

A vibrant bouquet of flowers, including purple, yellow, and blue blooms, is arranged in a white ceramic vase. The vase sits on a lush green lawn. The background is a blurred field of tall grasses and flowers, suggesting a sunny outdoor setting. The word "AFTER" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

AFTER

INTRODUCTION

We begin this series by looking at the Holy Week before the crucifixion. From there, we move into the Easter weekend. But this year, we wanted to spend more time on what happened in the 40 days after the resurrection leading up to the ascension of Christ. This time is critical to Christians in that it solidifies the mission of God in the world, as well as the evidence that we have of the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's action in the world.

We wanted to spend this time because we tend to leave the Easter Weekend experience and move on from the story. But the story doesn't end there. For 40 days, Jesus showed up, taught, ministered to, and was a presence in the disciples' lives. It would behoove us to spend a few weeks thinking about the impact and importance of this time that Jesus spent with his disciples. How can we live in those Post-Resurrection moments?

Due to our emphasis on the Sabbath, Seventh-day Adventists have often undervalued the importance of celebrating Easter. And, of course, I understand our not wanting to seem as if we were moving the day that we worship from Saturday to Sunday. I think celebrating Easter is a bit different from the weekly worship cadence. It is a celebration of when the power of Love overcame death, which is something we should not only be grateful for, but we should celebrate in ways that we don't celebrate each week. It focuses on the power of God to not only save, but to put death in its place, a place that has no bearing on our continued lives in Jesus.

Growing up, we would celebrate the weekend in one fell swoop on Sabbath morning. And that is beautiful, but it is also a little too short to really lean into an understanding of the trauma, drama, and overwhelming change that happened over the weekend that was Easter. We need to spend time thinking about what happened before, during, and after this amazing change of fortune for us. As the disciples did, we also need to take time on that quiet and silent Sabbath to mourn, to worry, to recognize anxiety, to understand what they were going through and what a relief that Sunday morning and the empty tomb would have been for them.

So this year, we will spend a short time before, one week during, and three weeks after the resurrection as we look at all that Jesus has done for us and how he continued to minister in those 40 days.

Forty days is also a critical time frame in Scripture. We usually think of Noah and the ark and that 40-day and night timeline. The truth is, when this number was used in scripture, it often indicates an overwhelming amount of time, a time of trial and tribulation, or testing. That time frame is mentioned 146 times in scripture, and it is connected with Moses, Jonah, Noah, Elijah, and even David, Saul, and Solomon (each having ruled for 40 years).

So we want you to take a look at your 40 days leading up to Easter, and the 40 days after the Resurrection as well, to see what God is doing in your life, how God is faithful to you and your family, how God is present in your life, and how God is drawing you closer to him and at the same time propelling you into the work that he has for you.

It should be an exciting time to reflect, remind ourselves, and reframe what we understand about the weeks before and after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus.

Thanks for being here with us!

Pastor Tim and the Crosswalk Series Guide Team

30 DAYS



TABLE OF CONTENT

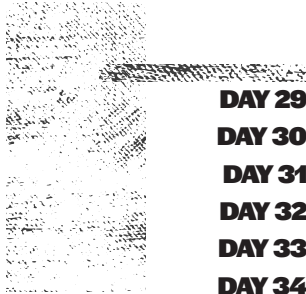
DAY 1	Jesus' triumphal entry is recorded in Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-19
DAY 2	Jesus Clears the Temple Matthew 21:12-22, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:13-17
DAY 3	Matthew 21:23-24:51, Mark 11:20-13:37, Luke 20:1-21:36, and John 12:20-38
DAY 4	Holy Wednesday
DAY 5	Passover and Last Supper on Maundy Thursday Matthew 26:17-75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, and John 13:1-38
DAY 6	Trial, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial on Good Friday. Matthew 27:1-62, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 22:63-23:56, and John 18:28-19:37
DAY 7	SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY
DAY 8	Matthew 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-33; and John 19:17
DAY 9	The First Three Hours of Jesus the Cross (9:00 AM-Noon) Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43; and John 19:18-27
DAY 10	The First Three Sayings of Jesus on the Cross
DAY 11	The Final Three Hours of Jesus on the Cross (Noon-3pm) Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; and John 19:28-30
DAY 12	"I Thirst..."
DAY 13	"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"
DAY 14	SMALL GROUP STUDY

"Father Forgive Them..."



DAY 15	John 21:1-3
DAY 16	John 21:4-6
DAY 17	John 21:7-9
DAY 18	John 21:10-14
DAY 19	John 21:15-19
DAY 20	John 21:20-25
DAY 21	SMALL GROUP STUDY
DAY 22	John 20:18
DAY 23	John 20:19
DAY 24	John 20:20
DAY 25	John 20:21
DAY 26	John 20:22
DAY 27	John 20:23
DAY 28	SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

**"FATHER, INTO
YOUR HANDS I COMMIT
MY SPIRIT"**



DAY 29	Acts 1:1-5
DAY 30	Acts 1:6-11
DAY 31	Acts 1:12-14
DAY 32	Acts 1:15-19
DAY 33	Acts 1:20-22
DAY 34	Acts 1:23-26
DAY 35	SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

"telling people about me
everywhere..."

DAY 1

Jesus' triumphal entry is recorded in Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-19.

On the Sunday before the death of Jesus, we know that he began his trip to Jerusalem, knowing that he would soon give up his life for us. When he was close to Bethphage, he sent a few disciples ahead, telling them to look for the donkey and its colt that had yet to be broken. They were instructed to untie the animals and bring them to Jesus.

As he sat on the donkey and made his way to Jerusalem, he was fulfilling the ancient prophecy that we find in Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt.

The crowds welcomed him by waving palm branches in the air and shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

On Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples spent the night in Bethany, a town about two miles east of Jerusalem. This is where Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, lived. They were close friends of Jesus, and probably hosted Him and His disciples during their final days in Jerusalem.

I have always loved this story about Jesus coming into Jerusalem. I love it because it feels like something great and new is happening, and it is hard to believe that in just a few short days, they would be clamoring for his death rather than his reign.

It is incredible how quickly popular opinion moves away from Jesus in these

moments and hours before his death. What do you think about this last week? Have you ever spent time contemplating what Jesus had to deal with that week, and what the disciples had to try and manage? Jesus was popular, obviously, but this week he went viral! Have you ever had something go viral in your life?

A few years ago, when I first started to work at Crosswalk, I had a friend who lost his wife and unborn child. As he was in the NICU with his 23-week-old son, who only lived a few hours, he sang a song to the beat of the breathing machine. Another friend of ours posted it online, and it had a few thousand views by the following evening. Throughout the week leading up to the funeral, the video went viral, and we were very quickly initiated into the world of press interest and interview requests. Of course, we were not interested in any of it, but one of us had to take it on in order for us to be able to focus on taking care of our friend.

My bet is that even though they were used to the attention that Jesus would drum up, there was much more than they had ever had to deal with at this point. I can imagine that the disciples were scrambling to figure out what they were supposed to be doing in the midst of such viral attention.

1. What do you think you would do if there was such love heaped upon someone you had been following for a while?
2. Would you have thought those prophecies about him dying were still on the table?
3. How do you think Jesus felt as he went into Jerusalem that day?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 2

Jesus' triumphal entry is recorded in Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-19.

The following morning, Jesus returned with his disciples to Jerusalem proper. Along the way, he had words that cursed a fig tree because it had failed to bear fruit. Some scholars believe this cursing of the fig tree represented God's judgment on the spiritually dead religious leaders of Israel. Others believe the symbolism extended to all believers, demonstrating that genuine faith is more than just outward religiosity; true, living faith must bear spiritual fruit in a person's life. It is safe to say that Jesus was using the tree as a metaphor and that we should all take notice of what he was trying to get us to understand. In other places Jesus had talked about the religious leaders as being clean on the outside yet dirty on the inside. We need to make sure we are not doing the same thing with our lives.

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, he found the courts full of corrupt money changers. He began overturning their tables and clearing the Temple, saying,

"The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves" (Luke 19:46).

On Monday evening, Jesus stayed in Bethany again, probably in the home of his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

This was a full day for Jesus and the disciples. Particularly interesting is the story of Jesus in the temple and how he was offended by what they had done in order to make money off of the religious beliefs of those who came to the temple.

You see, they had wrapped economics around their idea of repentance and forgiveness of God. This is more than offering some merchandise

in the lobby, rather, it is a deliberate effort to make money off of God's favor with people. Now we know that this is not really possible, but with a sacrificial system, it was possible to make people believe that they had to purchase something that was more appropriate and had been vetted in order for them to receive the blessing from God.

In today's vernacular, we would see this as religious abuse. And it was pretty despicable. When Jesus encountered this, he took it upon himself to make sure that this wasn't going to happen anymore. Therefore, he went right to the heart of the problem, those who were profiting off of this system and he kicked them out.

He must have had some pretty significant authority to do this in the midst of everything else that was happening in the temple and in Jerusalem at the time. It didn't make too many people happy, but that has never been something that Jesus was interested in doing. Everything he did seemed to make the religious leaders uncomfortable. Remember, Jesus was pushing back on the status quo that had been established in their culture and religion and they stood to lose a great deal by him upsetting the way things were.

1. What do you think you would do if you saw someone upsetting the way things are in our religious world today?
2. Why was Jesus able to take such authority in the temple?
3. Do you think this is one of the reasons that popular opinion soured on him throughout the week?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 3

Matthew 21:23–24:51, Mark 11:20–13:37,
Luke 20:1–21:36, and John 12:20–38.

On Tuesday morning, Jesus and his disciples returned to Jerusalem. They passed the withered fig tree on their way, and Jesus spoke to his companions about the importance of faith.

Back at the Temple, religious leaders were upset at Jesus for establishing himself as a spiritual authority. They organized an ambush with the intent to place him under arrest. But Jesus evaded their traps and pronounced harsh judgment on them, saying:

"Blind guides!... You are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness... Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell?" (Matthew 23:24-33)

Later that afternoon, Jesus left the city and went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, which sits due east of the Temple and overlooks Jerusalem. Here Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse, an elaborate prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. He speaks, as usual, in parables, using symbolic language about the end times events, including His Second Coming and the final judgment.

Scripture indicates that this Tuesday was also the day Judas Iscariot negotiated with the Sanhedrin, the rabbinical court of ancient Israel, to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16).

After a tiring day of confrontation and warnings about the future, Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany to stay the night.

The fact that Jesus just took authority over the religious leaders has always been fascinating to me. I asked you yesterday why Jesus could do that. Here is what Jesus said:

¹ One day as Jesus was teaching the people and preaching the Good News in the Temple, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to him. ² They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"

³ "Let me ask you a question first," he replied. ⁴ "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"

⁵ They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe John. ⁶ But if we say it was merely human, the people will stone us because they are convinced John was a prophet." ⁷ So they finally replied that they didn't know.

⁸ And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things."

Luke 20:1

1. What do you think of Jesus' answer to their questions?
2. Do you think it made the religious leaders happy?
3. What would you have said if they asked you by whose authority you did things?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 5

Passover and Last Supper on Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:17-75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, and
John 13:1-38.

Holy Week takes a darker turn on Thursday. From Bethany, Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to the Upper Room in Jerusalem to make the preparations for the Passover Feast. That evening after sunset, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as they prepared to share in the Passover. Jesus took a bowl and a basin and redefined greatness that night. By performing this humble act of service, Jesus demonstrated by example how believers should love one another. Today, many churches practice foot-washing ceremonies as a part of their Maundy Thursday services.

Then, Jesus shared the feast of Passover with his disciples, saying:

"I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16, NLT)

As the Lamb of God, Jesus was about to fulfill the meaning of Passover by giving his body to be broken and his blood to be shed in sacrifice, freeing us from sin and death. During this Last Supper, Jesus established the Lord's Supper, or Communion, instructing his followers to continually remember his sacrifice by sharing in the elements of bread and wine (Luke 22:19-20).

Later, Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony to God the Father. Luke's Gospel says that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44, ESV).

Late that evening in Gethsemane, Jesus was betrayed with a kiss by Judas Iscariot and arrested by the Sanhedrin. He was taken to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the whole council had gathered to begin making their case against Jesus.

Meanwhile, in the early morning hours, as Jesus' trial was getting underway, Peter denied knowing his Master three times before the rooster crowed.

Each of these instances could have a class written about them. Of course, we don't have the time to write about each one, but each one contributes to our understanding of greatness, sacrifice, of humility, of love, and compassion that Jesus had for us. From the way that Jesus led his disciples with humility, to how Peter denied his affinity for Jesus, we see the whole human emotion play out in love and drama.

But as we think about where this leads us, we need to recognize that this was all done with an unreasonable and overwhelming love for each of us. Each moment of this day leads us to the inevitable Cross that we will see tomorrow.

1. Have you ever been in a situation that seemed inevitable? What was it and how come you couldn't get out of it?
2. When you think about everything that was happening that day, what was the most difficult for you to watch play out?
3. What kind of love does God have to have for us to let all of this happen?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 6

Trial, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial on Good Friday.
Matthew 27:1-62, Mark 15:1-47, Luke 22:63-23:56,
and John 18:28-19:37.

Good Friday is the most difficult day of the last week of Jesus' life. Christ's journey turned difficult and painful in these final hours leading to his death. There was treachery, deceit, and tragedy in these final hours.

According to Scripture, Judas Iscariot, the disciple who had betrayed Jesus, was overcome with remorse and hanged himself early Friday morning.

Meanwhile, before the third hour (9 a.m.), Jesus endured the shame of false accusations, condemnation, mockery, beatings, and abandonment. After multiple unlawful trials, he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, one of the most horrible and disgraceful methods of capital punishment known at the time. It was a punishment undeserving of who Jesus was and what he had done.

Before Christ was led away, soldiers spit on him, tormented and mocked him, and pierced him with a crown of thorns. Then Jesus carried his own cross to Calvary where, again, he was mocked and insulted as Roman soldiers nailed him to the wooden cross. The journey up the Via Dolorosa is one that pilgrims have traveled every day since that fateful afternoon.

Jesus spoke seven final statements from the cross. His first words were, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NIV). His last words were, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46, NIV)

Then, about the ninth hour (3 p.m.), Jesus breathed his last breath and died. And at that moment, even the earth cried out in anguish and pain. The curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, and everything changed for all of us.

By 6 p.m. Friday evening, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross and lay it in a tomb. There it lay over the Sabbath in order to remind us of what death and sin truly was and is. It was a moment of clarity, a moment of anxiety and a moment of deep despair.

1. While you know this story quite well, was there anything you had forgotten about when you read the texts listed above?
2. How can you connect with different parts of the Good Friday Narrative?
3. Will we see you tonight at Crosswalk?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 7

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Can you recall a time when you were preparing for something BIG? Maybe it was an exciting event or trip, perhaps it was a certain Christmas, an important graduation, a funeral, or some other major moment in your life. How did you get ready for it? What were the days like leading up to it?

HEAD

We covered a large amount of scripture this week. For your Connect Group reading, select several portions of scripture from the passion week to read together. Share any initial wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Consider passages from these texts:
Matthew 21-27 | Mark 11-15
Luke 19:28-23:56 | John 12:12-19:37

What surprises you about the way Jesus entered Jerusalem? What do you find most significant about his triumphal entry?

What does the story of Jesus clearing the temple tell you about Him and His purpose? If He came into our lives, churches, or communities today...where do you think He would do something similar?

Why was it important for Jesus to have a "last supper" with His disciples? How do you

think Jesus may have felt during that time in the upper room?

HEART

If you knew without a doubt that your close friend was going to betray you...how would you treat them? How does Jesus model unconditional love for us in the story of His betrayal?

As you consider the teachings of Jesus during the passion week, are there certain things that you find hard to hear? What do you think it was like for the disciples to hear?

HANDS

Where does Jesus catch your attention in the passion week? What words or practices from this week's reading catch your attention and what do they inspire/invite you to do?

How is Jesus' life and death real to you today? Consider what your life would be like without those things and think about sharing that testimony with someone who needs to hear it this week.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.'" John 17:1-3

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

DAY 8

Matthew 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23;
Luke 23:26-33; and John 19:17

This week we will spend our time thinking about the last moments of the life of Jesus, and the time in between his death and resurrection, and of course include the resurrection in our study. These final moments have had books written about them. If I were going to recommend a book about the Cross of Jesus Christ it would be John Stott's book, "The Cross of Christ." It is a seminal work of theology and devotion. It is not the easiest of reads, but it is important for us to understand the importance of the Cross to our faith as Christians.

Why is the Cross so important? And what was Jesus doing up there? Wasn't there another way that he could have shown his love for us? Was God so bloodthirsty that he needed a human sacrifice? And did we spend time without a God because he died on that Cross? What implications does that have for us in the world, and what does it do to the Trinity to cease to have three entities in one?

Wow, these are a lot of questions that all deserve a great deal of time. Perhaps the best way to take a look at it is to spend time in the biblical account, using the synoptics, and taking a few moments each day to lean into the facts of what happened. Today, Jesus on the way to Golgotha:

I will assume that you will go and look at the verses in their entirety to make all of this make sense. But what we see is that when the Romans were finally tired of mocking him

(Matthew, Mark) they began to move him toward Golgotha, or the hill of the Skull. We know from other accounts of crucifixion that he probably would have been carrying the Patibulum, or the crossbeam. Regardless, it would have been heavy, and he would have been exhausted from the beatings that took place earlier.

Then, we see Simon the Cyrene, from Africa, subscripted into service and to carry the cross the rest of the way up the hill. Whether he was reluctant, we do not know. We do know that he was willing to continue the journey to the cross with Jesus, carrying the burden that had become too much for Jesus. Let us not forget that Jesus had to carry the weight of the Sins of the world with him as well.

In the Lucan account we see that Jesus makes a comment to the women of Jerusalem. The prophecy is difficult and a hard one to hear, and we don't know why it was not included in the previous two synoptic gospels. Then, we see two others, both criminals put next to him on the place of the skull.

This all happened by about 9am!

1. Are you familiar with the timeline of that last day?
2. How can we put ourselves into the crowd and take in what Jesus was going through?
3. How would you have felt if you were Simon the Cyrene?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 9

The First Three Hours of Jesus the Cross (9:00 AM-Noon)
Scripture: Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32;
Luke 23:33-43; and John 19:18-27

The next three hours were pretty brutal. They put him on the cross, and then the soldiers divided his clothes and threw dice to see who would get what of his belongings. They placed a sign above his head claiming that he was the king of the Jews; the crowds and religious leaders mocked him, and even those who hung beside him made fun of him.

However, through all this abuse, we see Jesus reminding God to forgive them for “They know not what they do.” And that is perhaps the phrase we should all hold onto through much of this experience. We have, at times, mocked God, made fun of the ideas of faith, and even taken God’s name in vain. But we also need that advocate who can remind God that we don’t know what we do, reminding us that his love extends through and beyond our foolishness. Without this kind of caring, we are at a loss for a savior. However, even at his most bereft, Jesus was advocating for us to the Father.

Perhaps this is a reminder that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, continuing his work of intercession on our behalf. In other words, regardless of the situation, his love never falters, wavers, and ceases. How much more, without the duress of the Cross, will the intercession on our behalf be in the ear of the Father?

I have always thought the most poignant of criticisms were levied against him by the religious leaders saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” They claimed that if he was really there to save them, he should save himself first. They never really understood why he came.

The act of saving us was and is an act of compassion and mercy. It is a gift of grace that did not come with the addition of saving himself. He went to the cross and ultimately to the grave, understanding that this was for us, as a sacrifice. He was willing to die a final death for a glorious chance at eternal life for us.

A bad metaphor for this is that if he were going down in a plane, he would ensure that our oxygen was on before he placed his on. He did this so that we could live. What a powerful act of love that benefited us.

1. What do you think about the Atonement?
2. How does the sacrifice Jesus made save our lives?
3. What can you do to honor this sacrifice that Jesus made?
4. Have you ever “known not what you do?”

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 10

The First Three Sayings of Jesus on the Cross

“Father Forgive Them...”

We mentioned this one yesterday. Luke 23:34 says it clearly. These were the first words of Jesus on the cross. In light of what is known about the process of ancient Roman crucifixion, it is incredible to think that he would think of us at all, let alone with such grace and mercy.

“Today you will be with me in paradise”

This text has been used at times to consider what happens when we die. The theology that we adhere to at this church is the idea that when we die, we move into a state where we know nothing until we see the face of Jesus in the second coming. How do we rectify this language that Jesus used with our understanding of the “state of the dead” as the understanding is called.

I think it is said best when we mention that for the one who passes, the very next thing that they experience is the face of Jesus. There is no passing of time, and there is no understanding of days or hours, or even seconds. The next experience is the resurrection from the Second Coming of Jesus. So in a way, Jesus was saying exactly a true statement, the next day for the thief on the cross will be with Jesus in heaven.

Perhaps we can learn that no matter the transgression, there is forgiveness for everyone. Whether at the end of one’s life or at the beginning. Whether the transgression was severe or seemingly minor, forgiveness is available and given by the grace and mercy of

Jesus Christ. For that, we should all be grateful, and not jealous of someone who receives this grace at the end of their lives. For grace given is the sole property of Jesus himself. (For more on this see the parable of the field workers: Matthew 20:1-16)

“Woman, behold your son”

Jesus saw his mother, Mary, standing by and knew her cares and griefs, and He saw John standing not far off. So, He established a new relationship between His beloved mother and His beloved disciple. He said to her, "Woman, behold your son, for whom, from now on, you must have a motherly affection," and to John, "Behold you mother, to whom you must pay a sonly duty." And so from that hour, that hour never to be forgotten, that disciple took her to his own home.

He calls her woman, not mother, not out of any disrespect to her, but because mother would have been a cutting word to her who was already wounded with grief. He directs her to look upon John as her son: "Behold him as thy son, who stands there by you, and be as a mother to him."

1. What do these sayings say about Jesus?
2. Do you think you would have been so graceful if you were in that situation?
3. Why was Jesus so keen to always think of others in his time of trials?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 11

The Final Three Hours of Jesus on the Cross (Noon-3pm)
Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; and
John 19:28-30

God draws a supernatural darkness over the scene. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, is "forsaken" (i.e., judicially disfellowshipped, rejected) by the Father, suffering the agony and torment of spiritual death (i.e., separation from the Father) on behalf of fallen men. (It was the prospect of this spiritual separation that had so terrified Jesus as He contemplated the cross.) Jesus is silent until late in the three hours, and then He speaks four times: 1) in agony, "My God, why...", 2) to those standing by: "I thirst!" (Jesus had something more to say, but His mouth and throat were so parched by the ordeal of crucifixion that He did not have the physical strength to say it; thus this request for moisture for His lips), 3) to a breathlessly waiting world, a cry of sublime victory: "It is finished," and 4) having completed the awful task: "Father, into thy hands..." The Prince of Life lays down His physical life for three dark days.

We will spend the last few days of this week thinking about these statements.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This cry of dereliction must have been a significant low point for Jesus. He knew that he would be mocked and beaten by the Romans. He knew that he would be rejected by his fellow Jews. He knew that even his family would struggle with who he was. He expected his friends and disciples would deny him. But for Jesus to come to the realization that the separation that he so feared from God was happening as well, was almost too much for him to handle.

Over the years, people have tried to explain away this particular saying. We know that this

was a quote from Psalm 22, so some have said he was singing through this time. And while it certainly could have been a song that people knew, it was at least a song that spoke to the reality that he was experiencing at the time.

There have been those who have said that it was a cry of victory. This seems pretty far-fetched to me. Whatever it was, it doesn't seem like it was Jesus crying a victory over anything at the time. It actually feels like the opposite of this. It was much more a cry of isolation and separation than anything else, and victory certainly seems far away from this particular outpouring of emotion.

No, I believe this to be a true cry of dereliction. Jesus, in the pain that he was suffering, in the anguish that he was experiencing, cries out to God in a true cry of confusion. Where did God go in such a time as this? Was God no longer there?

I don't believe so. Think about this, if you had never experienced sin before, what would it feel like to carry the sin of the world? It must have been overwhelming, and the separation that sin gives us would have been happening to Jesus at that moment. My bet is that he used words that were familiar to him in this Psalm. He cried out because he didn't have the words, so he let this song cry out for him.

1. Have you ever used the words of a song to speak to your emotions?
2. What do you think Jesus was trying to emote in this sentence?
3. How can you let God know what you are feeling today?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 12

“I Thirst...”

This may appear overly simplistic. The temptation is to take these words and interpret them in some overly spiritualized manner. We might equate “thirsting” with Christ’s call to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). Another possible connection would be to link this statement with Christ’s invitation that all who are thirsty are invited to drink from the waters of life (Revelation 22:17). These interpretive links are not necessarily wrong, and word-studies can be an enjoyable foray into both biblical meditation and biblical study.

It is out of this place of physical exhaustion that Jesus declares his thirst. The hours spent in the sun, coupled with the physical pain he was feeling, would have created mild, if not severe, dehydration. Jesus speaks of his own thirst out a real human need for sustenance and relief. On the cross, Jesus is physically thirsty. And this probably shouldn’t surprise us too much.

And why not? Why wouldn’t Jesus be as thirsty as we would be after this kind of ordeal? Have you ever been so thirsty that you ask for water? Let us not forget the human state that Jesus inhabited at this point of his life.

“It is finished”

Jesus is saying in “It is finished” that the debt owed by man to his Creator on account of Adam’s sin is finally and forever dealt with. Jesus, with “it is finished,” is saying not only does He take away man’s sin, but now He removes it as far as the east is to the west, for it is finished, done, signed, and sealed because of the blood of Jesus.

When Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) He brought about the completion of all the Old Testament prophecies, symbols, and foreshadowing about Himself. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Malachi, there are 300 detailed prophecies about the Anointed One Jesus, which are fulfilled by Him. From the “seed” who would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15) to the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53).

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus said “it is finished”?
2. If it is finished, what place do our works have in our salvation?
3. Why is it so hard to believe that what Jesus did on the cross is enough?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 13

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”

For some believers, whether or not the translation is more active, like “gave up the ghost” or “breathed his last,” in which Jesus appears to be making a decision is very important. Because He was fully God and fully man, Jesus could have taken himself off the cross, remained alive, and exerted His divine authority. He chose not to do so. His divine nature means He intentionally had to choose to no longer hold onto life.

For people who believe this element of the crucifixion is important, the passive implication that Jesus simply passed away on the cross due to sustained injuries in some translation is an insufficient reading of the text. Translations with “expired” or “died” would not be acceptable. Other readers and thinkers do not see this choice as taking away from Jesus’ divine nature, and go with what is easier for them to read or exegete.

But what is important is that Jesus made the decision to give his spirit back to God.

Rather than being taken, Jesus gave his life. It is his final act of love and devotion and truly, faith. Jesus trusted in God because he knew him. And although he couldn’t feel God, could not sense his presence, he knew God so well that he was willing to trust him, even unto death.

It is also significant because of its connection to Psalm 31. It is a direct quotation from that passage of Scripture. In context, it appears: “For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God” (Psalm 31:3-5).

1. How much do you trust God?
2. How much do you know God?
3. How can you find a way to trust God like Jesus did?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

SMALL GROUP STUDY

DAY 14

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What's a favorite memory, or a favorite aspect, about Easter?

HEAD

Read John 19 - 20 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

How do you think the crowd could go from shouting "Hosanna" on Sunday to "Crucify" on Friday?

Jesus continued to think of others all the way up to His last breathe. Can you name the different people and groups he cared for on the cross?

Knowing that crucifixion was one of the absolute worse ways to die every designed by men, and knowing that for every breath Jesus took to speak would have caused excruciating pain, what does it mean to you that He continued to endure that pain to speak words of forgiveness and love on the cross.

What would that Sabbath have been like for the followers of Jesus?

Imagine being Mary, weeping outside the tomb of Jesus. Not only was your hope lost on Friday, to add insult to injury the very body of her Savior was taken. Describe the emotions she might have experienced once she heard the "gardener" speak her name?

Yes, the disciples had seen Lazarus raised from the dead, but the one who raised Him was dead and now alive. When you think of Thomas' reaction to the resurrected Christ, do you struggle to understand his doubt or do you identify with it?

HEART

What are some of the things that you and I do that "we know not" as it relates to sin?

If Jesus was so willing to forgive even those that were nailing Him to the cross, and even the criminal who had mocked Him but then asked Him to save him, why do we struggle to forgive in like manner?

Thinking about Thomas, as well as all the disciples prior to Jesus' ascension (Matthew 28: 17), are doubt and faith opposites or do they somehow go together? Explain.

What does the cross of Christ AND the empty tomb mean to you?

HANDS

This study looks at the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each gospel has it's perspective of these events and it's always meaningful for the follower of Jesus to spend time in these passages to reflect on what it all means, what God accomplished and communicated to all humanity through these events, and how wide and long and high and deep is the love of the Trinity towards their beloved Creation. Listen to these in an audio version through Good Friday, Saturday, and Easter Sunday: Matthew 27-28, Mark 15: 16- Mark 16, Luke 23-24, John 19-20.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying." Matthew 28:6 NLT

"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." 1 Corinthians 1:18 NLT

DAY 15

¹Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. **John 21:1-3**

I am a horrible fisherman. Truly, I am just the worst. I’ve been fishing maybe 10 times in my life and I have caught nothing. I barely caught anything when we would go spearfishing when I was a student missionary in Majuro, and that was almost like shooting fish in a barrel. (I mean, if the barrel was the Pacific Ocean.)

Probably the worst thing about being a fisherman is when you don’t get any fish! And that is where we find all these guys. There were a bunch of them, and they were all taking Peter’s lead.

Also, have you ever thought of what it would be like to move back into a career you thought you left before? It is hard enough when you make a certain amount of money and have to go back to a previous amount that is lower. These guys were living with Jesus, and then they had to go back into their boats to make a living, even to eat. And they were failing pretty seriously at this point. I can’t imagine that they were feeling very good about themselves at this point.

The idea of coming back empty handed had to really grate on their nerves. Not only was their night wasted, but they didn’t have anything to eat. It seems they were utterly failing at everything they were putting their hands to since Jesus wasn’t with them any longer. It had to be frustrating, and it had to be soul-crushing.

Have you ever been really good at something, and then you stopped doing it, then when you came back to it you realized that you might not have the knack for it any longer? This is a tough reality, and this is probably what the disciples were feeling at the time.

How do you handle that feeling of hopelessness? How do you understand that it is not something that will last forever? Failures seem to sting particularly harshly when it feels that there might not be a success coming in the future. When it seems as if we are stuck in a cycle of failure or loss, it sometimes seems like we will never get out of it. I am sure the disciples felt the same way. They had lost their savior, and they were thrown back into their previous lives, without direction

It doesn’t stay that way for too long, but in this moment, it must have been hard.

1. Has life ever been hard for you?
2. Have you ever lost something that changed the course of your life?
3. What would it feel like to get that thing back?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 16

⁴ At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn't see who he was.

⁵ He called out, "Fellows, have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. ⁶ Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!" So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it. **John 21:4-6**

I have to tell you that I have always thought this was a little silly. I mean, why would they throw the nets on the other side simply on the advice of some guy that they couldn't really see? The only way that I can figure they would have done that is that they were either desperate, or they were so tired they would have taken any suggestion that sounded in any way plausible.

These were professional fisherman, they would have been able to know that the fish don't really just hang out on one side of the boat. Fish, as I understand it, don't really care what side of the boat they are on. I would also guess that if there were so many fish on the other side of the boat that these guys would have noticed that the other side was where all the other fish were hanging out.

Regardless of all of this musing, the narrative tells us that Jesus asked them to move the nets to the other side. When they do,

they couldn't haul in the net due to how many fish they had caught.

That must have been so amazing and relieving for those fishermen who had come up short all those hours during the night. I feel we learn a few things through this story. 1) We learn that when Jesus is involved, the miracle is always a gift of abundance. He never leaves us with inferior wine, or just a few fish, or not enough loaves. No, when Jesus considers a miracle, he makes sure it was worth his while and ours. And 2) Jesus was not interested in leaving his disciples out in the cold with a sense of failure. Rather, he wants to make sure that they are not only taken care of, but overwhelmed by his love, care and provision for them. In the same way, we find that Jesus is constantly taking care of us and the needs that we find we have. He does not want us to go through life without an understanding and experience of abundance. A life with Jesus is a life of abundant love, grace, and even provision in times of need.

1. When has Jesus provided for you?
2. Have you ever experienced the abundance of God through Jesus?
3. How did you experience it and what did it look like?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 18

¹⁰ “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus said. ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn’t torn. ¹² “Now come and have some breakfast!” Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. ¹⁴ This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead. **John 21:10-14**

153 large fish seems like a great big haul! The fact that the net did not break is pretty amazing. Not that I know much about fishing nets, but the way that this story is written, the net not breaking is pretty important. In fact, there are a lot of theories about the number of fish, but that is not really as important as the miraculous net keeping from breaking.

Jesus speaks first, with a second command to get the fish. While it seems that he spoke to everyone about it, it was simply Simon Peter who went to get the fish. It must have been a big job!

Throughout this entire scene is this idea of great awe in the minds of the disciples. So much, in fact, that they are afraid to even ask him who he was. Part of this was due to the fact that they had a pretty clear understanding of who this was. However, it would have been hard for them to be able to assimilate what they

knew about life and death and how this could be Jesus at all.

At the end of this pericope, we see the narrator say that this is the third time Jesus had appeared to the disciples since the resurrection. However, this is not true, it is actually the fourth time that John mentions that Jesus appeared. There are many theories, ranging from the disciple being wrong, to simply misunderstanding how he counted the appearances of Jesus—with everyone there, or did he count the ones when not every disciple was there? What about the encounter with Mary Magdalene, does that count?

I’m not really sure that it matters too much. What I do think matters is the Lordship of Jesus and the assent to fellowship through a shared meal. This is important in that we can see that Jesus not only wants to appear to us, but also wants fellowship with us. The meal indicates this desire.

1. Do you think the discrepancy in how many times Jesus appeared matters?
2. Why would it, or why wouldn’t it?
3. Is fellowship with God important in your life? How does it play out? Devotional life, church attendance, study time?
4. What do you think of this particular narrative and what would it have done for early believers?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 19

¹⁵ After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.” “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him. ¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.” “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said. ¹⁷ A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep. ¹⁸ “I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹ Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.” **John 21:15-19**

Jesus inviting his disciples to fellowship and share a meal signals his love for us. But he has some unfinished business with Peter to take care of. Remember, Peter denied Jesus in a pretty profound way before he was on the cross, and Jesus avails himself of this opportunity to have a crucial conversation with Peter.

Throughout this story, Peter has been referred to as “Simon Peter.” However, Jesus does not use this name at this time, rather, he uses Peter’s previous name, Peter, son of John, the name used before Peter was a disciple. Now, did this indicate that Peter has been ousted from that special group of first followers? It very well may have, it may have indicated that

there was a break in the relationship between Jesus and Peter, and it might be indicating that it is time to address this breaking.

The question that Jesus is going to ask, and he will ask it three times, is the life question that we all need to answer at some point in our lives. It is the ultimate question in our lives. “Do you truly love me more than these?” The way that you answer this question makes a difference in the focus, trajectory, and experience of life that you will have over the rest of your life.

The first time Jesus asks this question we see a Peter who is quick to answer, as he always is! But Jesus is not satisfied with the answer, so he asks Peter again, the same question.

Peter takes this opportunity again to answer in the affirmative. Then, with Jesus not being satisfied again with the answer, we see Jesus as the question a third time. (We will get to Jesus’ response in a bit).

By the third as, Peter is hurting. It must be finally dawning on him that Jesus is asking this question three times because Peter denied Jesus three times as well. I love the symmetry of this occurrence. He takes the biggest mistake of Peter’s life, and he turns it around.

I have said this many times, Jesus is the God of reversals. And we see that reversal happening here in a powerful way!

1. What has Jesus reversed in your life?
2. Do you think that the disciples on the beach understood what was happening?
3. How would you have received this reversal if you had been the one to make such a mistake as denying Jesus multiple times?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 20

²⁰ Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, “Lord, who will betray you?” ²¹ Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?” ²² Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.” ²³ So the rumor spread among the community of believers that this disciple wouldn’t die. But that isn’t what Jesus said at all. He only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” ²⁴ This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate. ²⁵ Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written. **John 21:20-25**

This story ends on kind of a strange note. John inserts himself into the narrative, almost awkwardly, and we see Jesus make a statement that then John feels like he needs to clarify. It is a little strange that this would be added in such an uncomfortable way at the end of this great story of reversal and forgiveness. But here it is, so we should deal with it.

First, it is clear that John wanted to remind us of his centrality to the story. By reminding us of the last supper, he is reminding us of his favored status amongst the disciples. He was right next to Jesus at the last supper and asked Jesus the seminal question about who would betray Jesus. By stating this, he is telling us that he was not only in the midst of it all, but that he was important.

In verses 24 and 25 we have an affirmation of what was being said was seen as true. And in fact, John reminds us that there is so much more that could be said that it would fill too many books to even read! Here we see the disciple reminding us that there is a much greater narrative that we will never be privy too due to the way that Jesus lived his life, the things that happened, and the volumes it would take to fill us in on everything that happened.

We need to recognize that this gospel of John, which is at times cryptic and significantly different from the synoptics, is trying to do something for us. Remember, it was written later than all of the other gospels, by a lot actually. And therefore, John’s ongoing decision to lean into the divinity of Jesus, to help us understand the signs and what they point to, and his comment that there was much more that happened, reminds us that there are things we don’t and will never know about the life of Jesus. But what has been shared is true, he testifies and witnesses to that truth here in verse 25.

So I guess the question for you today is what have you witnessed and can share as the truth of God in your life? Is there something that has been specifically powerful in your life and in your heart throughout your life of faith? How can you share it, and what would your witness be?

1. What would your witness be?
2. What has happened that you wouldn't necessarily tell anyone?
3. How can you help others understand the divinity of Jesus in your life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 21

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Think about and share a time when you had a family reunion or you reunited with some dear loved ones. What were those moments like for you?

HEAD

Read John 21:1-25 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

What do you imagine was happening in the disciples' heads/hearts that led them to fall back on "fishing"?

What's your best guess for what the disciples may have talked about as they fished (and caught nothing!) all night?

If you were one of the disciples in the boat that morning, what would your reaction be if you saw Jesus on the shore?

HEART

Why do you think the disciples didn't recognize Jesus when he was on the beach? They had already seen him post-resurrection, so why didn't they know it was him?

What was at the heart of Jesus' questioning of Peter? How is the tri-fold reinstatement important to their story?

Where do you think Peter was going with his question about John (the disciple Jesus loved)?

What was at the heart of the issue we find revealed in Jesus' response (v.22)?

Have you ever compared yourself to someone else and wondered why their life was so different from yours? What impact did that have on you and God's purpose in your life?

HANDS

Have you ever messed up really badly? Without going into too much detail, share with the group what you learned about God in that experience.

How can you extend grace to someone in your life this week that may have messed up or done something wrong?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Follow me!" -Jesus

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 22

20¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message. **John 20:18***

Mary found the disciples in the place she had left them. As she came running back to them to let them know that she had seen the Lord, she must have been filled with an incredible excitement and a purpose that she had not had in a little while.

Can you imagine having that information? What would it do to you? It has a fantastic and unreasonable quality that has to be recognized. She was talking about resurrection and they would have had to wrap their minds around that. It couldn't have been easy to try and convince anyone of what she had seen, and the fact that she was a woman made all of that just a little bit harder. Have you ever had a secret that you knew people would hardly believe? This must have been what she felt at the time.

But what she had to tell them was something that would change all of their worlds. I have mentioned it before, but not one of these people ever denied that this is something that really happened. Every one of them went to their graves, and often in a very painful way, without a hint of denying this occurrence. I can't imagine that Mary could have known the earth-shaking nature of her discovery. But I do know that she was simply excited to know that

her Lord and Savior was no longer absent in her life. Death had lost its sting.

Have you ever lost someone that you would love to get back? I am sure that we all have. The finality of death is sometimes overwhelming when we lose those that we love. I can remember simply wanting to go back in time so we could have a few more moments, a few more exchanges, and a few more memories. Mary and the disciples had that opportunity. We don't know if Jesus had changed at all after going through the experience of the grave. It does seem like there is a little bit of distance in the interactions that happen, but that may just be the way the narratives are written.

One more point. When Mary met Jesus again, he gave her a message, and I wonder what message Jesus has for you to give to those around you today? Is there something that Jesus has placed on your heart since you met him in your life? Is there a word or a testimony that he gave specifically for you to give to those around you? If so, have you done it?

1. What is the message Jesus has given you to deliver?
2. How can you deliver that message in a winsome and thoughtful way?
3. Do you sense a partnership with Jesus in giving this message?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 24

²⁰As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!
“They were filled with Joy...” **John 20:20**

I mean, why wouldn't they be. But even with joy comes confusion at times.

Jesus put out his hands in order for them to be able to see the wounds, which would have been a verification of what he had gone through. I wonder what they looked like? Would they have been clean? Would they have been just as bloody as they were when he hung on the cross?

I know this is a gross discussion, but I have often wondered. When we were told that Jesus would bear his scars for eternity, I wondered what that meant. I mean, I was told that we would get a new body, like that of Adam, but Jesus would retain his earthly body.

(You know, this sounds weird to say out loud right now...) I wonder where that came from? I think it was something that we were taught when we were in elementary school and I am sure it came from some extra biblical writings. Who knows, maybe it will be true. I am all for having a body like Adam's when heaven abounds.

But for the disciples, this verification of his suffering must have helped them believe that they were really talking to him, and not an apparition or a ghost, or even something more sinister than either of those options.

But when they recognized that it was Jesus, they were filled with joy and not dread. That says something. That says that they not only loved him, but fully believed that he had been raised from the dead and was present in their lives as a source of positivity, joy, and trajectory. They had hope seeing him, not fear. There was probably confusion, but the joy overwhelmed them!

1. Have you ever had overwhelming joy? What was it from and how did it make you feel?
2. What do you think you would have done when you saw his hands and feet?
3. When do you feel the presence of God the most in your life?
4. What did you understand about our bodies when we go to heaven?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 26

Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **John 20:22**

Okay, this is a little new for us. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into them, but at the same time, he asked them to receive the Holy Spirit. We know that later in Acts the idea of the Holy Spirit is explained and experienced in greater detail. But here we have Jesus bequeathing the Holy Spirit directly into his disciples.

Mission, or sending is at the heart of discipleship, and therefore, the giving of the Holy Spirit is an important part of the discipleship journey, as well as mandatory for mission accomplishment, for we can do nothing if not prompted by the Holy Spirit.

I thought this commentary said it well, so I will simply quote it: “If this community is to function in the way just described, then the gift of the Spirit is essential. Human beings in themselves are not capable of manifesting God’s presence and doing God’s will as Jesus did. Indeed, without the Spirit there is no spiritual life (3:3, 5). But Jesus now has been glorified, so the Spirit can be given (7:39; see comment on 16:7). At this point the life that has been in Jesus in his union with God is now shared with the disciples. The new state of affairs, described in the farewell discourse and hinted at already by the risen Christ (v. 17), begins to take effect among the disciples. They have

been reunited with Jesus and now are given his very life by the Spirit—not only reunited with him, but beginning to be united to him. The word used for breathed on (emphysaō) is the same word used in the Greek Old Testament to describe God’s action when he formed the man from the dust of the ground and “breathed into his face the breath of life” and the man became a living being (Gen 2:7; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 15:11; also Ezek 37:5–10, 14). This allusion implies there is now the new beginning of life, though, as George Beasley-Murray says, “Strictly speaking, one should not view this as the beginning of the new creation but rather as the beginning of the incorporation of man into the new creation which came into being in the Christ by his incarnation, death, and resurrection, and is actualized in man by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)” (1987:381).”

Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, vol. 4, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 480–481.

1. Do you believe that you have been sent with the Holy Spirit? What does that look like in your life?
2. When has the Spirit given you a new life?
3. What can you do to express this Holy Spirit driven life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 27

“If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” John 20:23

This is an interesting little text. We see that the Holy Spirit was given, and this is much before Pentecost. It is a commissioning of sorts, but it is also very specific. It is a continuation of the work that Jesus was doing on Earth, and not a new work. He is trying to get them to understand that this work he began needs to continue through them. In fact, they are to be his proxy, his presence in the world as he is leaving it soon. He is preparing them for what they would receive at Pentecost. In fact, the one who actually gives witness to Jesus, Thomas, was not even there at the time the Holy Spirit was breathed into them. So while the work was started through Jesus, it was to continue through them. This first giving of the Holy Spirit was the beginning of their ministry, and a continuation of the ministry of Jesus, specifically focusing on the forgiveness of sins.

Now, remember, this was during the time of

the sacrificial system that was still happening, and that Jesus indicted during the Passion Week. So when Jesus says that they have the power to forgive sin, and even the mandate to do it, he was also saying that the sacrificial system was no longer relevant to those who believed in Jesus. This was a big deal! We read past it too quickly, but it was a monumental statement that continued to take his followers away from their Jewish background and tradition. They were a different kind of religious tradition beginning with the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

1. Have you ever made a massive change in a tradition that you had? What was it, and was it hard to do?
2. How do you think the disciples took this admonition to forgive people’s sins?
3. What would you have done if given that declaration?
4. How can you go about forgiving those around you when the need arises?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 28

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever had a secret to tell that when you told it, no one believed you? Or can you remember a time when you got to be the first one to share news with another that they hadn't heard before?

HEAD

Read John 20: 18-24 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

What must it have been like for Mary, the disciples, and others to witness Jesus beaten to almost an unrecognizable state, take his last breath on the cross, then suddenly be standing before them three days later?

Jesus had told the disciples several times in his life what was going to happen to him, yet still they hid and grieved as if the cross was the end of the story. Why?

In verse 23, do you think Jesus was telling the disciples that it was up to them to offer forgiveness now, like mediators? If not, what was he communicating to them about forgiveness?

Jesus had sent the disciples out before. What was different about the sending referred to in verse 21?

How do you reconcile the difference between Jesus breathing on them to receive the Holy Spirit verses what happened on the day of Pentecost?

HEART

As mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-6 (below), the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed

by "more than 500 of his followers" and yet not one of them ever denied what they say they saw, even to the point of painful deaths. What does this do to your own faith regarding the reliability of this story and your faith?

Jesus often comes into our lives with the reminder, "Peace be with you." (Verse 19 and 20) If Jesus were standing before you today, what are you going through now that would cause you to welcome those words from him with an open heart, "Peace be with you"?

If we have not love, we have nothing (1 Corinthians 13). Why do you think we focus on so many things other than love (doctrine, judgment, end time prophecy, etc...) when it comes to evangelizing?

"We are saved to be sent, not sit." In what ways have you answered the call, or in what ways do you sense God stirring you to answer right now?

HANDS

As Pastor Tim shared earlier this week, "the greatest apologetic is love." In light of the Easter story and our commissioning sealed with the Holy Spirit, what are three ways you can be love this week to someone in your life (home, neighborhood, work)?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died." 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 NLT

DAY 29

¹ In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.

³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” **Acts 1:1-5**

Book dedications were common among the Greeks. Luke had dedicated his Gospel to his Greek-speaking friend Theophilus (Luke 1:3). He continues his contact with Theophilus to complete the story from the birth of Christ to the establishment of the church all around the Mediterranean world. Immediately he emphasizes key ideas of his book: the command to witness; the role of the apostles; the significance of the Holy Spirit; and his literary launching pad, the ascension of the Lord. Luke connects Acts to his Gospel with the simple words, after his suffering. He refused to point to the resurrected, glorious, ascended Lord without pointing to the suffering Servant. With that connection to the Lucan gospel, we see him begin the book in a way that reminds us that while Jesus had died in the crucifixion, he had shown himself in the 40 days since the resurrection to his disciples so that they might know that he was alive. He did these appearances so that they might be assured of his life-post-death.

And it would take a few times for people to become more and more comfortable with the idea of resurrection. As you know, there were many in the Jewish tradition who did not see resurrection as something that was even plausible, let alone reasonable to consider. While the disciples were by and large not from that school of theological thought, it would have been around them and so the idea of resurrection would have taken a few times to really take hold.

During the forty days that separated the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus further taught the disciples, preparing them to lead the early church. This is the only New Testament reference to these post resurrection days. You will probably find it helpful to read at least the last chapter of Luke to get a feel for how Luke makes the transition into this second letter to Theophilus. To lead, they first had to be convinced that death had turned to life. During this time he gave many convincing proofs that he was alive ... and spoke about the kingdom of God.

His knowledge of the kingdom of God was made that more clear through his time in the grave. Jesus spoke of it clearly, as if it was a place he had spent time, made a home, and was now clearly the king of. He had been given all authority in that kingdom, and he continues to reign in that kingdom today.

1. If you knew you only had a few days left to tell your friends and family everything important, what would you tell them first?
2. If you could give one piece of advice, what would it be?
3. Do you think Jesus knew that he was on a shortened timeline once he was resurrected?

DAY 30

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.” ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!” **Acts 1:6-11**

The ascension comes quickly. But we should not forget to mention that they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. The culmination of their submission to Jesus was a gift of the Holy Spirit, so that they could continue the work of Jesus throughout their lives.

Of course, after Jesus said these things, they were anxious to know when their struggle would end and the kingdom would be established. These are the same questions that we ask daily as we follow Christ. However, the answer that Jesus gives then is the same answer for us now; “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, they are not for you to know...”

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

If this is the case, then we are to stop asking those questions, and do as the disciples did, which is to get busy with the work that has been given to us, and to partner with the Holy Spirit who has also been given to us to do this work.

When the words come from above and the disciples are asked why they are standing there, simply staring into heaven, rather than getting about the work that they have been given, they are admonished that Jesus will come back in the same way. However, their job is now to get busy with the work that God had given them. We should not be astonished by miracles, as God does those without much thought. We should be busy as we wait for Jesus to come back.

I found myself in an airport yesterday, as I often am. I have learned that sometimes I wait for the flight, and other times I work as I wait for the flight. There is always more to do, so when I become industrious as I travel, time seems to fly by in a much greater way. When I am just trying to figure out which show to watch, time seems to go much slower.

Here, the disciples are admonished that standing in awe of what is happening is not beneficial to the kingdom of God. Rather, they are to get about the business of God so that his kingdom will be established and reign forever.

1. Do you often read about the Ascension?
2. What does it mean to us as believers in Jesus?
3. How can we not be like the disciples with our mouths open and eyes watching Jesus go away?

DAY 32

¹⁵ During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. ¹⁶ “Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. ¹⁷ Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.”

¹⁸ (Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. ¹⁹ The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.”) **Acts 1:15-19**

Have you ever denied Jesus, or done anything that distances you from Jesus? Have you ever done something that actually stops Jesus from becoming a savior to someone else? These are hard questions. If you did these things purposefully but have come back, there is forgiveness, but it is sometimes harder when you have done these things with the best intentions.

As a pastor, I know that I have made people run from Jesus by the way that I treated them or a careless word or two. These are not things that I have done purposefully, but rather they happened by mistake, and sometimes they even happened with the greatest intentions of actually bringing someone closer to Jesus.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

While this was not the case with Judas, of course, we have all been guilty of moving someone further away from Jesus by a word or deed that was not unnoticed, but was taken in either the wrong way, or we messaged the wrong thing.

Judas betrayed Jesus. We don't know the motivation completely. There are some who have said that it is because he was trying to force the hand of Jesus to become king of Israel, but that is not 100% clear. What we do know is what he did, albeit not his motivations. He betrayed Jesus for money, and he paid dearly for it. Now they must go about the business of nominating a replacement for this fallen soul.

Through the story of the restoration of Peter, we know that Jesus was in the forgiveness and restoration business. However, the ship had sailed to Judas for that. Therefore, there must be a replacement for this gap that was left. What is interesting, is that they were told that the Holy Spirit was going to fulfill that role. It has always been interesting to me that they took this role upon themselves rather than wait for the Holy Spirit.

1. When have you taken someone away from Jesus? Knowingly or unknowingly?
2. What does it make you feel like when you look back on it?
3. How can you continue to bring people closer to Jesus?
4. Have you ever moved ahead when you should have waited for the Holy Spirit?

DAY 33

²⁰ Peter continued, “This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’”

²¹ “So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—²² from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.” **Acts 1:20-22**

Peter had taken the role that was prepared for him, as leader of the small group of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. He was trying to get things organized in those moments after Jesus had left. One of the tasks was to study scripture in order to know what to do next. He believed that it was to fill the gap left by Judas and his betrayal of Jesus. Therefore, as he searched scripture, particularly the Psalms, he saw what was to happen next.

As he went about the tasks given to him, there did not seem to be anyone who was pushing back on his leadership. Obviously, this will happen later through Paul, but at this point, they were all of one mind.

There is an interesting thing to consider through this story. While the disciples were

voting and putting someone into place to fill Judas’ gap, the Holy Spirit was also at work discovering a powerful preacher, teacher, and writer in Saul, who would eventually be called the Apostle Paul. I have always wondered if Paul was the rightful replacement for Judas, but the disciples did not wait for the Holy Spirit, rather they pushed ahead in order to fill the role they thought they were supposed to fill. I don’t think this was done for any nefarious reason, rather, I believe that they were searching for what their next moves were.

We often do this, we move ahead of the Holy Spirit in our lives due to the fact that we like to be in control. I get that, I’ve done it many times. To wait on where the Spirit is going to move is not only difficult, but it is pretty confusing at times. Regardless of our moves, the Holy Spirit will work to get the will of God done in our lives, in our communities, and in our congregations.

1. Was there ever a time when you should have waited for the Holy Spirit to move, but you went ahead?
2. How did that work out?
3. Did you have to turn around?
4. What was the final outcome?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 34

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they all prayed, "O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen ²⁵ as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs."

²⁶ Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven. **Acts 1:23-26**

We never really hear from Matthias again. That is not an indictment on his character, just that he was not used by the Holy Spirit as powerfully as many of the other apostles, and certainly not in any fashion as close to how powerfully Paul was used by God.

But that does not mean that he was not a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Not everyone who witnesses becomes famous for doing so, or for leading, or writing or preaching.

We live in a celebrity culture where we have a feeling that the more you are known, the more important you are. And this is patently untrue. While some are gifted for great influence, and are given such influence, some are destined to be incredibly important in the lives of a few, and that is no less noble, and no more important than the call to a larger influence.

Because we are so used to celebrity, we find a skewed idea of what is important. I was blessed to grow up before the internet and certainly before social media. Influence was gained by the work that one did, by the academic prowess, but what you wrote and what you did. It was not about how many followers you had, but about the work you put into those things you created that people found valuable.

In today's culture, it is about how many people are listening, not so much about what you are saying, and there is a danger in this. How are you curating your words so that whatever influence you have makes a difference and is a benefit to someone's life?

Was Mattias worthless to the call of God? Not at all, while we don't know what he did, my bet is that he made a dent in the universe for the people around him. It is okay to toil for God in relative obscurity, in fact, that is a beautiful thing to do.

1. Who are the "celebrity" Christians that you follow or admire?
2. Why?
3. Who really has influence over your life?
4. How can you make sure you are curating your influence in a way that is positive and a blessing to others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DAY 35

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What do you imagine your “After” story would be? If your biography was written today, what would be said about you? Who would you want to have write it?

HEAD

Read Acts 1 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were promised an incredible gift—the Holy Spirit. Do you think they truly knew what they would be getting? How could that have lessened their worry/sadness about Jesus leaving them?

In verse 6, the disciples ask a very pointed question. What do you think was happening in their hearts/minds at this time? Were they in-line with Jesus’ mission, or off-track?

Jesus left and the disciples waited. What do you think they did in those 10 days as they waited for the Holy Spirit to come?

HEART

In what way do the angels' words in verse 11 speak hope/strength into your life today?

Peter emerged as a leader in the upper room. Knowing what you know about his journey and his shortcomings, would you have any trouble following him? Why or why not?

Compare the way the disciples decided upon adding a new apostle to the group with experiences you’ve had in choosing/electing a person into a new role. How is it similar/different?

HANDS

In verse 8 Jesus says, “you will be my witnesses.” How does that statement apply to you today? How are you, or are you not, fulfilling it?

Is there anything that is holding you back from spreading the gospel more fully/intentionally?

How can this group help you and encourage you this week?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“...you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1: 8b NLT

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

