easy to neglect the human side of our experience as we chase after the Holy Spirit. But both of these things are part of being a Christian, and we must pursue both with a God-given passion to be responsible stewards of all God has given us.

1 – What do you need to get done for your spiritual walk today? What do you need to get done for the more practical aspects of your life? Is there time for both?

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2 – How could any conversation from the cross be seen as normal? What do you think the impact of Jesus' words would have been on his mother and John?

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3 – Does the picture of the soldiers playing a game of chance for the garments of Jesus seem sacrilegious to you? Why do you think they couldn't see Jesus for who he really was? Would you have been able to see him for who he was?

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As we approach Easter, we are hoping that you have found someone to study with you so that you might be able to better understand these texts as you teach them. By going slowly through the words of each text, we are more likely to see how they are each pregnant with meaning, bursting to show who Jesus is at every turn. We are hopeful that you will be the conduit by which whoever you are studying with will come to see Jesus as not only an option in their lives, but as the savior of their lives!

As mentioned yesterday, these conversations happened at the foot of the Cross, and therefore, have a different significance than any other conversations that we might discuss. A few other questions that we might ask those whom we study with: Why were there not more people who followed Jesus to the foot of the cross? Were they afraid? Were they concerned for their own safety? Did they want to come, but didn't want to be caught? And why did Mary not have that concern? Or John, for that matter? What kind of answers can we give those with whom we are studying to these questions?

Going back to discussion of the text, it seems that the soldiers were no

longer affected by the brutal nature of the cross. It is interesting that almost any sort of situation, no matter how cruel or ugly, can become normal to be around if you are exposed to it often enough. This is, of course, one of the greatest reasons to keep our children away from violence and sex in the media before they can handle it. The soldiers were simply keeping up "business as usual" in their context. While we may be completely traumatized by what is happening to Jesus at the same time, they are playing a game of chance for his garments, garments, which would have been bloodied and dirty from the whole ordeal.

In our lives, it is very easy to become desensitized to a great many things. Sex, violence and brutality, of course, but we can also become desensitized to the many miracles of the God that we experience everyday of our lives. It is not just the negative things we get used to, but the miracles of love, compassion, mercy, and justice that we get to experience. One of the things about following Jesus is the ability to see these things as new every time we see them! Living the life of a follower of Jesus is something that renews our ability to see through his eyes each and every day.

Here are some questions to go along with this week's sermon:

- 1 — Why were there no other followers of Jesus at the foot of the cross?
- 2 — Do you think you would have been brave enough to be there?
- 3 — Would watching the soldiers take a business-as-usual attitude have frustrated you?
- 4 — Have you ever been adopted into someone's family? Have you ever adopted someone?
- 5 — What does it mean to be a child of God? And who are your brothers and sisters?
- 6 — What role did women play in the life of Jesus? What role should women have in the church?
- 7 — How much time do you spend thinking about the cross of Christ throughout the year? Is it central to your faith as a Christian?
- 8 — For a powerful treatise on the Cross, read John Stott's "The Cross of Christ."

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Notes

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WEEK 4

JOHN 19:28 (NLT)

The Death of Jesus

28 Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." **29** A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

MATTHEW 27:45-53 (NLT)

The Death of Jesus

45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. **46** At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

47 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. **48** One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. **49** But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

50 Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. **51** At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, **52** and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. **53** They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

28 Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

We are jumping into the book of John for one verse only. If you are wondering why we are doing this, it is because we have to use more than one source as we look at what happened on the cross that day. These are some of the phrases that Jesus said to those around the cross, and it is important to understand how we see a more three-dimensional picture of Jesus on the cross through the synoptic gospels and through John as well. (Remember, the synoptics are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with John being the outlier. John was written much later, and had a purpose of fighting Christological heresy.)

All of his life had come to this. While he had previously toyed with the idea of letting God take this "cup" or responsibility from him, (12:37) Jesus is now fully committed and close to death. The use of the Greek word "tetelestai" which connotes the concept of the "end," is used three times in three verses, and only six times in the rest of the gospel of John. The author seems to understand that the time is close for everything to be fulfilled.

And in that vein, Jesus says the words that will fulfill the scriptures. Now, we have to ask "which scripture is being fulfilled by this statement of his thirst?" In Mark's gospel, this question of the thirst of Jesus is linked to his cry of desolation

(Mark 15:34-36). John's gospel has no such cry. That cry of dereliction, which we will talk about tomorrow, is clearly an allusion to Psalm 22:1, but it is interesting to note that Psalm 22:15 talks of the thirst the Savior would experience on the cross.

The author may have written in this statement of Jesus knowing that Jesus was prompting the guards in order to fulfill scripture. However, his leaving out the cry of desolation of Jesus is peculiar in light of the synoptic gospels. Perhaps the author felt this was well-tilled soil as he wrote his gospel account many years after the other three were written.

The sponge given to Jesus would have been dipped in what was essentially vinegar and stuck on the end of hyssop. Now, it is only in later texts that we find the use of the word "branch," and anyone who knows hyssop understands it is a very flexible kind of bush. We should keep in mind that the cross was probably significantly shorter than most artist renderings of the cross. Jesus did not have to be high in the air to suffer on a cross. As well, they would have dug down in order to keep the cross straight and supported.

Regardless, what is important to note is that Jesus experienced all these things in accordance to the scriptures that were fulfilled through his life and death and resurrection.

1 – Have you ever felt like you “fulfilled prophecy” about your life? Did you do what everyone thought you might?

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2 – Why is it important for Jesus to have fulfilled all the OT prophecies about the Messiah?

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3 – Why do you think most of the Jews at the time did not understand what was happening before their eyes?

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45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 46 At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

To me, this is one of the most powerful texts in all of scripture, and it tells us so much about Jesus at the end of his life that we should make sure we have taken the time to study it and meditate on his words. The author has taken pains to make sure he translates the Aramaic for us. As the verse says, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned (forsaken) me?"

What is really happening here? Why would Jesus need to make this cry to God, especially if he understood that he would be resurrected in just three days? It seems almost silly that he would make this cry. We know that is a quote from Psalm 22 and perhaps Psalm 29. In fact, there have been many different attempts to make sense out of this cry. Here are few...

It is a cry of victory! Now, this one is a really strange justification for this cry from the cross. To think that Jesus would use these words but actually mean "I won" doesn't seem to make any logical or linguistic sense.

Jesus is just doing it for us, not for himself. In other words, Jesus is setting an example for us when we are in our times of need. He doesn't really think or feel this, but he says it in order for us to better understand our own suffering when we go through it. Again, that seems

almost heresy to say that in his last moments, Jesus was simply play-acting for our benefit and he didn't feel any separation from God at all.

The gnostics, or docetists, proposed as early as the 2nd century that by this point, the divinity of Jesus had already left the humanity of Jesus, and so this was not a cry from the full Jesus, just the human part of himself. This idea was done away with quite quickly, as it was seen as heresy by most Christians. The divinity and humanity of Jesus was and is forever inseparable.

So what happened that day? It seems that the most reasonable and logical explanation is that Jesus was under profound duress, and he struggled to understand where God had gone in the midst of such suffering. The weight and chaos of all the sin in the world was laid upon his shoulders to carry, and that is a burden that would break anyone. Jesus could no longer feel the connection with God, for as our sacrificial lamb, the sin that we are quite used to bearing was put upon him.

This had to be a true cry of dereliction, given with the most well-understood song from the book of Psalms that he could remember.

This helps us understand that as Jesus died, he felt utterly alone, yet was

willing to continue his journey to the grave for us. It means that it is possible that when he died, he felt as if this was it, there was no coming back, which should make his sacrifice for us even more incredible and his love that much more powerful.

1 – Have you ever thought about the last moments of the life of Jesus, and what he might have been thinking?

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2 – Which explanation makes the most sense to you from the above explanations? Why?

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3 – How can you show Jesus some of the love that he showed for you?

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47 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. 48 One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink

We are now seeing Matthew's version of the story, in contrast with John's version, which was on Monday of this week. In Matthew's version, Jesus does not say "I am thirsty." Rather, one person simply gives him the sponge with the sour wine.

Why would the different gospels have different versions of this important time in the life of our savior? Have you ever tried to remember exactly the way something happened? Do you remember your childhood the same way as your siblings, or is it a bit different? Have you ever forgotten an important detail when relaying a story?

My wife and I have very different versions of how we started dating—the first time! (Yes, it is a pretty long story, with a few different versions.) Now we both experienced the same thing, but from such different perspectives that sometimes they don't feel like the same story at all. Having us tell the story at a party takes way too long because of this. There are lots of corrections, lots of arguments, and lots of accusations—all in good fun!

But the same can be said for the differing accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection. These are men, truly inspired by God to write their accounts,

but God still allowed them to be human men and relay what happened with their own words and memories. This is really a question of Revelation and Inspiration. If you come from our little faith tradition, we have always understood the Biblical authors to be God's "Penmen" not God's "Pen."

Obviously, not all Christians feel this same way, and you are going to have to figure out where you are on the continuum from verbal inspiration (where God has given each author the exact words he wants them to use) to thought inspiration (where God gives each inspiration and allows them to use their own words to put their ideas down on paper). These are big questions, and it's very possible you either never thought about them before, or you grew up in a tradition that made very specific claims about the biblical authors. I would say this is a good moment to do some exploration of your own.

Let's take a quick look at v. 47, where some of the bystanders misunderstood who Jesus was asking for, and thought he was calling for Elijah. The reason for this is Malachi 4:5 (4:5 "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives.") Therefore, they thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to come and

rescue him before the “day of the Lord” nature of what was happening. However, was to come. This misunderstanding as we will see in the next verse, it was seems reasonable as they seemed to misconstrued. understand the somewhat apocalyptic

1 – How do you think God reveals himself to the biblical authors?

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2 – How does He inspire them to write what He would like them to write?

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3 – Do you think it was a divine/human partnership?

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4 – Do you think God might still do this at times, to certain people?

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49 But the rest said, “Wait! Let’s see whether Elijah comes to save him.” 50 Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit.

Continuing from yesterday’s conversation, the misunderstanding of the statement of Jesus came in the form of the crowd thinking that he was calling Elijah to actually come, and therefore any claims he had made would be true. It was almost as a dare they say to one another, “Let us wait to see if Elijah actually comes to save this guy!” I am sure that when Elijah did not show up, they were confirmed in their skepticism of Jesus. We do that sometimes as well.

Verse 50 then shows us that even in death, Jesus had some control. He shouts again, and then he gives up his spirit. It seems that Jesus, in his human nature, chooses the moment when he will give up on this life.

If you have ever been around someone who knows that death is imminent, a modicum of control is a blessing to them. To be able to choose to stop your struggle to retain this life seems like a grace that leads to some significant peace. While no one really wants to die, when the end is inevitable, to be able to choose your last breath can be a powerful choice. Jesus seemed to have that opportunity.

Many have said that this cry Jesus made was a cry of triumph. And while it might have been, it was definitely a cry of pain as well. To think that Jesus was gone must have been painful for everyone who knew him. It seemed a moment, as we will see in the upcoming verses, that changed everything.

Let us take just a quick moment to think upon this very second that Jesus “sends away” his spirit: Have you ever seen someone at the moment of death? Have you heard the death rattle with the exhalation of the final bit of air in the lungs? It is truly a moment that defines you if you are there.

Looking upon someone who has just taken their last breath is always difficult. It is difficult because they do change. That breath that defines us is no longer there. Hopefully, it was a moment of finality, and what is left is calm and peaceful. Of course, this is not always the case, as in trauma or violence. I can’t imagine the look of Jesus in that moment, and those who were there did not get much chance to dwell upon his body, as what happens next is truly earth-shaking.

1 – Have you ever waited for a miracle from Jesus, and when it didn't come, it verified your previous doubts about him?

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2 – Have you had the privilege to be there when someone you loved died? Spend a moment thinking about it, reflecting on it.

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3 – What gave your strength during this time?

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51 At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart...

Here we see the second and third events (after the darkness from noon to three pm) that attest to even the earth being distraught at the death of Jesus. The earthquake, itself a monumental event, led to two other events that are worth mentioning: 1) the tearing of the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple, and 2) the disgorging of the tombs of their dead (tomorrow's text). Let's spend time today on the tearing of the curtain in the sanctuary.

This curtain was no small thing. "The Veils before the Most Holy Place were 40 cubits (60 feet) long, and 20 (30 feet) wide, of the thickness of the palm of the hand, and wrought in 72 squares, which were joined together; and these Veils were so heavy, that, in the exaggerated language of the time, it needed 300 priests to manipulate each."

There are many that propose that the Rabbis of the day were prone to hyperbole, but some of the information we get about the temple curtain comes from Josephus, that historian that is so often referenced.

There is also some argument as to whether it was the curtain that separated the Jewish court from the Gentile court and is alluded to in Ephesians when Paul

speaks of no separation between Jew and Gentile. But it is probably more assumed to be the curtain that would have separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple. If this were the case, then the renting of the veil would be even more stupefying for the Jewish faith.

As you know, it was said to have been torn from the top to the bottom. There is simply no way this could have been done by human hands. It would have had to have been a miracle straight from God. This occurrence also shows us that there is no separation anymore between us and our God. All that has stood in the way of our relationship with God has been rent asunder with the death of Jesus. The curtain serves as a visual metaphor for us to understand how we now have access to God, without obstruction by anything human made or in human tradition.

Can you imagine believing that we needed something to get to God? Before Jesus, this was the case by default. But today, we understand that there is not only no one, but no thing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, to quote Romans 8:38-39.

1 – Has there ever been a time when you thought you needed someone to get to God for you?

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2 – What do you believe separates you from God now?

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3 – Why can we approach God with confidence because of the death of Jesus on a cross?

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52, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. 53 They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

It feels like we don't really study this text too often. It is discomfoting to think that at the same time the veil was torn, there were those who had died being resurrected. What happened to them? Where did they go? And how come we don't hear more about this? They seem to have stayed where they were until Jesus was raised from the dead (v.53) and then they showed up and many people saw them.

Matthew is the only gospel that mentions this occurrence. Scholars have always wished for more information that the text is unwilling to give. We are left wondering what this all means, how this all works, and where they all went. Were they simply resuscitated, as was Lazarus and Jairus' daughter? Were they truly resurrected and then somehow were taken up with Jesus? There are so many questions!!!!

Perhaps it is safe to say that there are some things we will not really have answers to until that great day when all things are made clear. Now, you know I don't say this very often. But the lack of

evidence and the lack of further explanation leaves us in a quandary of what really happened. While many have conjectured, to be true to the biblical account, we can only hope that it will be made clear to us one day.

I believe we can understand one thing from the previous texts. The death of Jesus held with it huge implications not only for us, but for the natural world as well. The whole of the earth was grieving the loss of Jesus, to the point where it had to respond.

If you go to Qumran, the Essene village where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found close to the Dead Sea in Israel, you will see a staircase with a crack that they date back to around the time of the death of Jesus. It is possible this is the physical response of the earth to Jesus' time on the cross. It certainly fits the mold. If nothing else, it serves as a reminder that Jesus is God of Heaven and of Earth and that the loss of Jesus was felt throughout the very geological veins that run through the earth.

1 – Have you ever been so upset that you wished the earth would respond with you?

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2 – How much do you think that those around Jesus were mourning his loss? Do we still mourn his loss in the same way?

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3 – Have you read the text about the resurrected saints? What can we do with it?

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These texts that deal with the end of the life of Jesus are powerful, at times confusing, yet show us even the geological affect of the death of Jesus on the world. We also hear the final words of Jesus, a true cry of dereliction, and his control of even the time of his own death. Jesus, even until the end, was a servant of God, was willing to go to the grave for us, and was willing to carry the weight of the sin of the world on his shoulders.

We have read this story so many times that the details are lost on us? As you read again in preparation for the sermon, what do you think the important details are? How thick the curtain was? How many priests it took to open it? Whether or not it was a hyssop bush or branch that brought the sponge with the sour wine to Jesus? Do they all mean something, or are some simply details that should be noted, but not made much of?

I have a tendency to believe that every word that is in scripture has some purpose. We don't want to allegorize every detail. That wouldn't be good biblical scholarship. But we do want to

make sure we are wringing every bit of purpose and meaning out of the text that God seemed fitting for us to have. So as we approach these texts, let us make sure that we take the time and care to understand the most important parts.

For me, the most important sections have to do with the words of Jesus, *Eli Eli Lama Sabbacthani*, with the tearing of the curtain and of the earthquake. These three things are what we will probably focus the most on in the text. These things teach us the true doubt and struggle and sacrifice that Jesus made for us, the visual metaphor that reminds us that nothing separates us from God, and it also reminds us of the power of Jesus even over the earth and how it grieves for the loss of Jesus as well.

As we study these texts and take the time to understand their importance, think about how you might worship God today because of the sacrifice he made for you. If you can focus and spend time in prayer thinking about the moment of his death, its meaning, and its power, our worship will be even more palpable in his presence than ever!

Notes

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Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.



WEEK 5

LUKE 23:44-49 (NLT)

The Death of Jesus

44 By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. **45** The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. **46** Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words he breathed his last.

47 When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshipped God and said, "Surely this man was innocent." **48** And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. **49** But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.

44 By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock

We are going over some texts that we have found in the account in Matthew; however, the purpose of Luke's account in this section is to again assert the innocence of Jesus. If you remember, in the immediately prior verse (v.43) We see Jesus telling the thief on the cross that "truly, today you will be with me in paradise!" This could only be enacted by an innocent savior. Luke is committed to continuing this thought in these next verses.

The death of Jesus was an unjust death, one that even angered the earth. Throughout Luke's telling of the story, this is made clear. However, his death was salvific, and therefore important and for us, necessary. The fact that he died as a savior is clear, although Luke does not have a specific soteriology (Salvation Theology) in mind. Later, in the writings of Paul we see this specific theology fleshed out. But for Luke, who is reporting the facts, we see his deep desire to keep the innocence of Jesus at the forefront, and we are even joined

by Gentiles who are convinced of the wrongful nature of the death of Jesus at the hands of the priestly caste and Pontius Pilate.

In this account, we see he is able to save even the "most terribly lost," tax collectors, the poor, the blind, prostitutes and even criminals being accused of their crimes with him and in real time are able to be saved at the very last minute by Jesus, our Savior, who gives a grace that is sufficient for our salvation.

Never think that it is too late for you, or for anyone you hope will find Jesus. Jesus can be found at the 11th hour. There is no one who is too lost, too far gone, or too unwilling to be touched by the Holy Spirit. While Jesus will never force himself upon someone, he is available and willing to come into anyone's heart who will crack open the door.

Today, let's pray a specific prayer for someone in your life who has fallen away from God and is now living in that darkness that the above text tells us enveloped the earth from noon to when Jesus finally surrendered his spirit.

1 – Do you know someone who used to believe but has now rejected Jesus in their lives?

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2 – Write their names down and the circumstances on why they left. Was it the church that drove them away, abuse at the hands of the super-religious, a difference in worldview that didn't include God, or another reason. Be specific.

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3 – Start to pray for them today. Pray for them all week as a matter of focus and intent. Ask God to open up an opportunity to show them the love of Christ this week.

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45 The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle.

We have heard this part of the story before, with a little bit of a different take. Matthew puts the tearing of the temple curtain after Jesus died, and Luke puts it before he has surrendered his spirit. Why the difference?

He also recorded the tearing of the temple curtain (23:45b), but he placed this earlier in the account right after the coming of darkness (22:44–45a). In so doing he heightened the eschatological nature of what was taking place. The account's high point is found in the centurion's words, which serve as the final witness to Jesus' innocence (22:47). Luke then concluded the account like Mark by stating that "the women" and Jesus' acquaintances witnessed these things.

What is eschatology? It is the study of the end of time, the end of all things. Luke is interested in showing us how this affects those who don't believe in Jesus in the grand scheme of things.

Luke does, however, leave some things out that we saw in Matthew's account. He leaves out the cry of desolation that Jesus cries out, quoting from Psalm 22:1. He also leaves out Mark's

reference to Elijah, which Luke replaced with Jesus' prayer of commitment to his father (tomorrow's text). He does add some things, particularly the centurion's confession and the crowd's concern and beating of their breasts at the death of Jesus.

For Luke, it is paramount that we understand the effect that the death of Jesus had on people. There were those in the crowd that recognized his innocence and began to believe that day. While we don't have the trajectory of their faith journey, we know that the impact the death of Jesus had on them was profound.

What effect does the death of Jesus have on you as you live your life some 2,000 years later? Is it still important, profound and urgent in your life? Why should it be? Does the death of Jesus motivate you to be more evangelistic, to lean more into opportunities to share the gospel with others? The urgency of the cross should be a motivating factor and an inspiration to share the love of Christ with those who have yet to experience it. What an honor and privilege that it might come from you!

1 – If Luke is interested in the transformative nature of the cross in people’s lives, shouldn’t we be as well? How can we be as focused on the innocence of Jesus as Luke was?

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2 – Is there someone you need to be praying for that might accept the gospel?

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3 – How can we grow in our understanding of the cross of Christ and its importance to the great story of the Gospel?

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46 Then Jesus shouted, “Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!” And with those words he breathed his last.

Reading this story is so tragic. It is a reminder and a model for the followers of Christ. We know it was a model because in Acts 7:59, we see Stephen saying almost the same words as he is being stoned. “59 As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.” We also see that this serves to remind us of the connection that Jesus always had with the Father, even when he felt as if God had abandoned him.

There are often times in our lives when we feel that God has abandoned us, yet even in the midst of feeling as if God is not there, it seems we should be reaching out to him nonetheless. Jesus, in all his suffering and struggle, still felt it right to reach out to the Father for strength, forgiveness, love, and a deep sense of peace that can only come from the Holy Spirit calming our hearts.

Mark uses the same expression of breathing his last breath. In the Mark account it says he “gave up his spirit.” It is said that he was not killed; rather, he surrendered his spirit. Again, this is keeping up with the idea that Jesus was in control until the very end, and that he was willing to die for us, voluntarily. Perhaps this is for us to understand the

incredible sacrifice and willingness that Jesus had to give to us that day, and each day hence.

What is interesting is that he was giving his spirit back to his father. What was his spirit? Some would interpret this as his soul returning to God, and therefore, Jesus did not really die. However, from our tradition, we believe the state of the dead is not just a shell that is in the ground, but rather, the soul and the body are connected and both are sleeping, essentially waiting for the return of Jesus at the end of time. We have never understood there to be an immortal soul that is disembodied at any time. So what would the “spirit” of Jesus be?

An interpretation that would make sense to our theological viewpoint would be one that essentially believes that the breath of God was given back to the Father. As with Adam, God breathed His spirit into Adam at creation, and into us as we are born, so the breath of God is given back to him at the end of our time on this earth. That is a quick and probably incomplete interpretation, but we need to know that Jesus was in the grave, “body and soul” as it were. The sermon this week will flesh out these ideas even more as they are important to understanding what happens when you die.

**1 – Have you ever wondered about the difference between spirit and soul?
Is there any difference?**

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**2 – Have you prayed for the one who needs to find Jesus? We will ask each
day this week.**

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3 – How can you continually give your “spirit” to God each day?

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47 When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshipped God and said, “Surely this man was innocent.”

A centurion in the Roman army was an officer that was given the charge of 100 men. Six centurions and their men served under a tribune. This centurion had “seen what had happened” and was convicted of the innocence of Jesus. Remember, this involved seeing him ask God for forgiveness of his captors, the darkness that set over the earth for three hours, the earthquake, the reports of the tearing of the temple (assumed at this point), his words to the thief on the cross, and the calm nature in which Jesus faced his untimely death. There was a lot for this centurion to take in!

He worshipped God by declaring the innocence of Jesus. I am sure he wasn't singing praises to God, but his declaration of innocence was enough to bring honor to God through his words. Luke uses the phrase that “this man was innocent,” while Mark and Matthew have the confession as the centurion confessing that this man “was the son of God.” For Luke, the centurion's confession was more important than having him declare Jesus was the son of God.

Here is a question for today. When

was the last time you declared that Jesus was the son of God? And along with that, beyond just declaring this, when was the last time you submitted to Jesus as the ultimate authority in the way you live your life, the choices that you make, and the direction of your life and ministry? We each have a ministry, ordained by God and given by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When we admit to the sovereignty of God in our lives, we also take up our ministry to others. Each ministry is an individual expression of the love of God in our lives, his sacrifice motivates these ministries, and his resurrection empowers these ministries.

What is the particular ministry that God has given to you? It is possible that for the centurion, this statement of faith, this affirmation of the power of Jesus and the innocence of Jesus was the fulfillment of the ministry he was to take up? But what is your calling, your ministry, and your purpose? As the centurion, we need to be willing to admit the power of Jesus, through his death, in our lives. And this declaration is a shocking admission of the power of God, available through our work in ministry for Jesus in the world.

1 – What is your ministry?

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2 – When did you last confess the innocence of Jesus to someone in your circle?

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3 – Why is it important to confess this innocence to others? How is it part of the Gospel narrative that we have been entrusted to give to the world?

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48 And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow.

Luke is now reporting on the response of the people in the crowd. He uses the term “all,” but that is probably hyperbole. In other words, he is painting with a pretty broad brush at this point. Some translations mention that they “beat their breasts,” which is an expression of sorrow and sadness. Perhaps there was an assumption of guilt and remorse. This would have been an appropriate and culturally relevant response. Perhaps they recognized, albeit too late, who Jesus was.

Have you ever missed the boat? Has there been a trend in fashion that you just missed, and once it was gone, you wished you had tried it? We often miss trends and then jump in when things are too late. Missed opportunities are some of the most painful things we have to live with in our lives, but we often don’t understand that we are missing until it is too late. It seems that perhaps there were those in the crowd who were now convicted that they had missed the boat when it came to Jesus.

Luke recounts this as a warning to those reading that we should not miss the opportunity to call Jesus the Lord of our lives. The moment we understand who he is, we need to make the choice not only to follow, but to also show others what mercy and grace really can be. Without acknowledging Jesus, we are missing out on the greatest opportunity to show the world how amazing

God really is.

If you grew up in the church, then you know many people who used to claim the power of Jesus in their lives, but have left for a reason that now separates them from their love and submission to Jesus. The reasons for this are as vast and varied as are the people who can no longer believe in the divinity of Christ. Deconversion is difficult to watch, and is often met with anger by those who still believe.

Perhaps this is an experience to which you can relate. I would suggest that rather than meeting this with anger, meet this falling out of faith with the same grace you were met with, coming from Jesus, as you decided to accept Jesus as the Lord of your life. Those who have left have their reasons, but they are not too far away from God to miss the boat. The Holy Spirit can continue to work on their hearts, even when it feels like their hearts are hardened. We continue to pray, to look for opportunities, respectfully, to share Jesus. We allow for God to work in places that we can’t reach and to be available to speak a word when the time is right.

Jesus does not give up. We shouldn’t either. We pray for those who beat their breasts and leave with deep sorrow, but we also pray for those who feel like they had to leave faith. God has them all in hand.

1 – Who are you praying for this week? Have you had an opportunity to speak with them? Has God opened a door?

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2 – Have you ever felt like you missed the boat on something? What would you do differently if you could?

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3 – How can the death of Jesus become part of the narrative you share with others about the gospel?

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49 But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.

Here, Luke is referencing either Psalm 38:11 (My loved ones and friends stay away, fearing my disease. Even my own family stands at a distance) or Psalm 88:8 (You have driven my friends away by making me repulsive to them. I am in a trap with no way of escape.)

Again, Luke is wanting us to understand the fulfillment of messianic prophecies that are experienced through the death of Jesus. He references the earlier texts in order to make connections that we might not have made otherwise. It is probable that his first century audience would have caught on to the nuances of the fulfillment, but we need the prompts that come to us through the commentaries.

As his friends watched, Jesus was unjustly crucified. He was righteous and he was holy, but that did not stop the crucifixion from taking place. Even Pontius Pilate had said three times that this man was innocent. Herod Antipas confessed his innocence. Even the centurion and a criminal confessed that he was innocent of any wrongdoing. How is it Jesus could still end up dying a death on a cross?

But this was not just any death. It was not just the death of a good man, or the death of a great teacher, or even a

great prophet. This death had an eschatological echo that was heard around the world. His death inaugurates the coming of the new covenant, of a kingdom without end. This was his goal from the very beginning. And while he had moments of doubt in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was not to be deterred from his goal of salvation for all of humankind by grace, through faith.

His friends had to watch this happen from afar. This could not have been easy for them, as it is never easy to watch someone you love suffer. But they had to understand the incredible sacrifice on which the turning of the world hangs. It seems they stood at a distance, full of remorse and contrition. So there was hope for them. They had not abandoned Jesus. They had simply been afraid of what was happening at the moment. In the book of Acts, we see that this witness became a major motivation for them to continue the work of Christ in the first century. And truly, these people changed the course of history by simply refusing to regard this occurrence as anything less than the salvation of the world. Almost all went to their deaths proclaiming the power of Jesus on the cross as the final blow against sin and evil in the world. Do we have such conviction?

1 – How can we recognize the power of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us?

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2 – How can we share this power with those who don't know?

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3 – Have you continued to pray for that one person who needs to either discover the power of Christ on the cross or rediscover it?

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This week we have looked into the Lucan account of the final moments of the life of Jesus and we have seen his emphasis on the innocence of Jesus and the impact it had on those around him at the time. We heard his last words and have discussed the idea of the state of the dead through this pericope.

I once heard Tony Campolo speak at La Sierra University, and he said some interesting things, as Tony always does. He mentioned that we as Seventh-day Adventists had gotten the state of those who had died right. He thought our theological understanding of what happens when you die was biblically correct. We all, of course, felt pretty good about ourselves. Being right is always something that makes us feel good, and sometimes, even arrogant in our beliefs. But then he continued: "However, I don't know that it makes any difference to the one who has passed. The next thing they see is Jesus, regardless of when it happens..."

I had never thought about this before from this perspective. In one fell swoop, Tony had changed the meaning of our understanding of the State of the Dead theology. To this day I believe that

death is like sleep, and I don't believe that our soul immediately goes to heaven. If that were the case, why would Jesus need to come back and why would there be a bodily resurrection at the end of time? If I were already in heaven, I don't know that I would be happy to return to this body. (That is something I have never understood). However, from the perspective of those who have passed, it doesn't necessarily matter, as the next thing they see will be Jesus, regardless of when it happens.

What Tony did, correctly, is remind us that the focus and purpose of any theology is to get closer to Jesus and to think about it in the context of our relationship with Jesus. Tony admitted the biblical correctness of our understanding, but also redirected us to the real reason we do this work in the first place; to understand and be closer to Jesus through our understanding of scripture.

I want you to prepare for the sermon this week by rereading these portions of scripture and seeing what it says about Jesus, about our response to his death, and about how we should be responding to the sacrifice that he has made for us.

Notes

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Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.



WEEK 6

LUKE 23:50-56 (NLT)

The Burial of Jesus

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, **51** but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come. **52** He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. **53** Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock. **54** This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation, as the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. **56** Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council,

So this is interesting! Joseph must have been a member of the Sanhedrin and not some other body as sometimes suggested. In fact, Mark 15:43 tells us he was even distinguished and a highly respected member, very prominent, and whose counsel was sought out. He is called good and righteous. There were a few men who remembered this way, Barnabas, in particular in the book of Acts, 11:24.

When someone gets status in a community, all the stakes get higher. It becomes harder to disagree with the common cause that is found by the groups that you belong to. One works relatively hard to be respected, to find a position, and to be someone whose counsel is sought after. With all of this comes an expectation to act as the ruling class acts in any given moment. Have you ever wondered why politicians seem to say one thing, but when in office they often act a different way, a way that benefits the status quo of society?

There is a simple reason for this, to become one of the ruling class, there are usually compromises that must be made. Even in our society today, we have become very used to our ruling class taking care of those who look, feel, earn, and seem the most like them. Of course, we can make an argument that this is not true, but too often it is.

So Joseph, as we will see in the upcoming texts, seemed to be a man of conviction, a man of steadfast principle, and a man who was willing to go against the grain. I wonder if we are willing to be those same kinds of people? In any given group, there will be a time when we are called to go against the grain, which might even mean in church, both local and global. When that time comes, what do we do?

Of course, I am not advocating anarchy, but I am advocating the importance of one's convictions in light of the peer pressure that goes against what you believe God has set in motion in your life. I say this, understanding there might be a time when you feel it right to go against what your spiritual leaders in your local congregation are teaching. However, this is the beauty of the way God made us. Freedom of choice means the freedom to disagree, the freedom to choose to separate from the community, as well as the freedom to engage in conversations that might be difficult.

Joseph decided to go against his peers, and that made all the difference.

Just so we are clear, this Joseph is not the Joseph who was the earthly father of Jesus. I am sure you know that, but names can be confusing if you are new to this narrative. We will unpack more in the coming days.

1 – Do you think someone would consider you “good and righteous”? Why or why not?

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2 – Have you ever had to go against popular wisdom in order to follow God’s will in your life?

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3 – What can you do today to make sure you are following what God has placed on your heart?

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51 but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come.

Joseph proved how good his heart was, how fair he was and his willingness to follow his heart by simply not consenting to the action of those leaders (the Sanhedrin) against Jesus. According to the text, the actions of the Sanhedrin were unanimous; therefore, we can conjecture that Joseph must not have been at those meetings, or he had a profound change of heart once seeing Jesus go through the trial, crucifixion, and death.

He came from Arimathea, which is a Jewish town. It means that he came from Ramah (which means height), which was the city of Samuel. It was located in the region of Ephraim and was also known as Ramathaimzophim! (1 Samuel 1:1). It was about 20 miles to the northwest of Jerusalem.

It is said he was "waiting for the kingdom of God to come..." This is interesting in that he seemed to be open to hear a new message, a message that was coming from Jesus. It does not say he was necessarily convinced that Jesus was the messiah, but he was troubled enough by how this went down that he was willing to step in and take matters into his own hands. Do we know for sure he was a follower of Jesus? Not nec-

essarily. At this point, however, we do know that he was willing to keep an eye open for the kingdom of God to break through, and that particular stance gives us options.

Is that how we are living our lives? Looking for where the kingdom of God is going to break through? Being willing to connect to the story of God in our lives and in the lives of those around us?

In a sense, the work of God had already been started in this man, through the Holy Spirit harassing his heart about what was right to do in this instance. It is phenomenal that God can work in the spirit of those who don't believe, before they believe, in order to get the work done he needs to get done. God can use whoever, whenever he wants, given that they are willing to be available, even if it's simply by the use of their moral compass in order to do the will of God. In my work with faith-driven health care systems, it is clear that there are some that have no intention of believing in God, but are doing his work because they firmly believe in the mission of the healthcare system that employs them. They will even lose money to stay and work in a mission they believe in. This is amazing.

1 – Did God ever use you, even though you weren't sure about him?

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2 – How did that happen? And have you seen it happen in any one else's life, as well?

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3 – What can you do to further the work of God today, even if it goes against reasonable thought?

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52 He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Joseph stepped out of his comfort zone in order to go and ask Pilate for the body of Jesus, so that Jesus could be buried with honor. This took courage for a few reasons. First, Pilate was not a fan of the Jews and had refused to change the wording of the superscription on the cross (John 19:20-22). Secondly, someone who was being condemned by Roman law would have lost all the rights to a proper burial.

Lastly, and most importantly, is that up until this point Joseph must have been a secret disciple of Jesus, one who did not dare stand up openly to follow Christ. Now he was openly declaring for Jesus, and in tandem with this would have been pretty significant threats to his status, his position, and even to his life. At this point, he had to be All In for the kingdom that he saw breaking through because of Jesus.

How did Pilate respond? We jump to Mark to give us the answer specifically. (Mark 15:44-45) "Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. So, summoning the centurion, he asked whether Jesus had already died. When he was so informed by the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph."

Why would Pilate be surprised to hear Jesus had died already? Simply put, a crucifixion was a brutal method of death and it usually took quite a while for someone to die by this method. This is one reason why it was such a deterrent for the Romans at the time. There are stories of miles and miles of crucifixes along certain roads to remind the travelers that they should keep to the Pax Romana.

Back to the Luke account. Joseph reaching out to Pilate meant that he could no longer hide his belief in who Jesus was. As well, there will come a time in your life where your following of Jesus will become a public event. Either someone will ask you point blank, or you will be put in a situation where you have to show compassion beyond what people expect, and then someone will ask you why you behave as such. You will no longer be able to hide your faith. It will come to the forefront of who you are and why you do what you do. This is not a bad thing, but it can be a bit traumatic.

1 – What are the deterrents in your life that keep you on the straight and narrow?

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2 – Have you ever had a moment where you had to show everyone what and who you believed in? What were the circumstances? Could that be part of your witness to share?

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3 – Would you be willing to go against the grain and stick your neck out for Jesus?

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53 Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock.

We don't believe that Joseph took him down all by himself. In fact, it is seen that Nicodemus helped. (See John 19:39-42) Perhaps there were others as well, maybe servants that Joseph had in his employ at the time. Remember, Joseph must have been a rich man to be a part of the Sanhedrin, as well as to have a tomb just sitting around!

They treated the body according to the custom of the Jews, which probably included that it was washed and wrapped in linen. They would have wrapped the linen tightly around the

body, limb by limb, with the moisture of myrrh and other salves (aloes) that were brought by Nicodemus. (Again, see the Johanne account.)

They then took the body down to the tomb. Now, if you believe that the garden tomb in Jerusalem is the place where they laid him, and if you think the hill behind the tomb is Galgotha, then it was not a long trip. We simply don't know. What we do know is that it was Friday, the day of Preparation, and so they would have wanted to get this done before the Sabbath. We know a few things about the tomb according to the text.

1 – It was new. In other words, there was not a previous body buried in the tomb. Therefore, there had never been decomposition in it.

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2 – It was owned by Joseph, set to be used for himself. (Matthew 27:60) It also might remind us of Isaiah 53:9 which states that he was with a rich man in his death.

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3 — We know there was a stone that was placed against the entrance. This would have been relatively commonplace for those tombs of rich folk. This way, no animals or robbers could get in easily. It was probably pretty big, resembling a millstone, which is not light by any means.

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Again, we don't know exactly where this tomb was. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the traditional site, but the Garden Tomb is much more picturesque. Regardless of where the actual place is, the point of the story is that they were able to get Jesus into a tomb for burial before the Sabbath came in earnest, and they were able to take care of the body.

Did you grow up in a home where keeping the Sabbath was paramount? Do you have any stories about some of the things you would do or not do on the day of Preparation? We used to see who else was in the Alpha Beta market as the sun was approaching the back of the hills where we grew up.

1 — What does Sabbath mean to you? Were they silly in the way they worked hard to get the body of Jesus down before the Sabbath came?

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2 — Was it a surprise to you that Nicodemus showed up again in the story? We haven't seen him since John 3!

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3 — How does the Sabbath play into your idea of being a Bible-based Christian?

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55 As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed.

Why were they following along so closely? They, of course, wanted to treat the body of Jesus with perfumes and oils that helped keep the stench of decay from the body of Jesus. This also plays into the narrative we see happening on Sunday as they go to his tomb early in the morning.

Jesus always had women who were close to him. This is important to understand that Jesus was very interested in women being part of his experience, and part of the faith as well. He did not delineate them out of the tradition, and neither did Luke, as he makes a point to mention them when he can and when appropriate.

It is deeply important that we understand the role of women in the story of Jesus, and in the story of our own faith. Valugenesis taught us that the most important spiritual influence on anyone's

faith is the faith of their mother. Since this is true, then we need to understand the importance of the women of faith in our lives. It is only fitting that we should give them the same opportunities and the same recognition that men get.

These women were interested in taking care of Jesus as he was lying in the grave. It never occurred to them to not be involved in the process of caring for him. This propels them to the grave the moment they have the opportunity on Sunday morning.

This commitment to taking care of Jesus is something that we can all learn from. Where is Jesus in your life? How are you taking care of him? Do you take care to see where he is going? How are you seeing the Holy Spirit move you toward him in a much more profound way?

1 – How can you affirm the women in your life today for their faith journey that has impacted your Faith so importantly?

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2 – What can we do as a congregation to affirm women in ministry and faith?

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3 – What can we do as a world church to engage this affirmation in a more palpable way?

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56 Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

They were waiting for Sabbath to end. We know from Mark 16:1 (6 Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body.)

Jesus' body had been prepared by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethea with spices and myrrh, but it had yet to be anointed, which was deeply important for the Jewish faith. While Jesus' living body had been anointed (John 12:1-8), his dead body had not yet been anointed and so they hastened to get all the supplies needed in order to perform this ceremony in accordance with Jewish tradition and law.

This moves us into the next portion of the story, the resurrection! But let us linger here for a few more moments before we go there next week. We do this because there is an important lesson to learn from this text. These people were willing to be part of the culture and context in which they found themselves. They did not have to be outside of their context in order to follow Jesus. They were willing to still participate in the customs of their upbringing in order to honor where they came from.

How are we still connected to the culture from whence we came? Should Christians be such outliers that they don't

care about the traditions and cultures that birthed and raised them? Of course, things are different now, but we still have to be effective evangelists in the worlds in which God has placed us.

I was speaking to some pastors lately at a conference, and my topic was titled "The 7 Challenges Facing the Local Church." One of those challenges was the ability to retain our cultural relevancy and impact on the community at large. It is easy for us to want to separate and be "of the world" but not "in it." But it doesn't seem as if God is asking all of us to move to the wilderness and make our living there, waiting for the time of the end. He seems to call some of us to be deeply engaged in the culture, making an impact and changing the culture to more clearly reflect the Kingdom of God. While this is not for everyone, some of us are called to our cities, our towns and our communities. While surely some are called to leave, it is as true and godly a calling to plant churches in the midst of where God is working.

In this text, we see a willingness to still engage in the culture, traditions, and meaning that has been placed on them by the culture, faith, and family where they grew up. We should take this as a precedent of how we present Jesus to our own cultures.

1 – Do you believe you have been called to still engage in the culture where you have been placed? What does that look like?

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2 – How can you become more relevant to your community in order to impact it for Christ?

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3 – What are the traditions that you seek to keep in your following of Jesus?

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We are coming close to the climax of Easter. We will engage in the resurrection of Jesus over the next week. Easter is a moment when we meditate and pray on his last week. We have, over the past six weeks, spent a great deal of time on his very last few hours and minutes. We do this because we want you to understand the great many happenings over this time frame, but also to see how intentional every word and act of Jesus really was on that last day of his crucifixion story. There are so many more stories within these stories. We could have taken his entire last week into account. But we wanted to linger in the last few hours, as they are worth weeks and months of study.

As Christians, our understanding of the crucifixion of Christ is paramount to understanding his resurrection. The cross of Christ is the banner to which we hold up all our theology, all of our understanding and all of our victory. The resurrection of Christ gives us our hope and our anticipation of the coming of Jesus in the flesh again. But to linger in the crucifixion is for us to understand the trials and suffering he went through for us. We see the players, the characters that have been immortalized in

these stories, we understand their impetus, their desires and their hopes for a savior. We also understand their disappointments, their sadness, and their struggle to understand.

But beyond anything, we see how Jesus was faithful till the end, not giving up on the mission of God and not giving up on us. We see his grace on the cross, we see his pain and suffering, but we also see his power. As he was placed on the cross, the beginning of the end began. What Lucifer assumed would be his crowning moment became his most devastating defeat. Once Jesus had given up his spirit to God, there was no longer anything else that Satan could do. Victory over sin was secured and assured. All that needed to take place was to see God have victory over the effects of sin, and we would see that in just a few days.

As you begin the final journey to the resurrection, what has this story of the crucifixion of Jesus meant to you? What have the words he said meant, and mean? Have you seen them new for the first time in a while? Have you understood them in a more complete fashion? And do they drive to a desire to see the resurrection?

Here are some questions to go along with this week's sermon:

- 1 — What can you do, as a person of faith, to give this sense of urgency for the resurrection to those you are studying with?
- 2 — Are you preparing those you are studying with for baptism, or for simply a great understanding of Jesus, both of which are amazing!
- 3 — What can the church do to help you prepare your people for baptism?
- 4 — What did the words of Jesus on the cross mean to them and to you today?
- 5 — The seven phrases that Jesus speaks from the cross are powerful, are evocative, and are transformational. Can you make a list of them from scripture? You will have to jump from gospel to gospel to get them all in!
- 6 — Why is the cross so important? What can you do to remember its importance in your faith journey?
- 7 — Do you spend much time thinking about the cross of Christ? How can you make it more central to your understanding of Jesus?
- 8 — Ask the person you are studying with what the cross might mean to them.
- 9 — Why is it important to see the role of women in the faith and life of Christ?
- 10— What can we do, as a community, to give you all the tools you need in order to make the decision for Christ?
- 11 — Who are you inviting to the Easter service at Crosswalk this year?
- 12— How does studying the cross give you a spiritual awakening?

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Notes

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WEEK 7

JOHN 20 (NLT)

1 Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. **2** She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. **4** They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. **6** Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, **7** while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. **8** Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— **9** for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. **10** Then they went home.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. **12** She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. **13** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. **15** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell

me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16 "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. **20** As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! **21** Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." **22** Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. **25** They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

Purpose of the Book

30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. **31** But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

The Resurrection

1 Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. **2** She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" **3** Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. **4** They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. **6** Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, **7** while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. **8** Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—**9** for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. **10** Then they went home.

We have been leading up to this week! While this weekend, we will follow the story of the death of Jesus, we will also celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and recognize the awakening that happened to the disciples and other followers of Jesus as they finally understood the inexplicable power of God as exercised through Jesus in his resurrection. The power of God to conquer death, to put the final nails in the coffin of Satan's attempt to rule this world and to rule our lives. We have been given new life, and a life of awakening to the incredible love, grace, and compassion of Jesus to us!

The story begins in the gospel of John with the story of Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb. (In the synoptics there are several coming to the tomb: three in Mark, two in Matthew, and according to Luke, there were more than three). John seems to focus on Mary, who is mentioned only in this chapter of John and at the cross in 19:25.

While we don't know the exact time Mary (and probably other women) made it to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, we do know that it was quite early; probably that time in the morning as the sun is about to come up and it is hazy and grey.

Mary recognized that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So she ran and told the other disciples. They heard her and ran. I have always found the little race in this text to be a bit humorous, as John wants everyone to know that he was faster than Peter. I have never known why he added that bit, other than to make a little dig at Peter. I guess people will always have their little rivalries. John assumes the miracle of the resurrection from this point. While Matthew had been interested in the earthquake that moved the stone, John accepts it as a miracle without question.

As they saw the linen strips lying there, it must have made a deep impression on them both. The separation of the cloths seemed to be unique enough that it compelled both of them to believe. We can easily gloss over that statement in verse 8, but it is important. While they had been following Jesus for years, they still did not understand the implications of what Jesus had really meant. As they looked at the empty tomb, they finally recognized the power of God to overcome sin and death. They realized the battle and the war had been won, and there was nothing to do but go home.

1 – When did you realize what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus really meant?

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2 – When did you decide you wanted nothing more in life than to follow Jesus, whose sacrifice made your whole life possible?

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3 – What would you say if someone asked you to follow Jesus as the center and circumference of your life? Would you be willing? How would that change how you live your life today?

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Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. **12** She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. **13** “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” **14** She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. **15** “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” **16** “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). **17** “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!’” **18** Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

The author would have us jump back into the story of Mary. He used an interesting tool, to sandwich the story of Mary around the story of Peter and John. He does this so we can focus on the fact that both the men and the women of the story believed. This is a pretty creative way that the author allowed us to see that both men and women were part of the story he is weaving about the resurrection of Jesus. That an awakening is not for one group or another, but all have access to what Jesus

has done for them, and they are both deeply important to Jesus.

We encounter Mary crying at the opening of the tomb. It is brought to us as a lament, that she was concerned for they had taken the body of Jesus. This would have created an issue in that they had not anointed the body yet, and therefore she would have assumed a dishonorable burial for Jesus. Obviously, this was not the case. She was met by two angelic beings where Jesus should have been laid to rest. The presence of

these beings is recognized in all the Gospels, though not described in exactly the same way in each.

But their message to her in John is the same as in all the gospels: Jesus is Alive! There is no need for crying anymore. Her nonrecognition of what they were saying to her is pretty reasonable. How are you to get your head around the idea that Jesus is alive, when you saw him crucified just a few days before. It takes a while to understand what they are saying. When she encounters the gardener, she is just as distraught. It wasn't until she saw the physical manifestation of Jesus that she was able to wrap her head around what was really happening.

Awakenings are like that sometimes. We have to encounter the same narrative more than once to completely

understand what is really happening. Even as we hear the story of Jesus, told from multiple perspectives, it takes us a while to really understand and internalize the importance, the astounding power, and the incredible love that this narrative exposes us to.

Interestingly, this nonrecognition of Jesus is carried throughout many of the encounters that followers of Jesus had as they were trying to go about their business in the aftermath of the crucifixion and resurrection. The Lukan Emmaus story, the stranger on the shore and others remind us that the disciples and followers of Jesus take a while to understand what has happened. That awakening to the crucifixion is a process of experience, exposure, and excitement.

1 – As you study the story of the aftermath of the resurrection, is what comes to mind hard to understand or believe?

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2 – How would you explain the resurrection to someone who had never heard it before? How can you press upon them the incredible love that this exposes?

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3 – Why, do you think, did it take the disciples a while to awaken to the fact that Jesus was risen?

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19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! **“Peace be with you,”** he said. **20** As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! **21** Again he said, **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”** **22** Then he breathed on them and said, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. 23** If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

It seems that there is a mystery that is unfolding here. The theme of darkness (which is a tool used by John in his gospel) shows that the disciples were still living in the darkness. They were in the grips of fear of the Jewish leaders, because they did not know if they were being pursued. They were hiding so as not to be found. But they were found! Not by the Jewish leaders, but by the risen Jesus.

He has to tell them “peace,” as they would have probably been freaking out at the sight of Jesus standing in the room with them. He showed them the wounds to affirm he was who he said he was.

How do we know this really happened? Couldn't it simply be the testimony of someone who had a vested interest in this story being true? Could the disciples be in cahoots as they try to pull the wool over the eyes of those who claimed victory by the death of Jesus? Many people would and are hard-pressed to believe the testimony of these men and women who experi-

enced the resurrection and presence of Jesus first-hand.

For me, a deeply compelling argument for the veracity, or truth, of these testimonies is that every person in that room that night went to their grave without denying this happened. When they were faced with imminent death, they still did not recant. In fact, every trial, torture, and painful experience they had they assumed was a blessing in order to tell others about the risen Savior! That in itself is incredible. The unity of purpose and story that these people gave to the world is a great testament to how serious they believed in this occurrence. They did not waver, and the course of history was changed from this night on. The awakening they had when they saw Jesus didn't just change their lives, it has changed our lives as well. The worldwide and millennia-long impact of this night is an axis point in which history hangs.

I was speaking to a friend of mine the other day, who has de-converted

from faith in Jesus. He told me that he tells his children that Jesus was real, just not anything other than a man who people really respected. This conversation happened in front of another gentleman who was not a believer but was deeply interested in the conversation. The third man asked why he was worth talking about if he was just an historical figure. My first friend tried to give an answer about values and morals and the importance of some of the teachings of Jesus. Basically making the "he was a good guy" argument. The man then turns to me and asks why I still believe in Jesus. My answer was simple; "there

is too much evidence that lives are transformed, that people are changed, and that when they really meet Jesus they are never the same. Those that claim to have seen him after his resurrection, without education, training, status, or influence seemed to have changed the world."

I don't know that this was as powerful an answer as it should have been, but there was a flash of awakening in the eyes of the man we were speaking to. I can't claim conversion, but I can claim conversation with the man. And sometimes, a conversation is the first step in an awakening.

1 – How does the change we see in these people that met Jesus that night affect your thoughts on Jesus?

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2 – How do you think you would have reacted to this occurrence?

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3 – What can you tell someone about why you believe in Jesus?

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24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

For some reason, I always forget that Thomas wasn't in the room when Jesus first showed up to the others. I wonder what he was doing. He really picked a bad time to go and get a drink of water! Because he was not there at the first presentation of Jesus, he meets his colleagues' excitement with a realism that is reasonable. Over the years Thomas has been vilified for his "lack of faith." But in reality, throughout this gospel account he has always been presented as a realist, or a person who evaluated situations on the basis of what he could perceive. This is certainly no exception and keeps to the narrative.

Those who had seen Jesus were not only ready to share their experience, they were clearly excited to share that Jesus was risen and they had seen him "in the flesh." This is something that happens with anyone who has had an experience with Jesus. They sense the transformation, the awakening happening within them, and they find themselves ready to share. One hard thing is they often assume that everyone will have their same enthusiasm, and that is often not the case. Others can be deeply skeptical, and often kill the momentum of those trying to share. Thomas seems to have done that with the disciples at this point.

He, again being a realist, simply

states that he won't believe until he can inspect Jesus for himself. My bet is that he did not necessarily think that he would get the chance to see Jesus and find out for himself. In some respects, he was "kicking the can down the road," or putting off having to make a decision about Jesus until a later moment. He was not prepared for the confrontation that comes from having to make a decision about Jesus in your life. I use the word "confrontation" in that being confronted with the reality of Jesus is always something that puts us back on our heels. Thomas would have to make a decision, but at this point, he was trying to delay the inevitable.

I find that this is true at times with those who are interested in belief but are not prepared to submit to Jesus yet. They have a tendency to push back the start date on their faith for a multitude of reasons, many of which are simply stall tactics in order to allow themselves a little more time before they have to give themselves over to following Jesus. I know this sounds like belief is a bad thing; of course it is not, but what is meant is simply that belief in Jesus changes us, our behaviors, our worldview, and our understanding of who we are, and that is not always easy. Sometimes we put it off while knowing we will eventually have that full awakening.

1 – What proof do you need to believe?

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2 – Have you ever felt that following Jesus was an inevitability in your life, but you still wanted to wait for a bit?

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3 – What keeps you from believing today?

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26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

The time of reckoning for Thomas is upon us! Eight days later, which was really seven days, as they counted the day they were in, Jesus shows up again to a locked room. Again, he says "peace be with you," perhaps to calm their nerves. He then says to Thomas--and I am paraphrasing here--"you wanted proof, here's your proof." And allows Thomas to put his finger in his wounds.

His "don't be faithless any longer. Believe" statement to Thomas seems a rebuke, and is indeed. I am sure you can imagine the air in the room. Jesus had proven, point for point, what Thomas had been doubting. I wonder if Thomas understood the tension. I am sure he did. It is possible that he had assumed he would never get the opportunity to actually prove his doubts. And now, Jesus is standing in front of him, rebuking him for his unbelief.

In verse 28 we see the high point of confession in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "My Lord and My God." In the entirety of the gospel of John, we see the au-

thor seeking to help us understand that Jesus was more than a man, that Jesus was 100% God as well as 100% human. In this declaration of belief, Thomas makes this recognition and submits himself to the truth of Jesus. He had a full awakening as to who Jesus was, not only for him, but for the world as well.

Beyond this, his declaration is not simply "The Lord and The God" but it is in the possessive; "My Lord and my God!" This personalizing and possessing of the salvation that can come only from Jesus is powerful and important. It is a recognition that we still see today when someone has an awakening to the power and grace of Jesus in their lives. This recognition begets intimacy, and therefore the use of the possessive is absolutely appropriate.

The end of this pericope, or section, seems a little negative. The author was not content to let the declaration be the final word. Perhaps it is because he knew that he was writing to those who would have the same doubts, but would not be able to have the same encoun-

ter with Jesus that Thomas did. There- the proof Thomas required. Of course,
fore, he recounts the words of Jesus that this should be a lesson to us in stepping
blessed are those who believe without into faith without certain proofs.

1 – Is Jesus “Your Lord and Your Savior?”

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2 – What was it like when you first assented to follow Jesus? Did you have a sense of intimacy that you hadn't had before?

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3 – Is it hard for you to believe in something that you cannot see? Is proof important to you? Is a life change enough proof to believe? What does it mean to take a leap of faith?

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Purpose of the Book

30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. John finishes his testimony, his gospel account, with what is both a pithy and precise statement. Basically, he had seen so much that he didn't recount it all, because he couldn't possibly recount it all. But the ones that he did write down should be more than enough to come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. You should be reading this, at least during the original series, on Good Friday. This means, we are preparing a dinner to share with you. We are preparing communion in which to partake, and we are preparing our hearts to go into the remembrance of the greatest weekend that ever was. We are remembering what our Savior has done for us, and we are using the words found in the gospels to frame our understanding of the last moments of Jesus' life, and the first moments of the resurrection of Jesus.

We do all this so that we can not only remember, but so that we can be re-converted into the incredible power of awakening to the realization that Jesus was not only real then, but real now. And we do this also so that you might be convicted (not convinced, as that is not our job) of the truth, beauty, and grace of Jesus Christ and how it is available to you as well.

I won't belabor anything today,

for today is a day to reflect, pray, and remember.

May the grace of God be with you as we are awakened to a greater understanding and appreciation of what and who Jesus is.

1 – Take ten minutes today to simply pray in gratitude for what Jesus has done for you.

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2 – Pray specifically for someone who might need a word of grace from Jesus.

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3 – Join us for our Friday night program.

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What is there to say about today? As Seventh-day Adventists, we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Saturday/Sabbath with you. Therefore, our service will have both elements of loss and of hope. As well, we will ask for anyone who would like to be baptized to come forward so we might share this with you in between services.

We don't take these calls lightly, and we also don't want anyone to feel pressure. We are simply so excited by who Jesus is, that we want everyone who has an opportunity to publicly announce that they want to follow Jesus to have the chance. Please do as your heart is convicted today!

If you have been studying with someone and you know they are coming to be baptized today, please let us know so we can be prepared. We want everyone who would like to be baptized to have the chance. We will make sure they have clothes to wear; if they need someone to watch their kids while they are baptized, we have that ready as well.

It is our privilege and honor to be part of this journey with you.

We also recognize that during a call to baptism, there are times where it is uncomfortable, or that you might want to make the decision but not come forward. That is fine as well. We have cards in the chair that you can fill out and turn in as you leave, so we can follow up with Bible studies or at least a conversation. Your journey through an Awakening with Jesus is between you and him, and we are simply here to facilitate an opportunity for you to make a decision. If no one comes down, we are fine with that, because we believe that it is the Holy Spirit's prerogative to convict hearts at just the right time.

What we are excited for is the opportunity to fall in love with Jesus again as we worship together, as we open God's word, share bread together, and dwell on his love for us.

May God continue to richly bless you with salvation, hope, charity, benevolence, generosity, grace, compassion, and courage.

It is a blessing to continue this journey toward Jesus together.

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

awakening

