



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 31, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gifts you bestow upon us, and the gift of your son, Jesus, our Christ. Inspire us to do your work, no matter how humble, on this earth. May our work glorify you, Heavenly Father, and by glorifying you, bring others to your side. May we, like Mary, share the good news of a risen Lord. In your name we pray, Amen.

Monday, April 1

Scripture: John 20:1-10

Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

Observation

Early Sunday, Mary, Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" found the tomb empty. Had the authorities taken Jesus' body? Had grave robbers been there? The two disciples saw an unexpected sight. The cloth that had been around Jesus' head was separate from the linen, which could be an indication of neatness, or that it was still rolled the way it had been when it was wrapped around Jesus' head — that his body had risen straight out of the wrappings and cloth. "The other disciple...saw and believed" — even without fully understanding.

Application

Mary went to the tomb “while it was still dark.” She didn’t expect to find Jesus alive, but out of love and devotion she was eager to care for his body as soon as possible. (The Jewish laws that Jesus had challenged forbid such things on the Sabbath.) How can you nurture a desire to go to Jesus first, even in times of discouragement and darkness?

Prayer

Lord God, your creative power didn’t just work once, eons ago. It’s always at work in my life and in the world around me. Keep my mind open and willing to believe in all you want to do in my life. Amen.

Tuesday, April 2**Scripture: John 20:11-13**

Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put him.”

Observation

In John’s Gospel, the details almost always matter. So he described Mary seeing angels in the tomb in a way that evoked the “mercy seat,” the Ark of the Covenant’s cover (cf. Exodus 25:17-20 for a description of the cover). John wanted his readers to realize that Jesus was the true center where God’s mercy always meets human sadness and need.

Application

Mary thought she was going to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus’ body for burial. Why not weep? Expressing grief over a loss is healthy. Yet two angels (“in white,” not the color of sorrow) asked her, “Why are you crying?” Has God ever helped you see a painful or negative experience in a different light? What are you facing now that needs the touch of God’s life and hope?

Prayer

Living Lord, keep making me a new creation, one whose God-given sense of self doesn’t let what “they” do and say hurt me so readily. Give me eyes to see people, situations and myself in the light of your eternal love. Amen.

Wednesday, April 3

Scripture: John 20:14-18

As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means Teacher).

Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

Observation

Mary thought Jesus was "the gardener." In symbol, he was — Adam failed, but Jesus would tend earth's "garden" well (cf. Genesis 2:15, Romans 5:15-21). Mary didn't recognize Jesus (maybe she was blinded by her tears), but it seems his voice, the way he said her name, was unmistakable. (Remember John 10 where Jesus said the sheep recognize the shepherd's voice.) Then Jesus sent Mary to be the very first eyewitness to the risen Christ.

Application

In his Bible commentary, N.T. Wright said, "If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a convincing story about people seeing Jesus, they wouldn't have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene." What does Jesus' trust in Mary to share the good news of Easter tell you about how Jesus saw the value of all people in his new creation?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in the beginning you created. Then, when everything went wrong, you came and launched a new creation. I want to be part of your new creation, to join Mary in sharing the news of a risen Lord. Amen.

Thursday, April 4

Scripture: John 20:19-23

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

Observation

Everything the disciples thought they understood about Jesus' mission seemed lost. Their leader and would-be Messiah was dead. Now Jesus' body was missing. The disciples were in hiding, afraid the Jewish authorities would come after them next. But no one had stolen Jesus' body, and he was still their Messiah, in ways that surpassed their wildest dreams. "Jesus...stood among them" and gave them his peace, his purpose ("As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"), and his power ("Receive the Holy Spirit").

Application

Have you ever been "commissioned" to do something you felt inadequate to do? Jesus told the disciples, "If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Wait — isn't that God's job? The answer is yes — and God has "breathed" the Holy Spirit into us and will do his work through us. How can you participate in Jesus' work of extending God's forgiveness to others, while warning them that sin is a serious, deadly disease?

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for defeating death through Jesus' resurrection. Help me to embrace your peace and purpose, and to trust the Holy Spirit as my power source as I shine your light in the dark world around me. Amen.

Friday, April 5

Scripture: John 20:24-28

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be

with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!”

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Observation

For unknown reasons, Thomas missed Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples. He refused to take their word for the remarkable claim that Jesus was alive. But Jesus was patient with Thomas’ fears and questions. He came again when Thomas was present and said “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.” As with Mary in the garden, the presence of his clearly alive Lord overcame all Thomas’ doubt. He worshiped, calling Jesus “my Lord and my God.”

Application

The risen Christ was different — he could walk through locked doors, for example (verse 26). But he was not a ghost or an imposter — that was the point of “Reach out your hand and put it into my side.” This was physically him, Jesus, the body the grave clothes could not contain. The Word who became flesh (John 1:14) arose as flesh still, but with what Paul would call a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-47). In what ways can knowing a bit about how Christ was raised “flesh out” your hope and expectation for life with him eternally?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are my Lord and my God. You are my Creator and my Redeemer. Because you live, I too will live forever. I thank you and I praise you today. Amen.

Saturday, April 6

Scripture: John 20:29-31

Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.”

Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples’ presence, signs that aren’t recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

Observation

Because this gospel was written as the generation of the apostles was dying out, Thomas’ experience took on special significance. If people weren’t willing to trust the testimony of those who’d seen Jesus, the faith would soon die out. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” We don’t see Jesus as the apostles did. An eyewitness wrote this gospel, however, so that we may believe as they did, and have eternal life.

Application

This was almost certainly the fourth Gospel's original ending. (Chapter 21 reads like a sequel added later, for a special purpose.) John made no claim to being an exhaustive biography of Jesus, written for any abstract, academic purpose. No — “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name.” William Barclay wrote, “We must read [the Gospels], not primarily as historians seeking information, but as [those] seeking God.” In what ways have you come to know God better this Lenten season?

Prayer

Dear God, guide me as I use whatever gifts I have to bear witness to my Savior. Amen