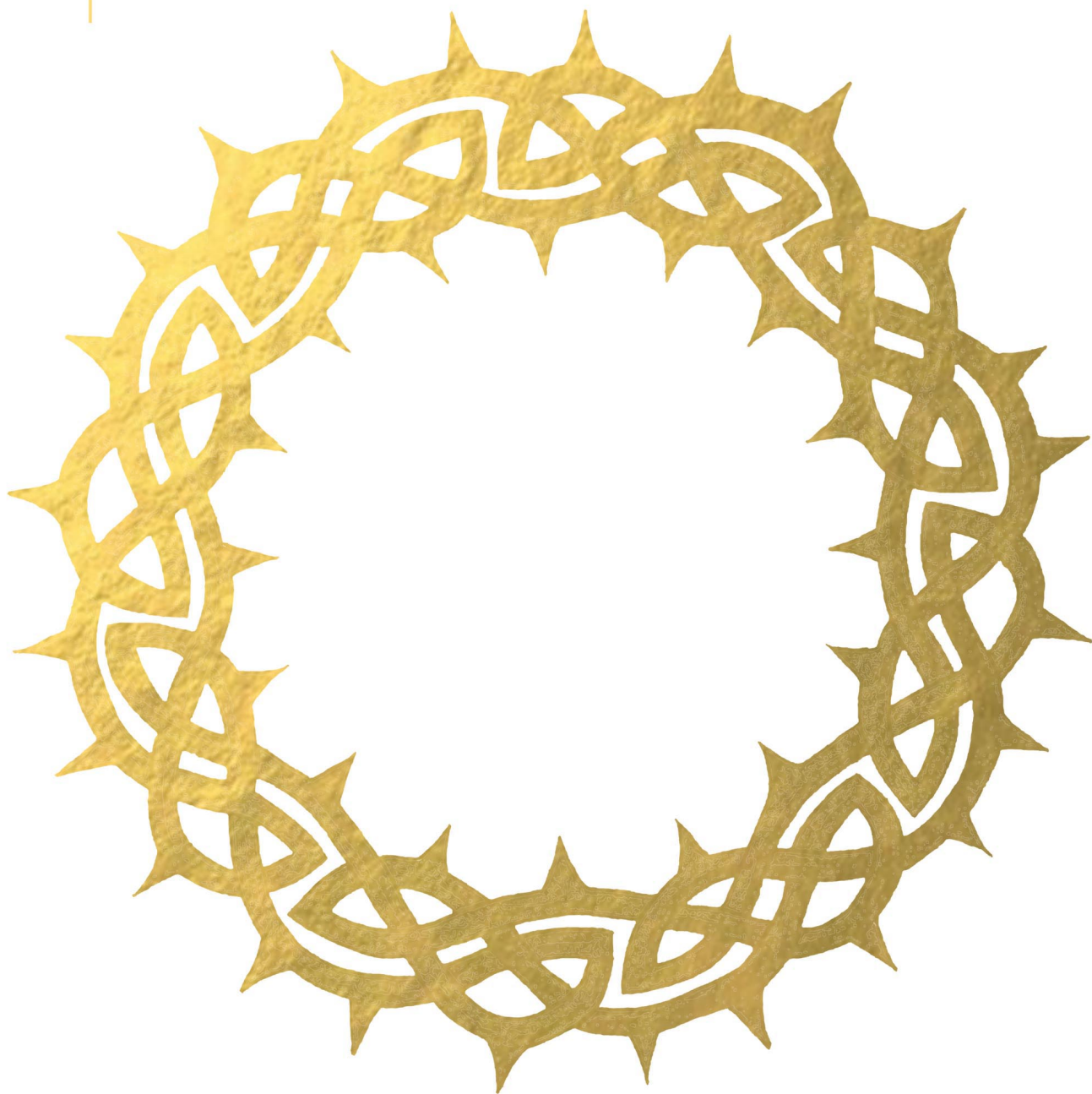


LEVEL

GROUND
mennonite church



2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL SERIES

week eight: apr 4 - apr 10

CONTENTS

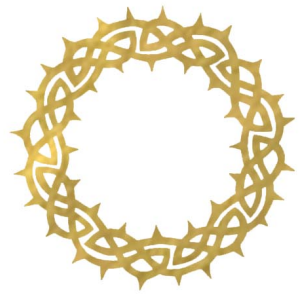
| | |
|---|-----------|
| Day 47: April 4, Easter Sunday..... | 1 |
| <i>The Resurrection of Jesus</i> | |
| Day 48: April 5..... | 5 |
| <i>The Disciples Meet Jesus on the Road</i> | |
| Day 49: April 6..... | 6 |
| <i>Doubting with Thomas</i> | |
| Day 50: April 7..... | 8 |
| <i>Breakfast on the Beach</i> | |
| Day 51: April 8..... | 10 |
| <i>A Vocation of Excellence</i> | |
| Day 52: April 9..... | 12 |
| <i>The Promise of the Holy Spirit</i> | |
| Day 53: April 10..... | 13 |
| <i>The Ascension</i> | |
| Colouring Activity..... | 15 |

DAY 47: APRIL 4, EASTER SUNDAY

Theme: The Resurrection of Jesus

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Prepared by: Andrew Haak



Do you like surprises?

You might be surprised to hear that my wife startles easily. There was that time I made a surprise eight-hour roadtrip to see her when we were dating. With the help of Marie's roommate I was able to sneak into her house and was nearly arms-length away from her while her back was to me. When she turned to see me nonchalantly leaning against the doorframe, Marie let out a sizable scream and collapsed to the floor! What was meant to be a good surprise, was first experienced as shock, fear, and disbelief. But don't worry! She eventually recovered and we continue to live out our happily ever after.

The Easter story is full of surprises, and maybe no written account contains more surprises than John's record of the event.

Here are some of them:

Tying back to my story, it may be surprising to discover that joy is one of the last emotions to be experienced in the Easter account. Instead of happy feelings, as we follow the characters of the story we see reactions that we don't typically associate with this day: emotions such as grief, confusion, fright, and desperation. It can be helpful to remember that Easter wasn't all celebration: these are heavy, intense, dark experiences.

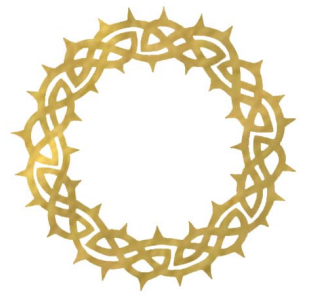
Speaking of dark, as readers several thousands of kilometers and a couple thousand of years removed from this event, we may not catch some of the surprising subtly included in this story. For example, it's not a throwaway detail for the author to note that Mary left while it was still dark. Not only does this imply that she had very little sleep, but also that she's willing to risk traveling without sunlight to complete her task; no small risk for anyone, let alone a woman, in ancient times.



John 20:16-17

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

(NIV)



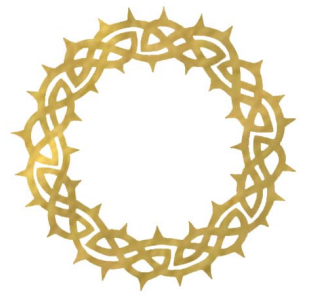
Further, drawing from details earlier in this gospel, we can assume that Mary is traveling from Bethany where the disciples had been staying for the past week. To get to Jesus' tomb, Mary would have to travel several kilometers across hilly terrain that led through the Garden of Gethsemane to arrive at the burial site. Traveling four or five kilometers isn't that big of a deal, but based on how this story develops we can surmise that Mary travelled this path at least four times that day: first to arrive at the tomb at dark, second to retrieve the disciples, third to return back to the tomb a second time, and finally fourth to tell the disciples the good news. That's a lot of traveling!

Speaking of traveling, to read that the disciples ran to the tomb should also be a bit of a surprise. To run in typical ancient Middle Eastern attire would have been clumsy, awkward, and even a little embarrassing. It would have been social inappropriate for full grown men to run, but these two took the risk.

While one disciple is identified as Peter there is a surprising figure, an unnamed follower who is identified as "the other disciple." Based on the author's storytelling tendencies, we can infer this is John's way of highlighting his own part in the story without drawing too much attention to himself. Of course he also identifies himself as "the one Jesus loved" so make what you will of attempts at humility!

There is the also surprise of the empty tomb, of course. Well, to be specific, Jesus' body wasn't there but the tomb was far from empty. The tomb in and of itself contained all sorts of surprises: first, there was the surprise of the rock rolled away; second, the shocking realization that Jesus' body was missing; third, the confusing discovery of Jesus' burial cloths neatly organized; and last, the sudden appearance of two angelic beings in the tomb after Peter and John turn for home.

The fact that the tomb wasn't completely empty matters. Grave robbing was a common enough occurrence, especially if the deceased was of significance; and there was also the unfounded claim that the disciples may attempt to move Jesus' body in an act of deception. Therefore, a completely empty tomb could have lead to wrong conclusions and a lack of credibility: and yet, grave robbers would have no reason to unwrap Jesus' body which would have been decomposing by this time (let alone take the time to fold the cloths left behind); further, there is of course the testimony of the angels! Combined, these two details provided early evidence for Christ's resurrection.



Pausing here for a moment, isn't it a little surprising that Mary seems oblivious to the fact that the two men she's talking with are obviously angels? At a very basic level, isn't it surprising that she isn't bewildered by the fact that there are two people talking to her from inside a tomb?!

This takes us back to the main character in this story: Mary herself is full of surprises. It's surprising enough that she of all people is at the center of the story! First, she is neither one of the 12 disciples nor a family member of Jesus. Second, as a woman her voice legally didn't count which means she would never be considered a credible witness according to standards of her time. Yet, the disciples believed her when she told them that the tomb had been tampered with. More importantly, she of all people is the first to see the resurrected Jesus! Who will believe her if her testimony technically didn't count?

Backing up a little, it's worth noting that at this point in the story there is a second surprising figure. Initially a mistaken identity on Mary's part, this leads to the surprising revelation upon which this whole story turns: that is no gardener Mary speaks to, that is the risen Jesus, her rabbi, the Christ!

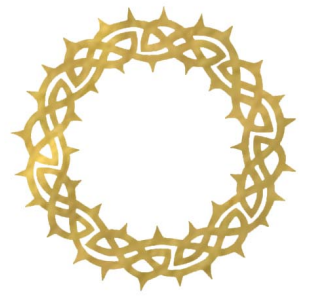
Maybe Mary was so distraught that she couldn't see clearly, or maybe she was in desperate need of corrective lens, but it's a little boggling that she didn't see the angels for who they were and similarly didn't recognize Jesus until he said her name. Either way, she mistook him for a gardener, which doesn't paint a very flattering image of Jesus.

Let me explain.

Maybe our pictures of Jesus all majestic and glowing and clean isn't how Jesus looked that day. If he passed for a gardener, he probably looked pretty ordinary, maybe ragged and dirty even since gardening was low-end employment in that time. This maybe is a little surprising for us, a mental picture of a messy God. As Nadia Bolz-Weber writes, we are left with the impression that "the God of Easter is a God with dirt under his nails."*

But Jesus' resurrection isn't the last surprise of the day. Cryptically Jesus tells Mary to not cling to him. This is confusing: why can't Mary hold onto Jesus? Perhaps there is a double meaning. First, Mary has to let go of Jesus because Jesus isn't back to stay; now that he's conquered death he's returning to heaven. Wouldn't that have been a difficult surprise for Mary to receive? She just recovered Jesus, only to hear he's planning to leave.

*Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful, Faith of a Sinner & Saint*. Page 173.



Second, Mary can't hold onto Jesus because she needs to go tell the disciples that he is alive and won't be around for much longer. Sent on her way and leaving Jesus behind, she becomes the apostle to the apostles, the one who first brought the good news to those closest to Jesus. These are the surprises of Easter.

As one who has heard the Easter story ever since birth, it surprises me how the story can still surprise me. And so as we revel today in family festivities and receive with gladness again the wonder of a God who overcame the grave, celebrating with joy that Jesus is alive, may we never lose the capacity to be surprised by God. May the Easter story never become stale and old news us. May we continue to keep our eyes and ears open for what God is resurrecting around us, the new things he is doing; he created at the very beginning and his still creating today. Bound no more by grave clothes or tomb, our God cannot be contained!

Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!

Prayer:

Resurrecting God, resurrect in me the capacity to see and hear you
in all the ordinary, mystifying, and awe-inspiring ways you reveal yourself.

Thank you for the surprise of Easter,
and for all the surprises you lay in my life that lead me to you.

DAY 48: APRIL 5

Theme: The Disciples Meet Jesus on the Road

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

Prepared by: Hans & Alice Federau



It is an interesting fact that at least 5 resurrection appearances of Jesus on Resurrection Sunday are recorded. One of them being the appearance to two people going to Emmaus, which was situated about 7 miles west of Jerusalem (according to the NIV map).

It had been an exciting first day of the week and we can imagine how the two discouraged disciples reviewed the day in words and thoughts. They were probably a bit baffled when an unknown wayfarer joined them; even more so when they perceived that this person (Jesus) was not familiar with the events of the day in Jerusalem. Think of it, as these two discouraged disciples walked with the Savior; he explained the Old Testament to them, showing them how it proved the Messiah would come, suffer, die and rise again. Their discouragement likely faded away, and a surging joy came with their new information. Their hearts burned within them.

Cleopas & his companion invited Jesus, in true Middle Eastern fashion, to stay with them for it was nearly evening. However, we can also imagine that they wanted to keep the conversation going as he was so well informed of the Scripture.

Supper was prepared and they were ready to eat, when Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Can you imagine that moment when they recognized Jesus? But then He was gone!

In their excitement they just got up from the table, probably without having taken a bite to eat and rushed back to Jerusalem. Likely they didn't find that long walk back to Jerusalem all that tiring as they had such wonderful news to share with the other disciples. Before Cleopas and the other disciple could share the wonderful news, the 11 disciples told them that Jesus had appeared to Simon. What an evening that must have been for all of them. After all that excitement they probably didn't get any sleep that night!

May the announcement "He lives"
fill all our hearts with joy
this Easter Season!

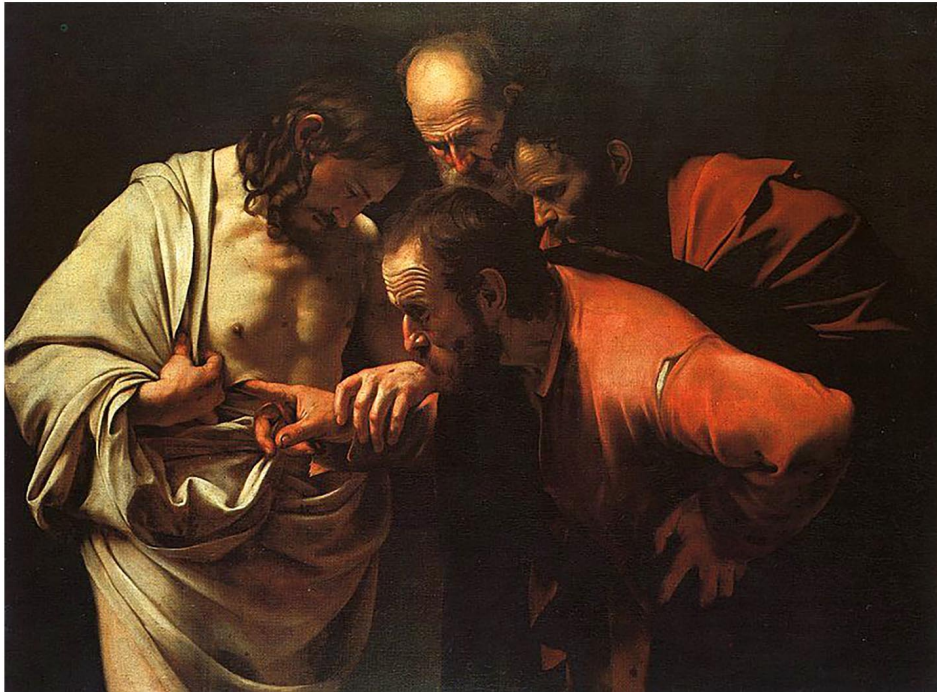
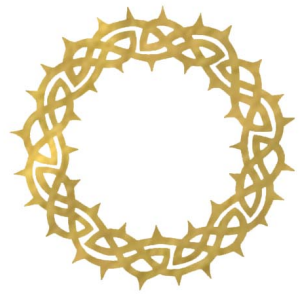


Luke 24:30-31

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.
(NIV)

DAY 49: APRIL 6

Theme: Doubting with Thomas
Scripture: John 20:24-29
Prepared by: Crystal Wildeboer



After you read the passage for today, take a look at this painting. Is there anything that stands out to you? Notice how Jesus is holding Thomas's arm. Pay attention to how Thomas is putting his finger into Jesus's side. Imagine the story as you read. Are there any words and phrases that stick out for you? What feelings or emotions come up for you when you read the passage and examine the painting?

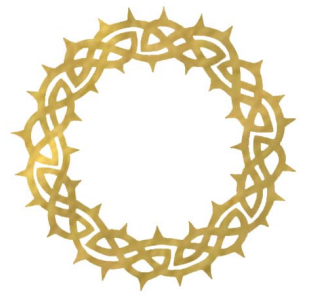
One thing that stood out for me in this story is the fact that Jesus showed up to Thomas one week after he did to the other disciples for the first time. They had all already been told by Mary Magdalene and Mary (Jesus's mother) that Jesus was no longer dead on the morning of the Sabbath. None of them believed either, until Jesus showed up while all the doors were closed and locked and actually ate some fish to prove he wasn't a ghost (Luke 24:36-42). Thomas wasn't there that time. It would be one week before Thomas would see Jesus.

ONE WEEK.



John 20:27-28

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
(NIV)



Imagine that week. What more proof would Thomas need? The others had seen Jesus's wounds, and they even ate a meal together! Maybe he just kept repeating his initial response of having to see Jesus and put his hand in his wound in order for him to believe it for himself. Again, Jesus suddenly appeared though the doors were locked.

I've often told people that Thomas is one of my favorite disciples. He was a man who followed Jesus, witnessed his many miracles and had a close relationship with him (he was, after all, one of the disciples)—and he still doubted. I'm pretty sure, because of that, God can handle my questions and doubts as well—which, I must admit—I have plenty of.

God isn't afraid of our doubts and questions. I can imagine that most of us have been in the position of literally crying out to God asking if he is real, if he is really there, and if he is, to do **something—ANYTHING**—to show us.

For Thomas, doubt eventually led him to the truth. I wonder if sometimes it is the same for us as well. Could our struggles and doubts about God actually lead us to faith?

What role does doubt play in your faith?
Has doubt ever brought you to truth?

In the middle of this pandemic, what things help you feel, see, and touch Jesus?
What helps you believe in him?

What would it look like to allow Jesus to hold a safe space for your doubts and fears?

Theme: Breakfast on the Beach

Scripture: John 21:1-19

Prepared by: Karen Heidebrecht-Thiessen



Sometimes our lives begin to unravel before our very eyes. For Peter, the great unravelling took place around a charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard. Maybe it was the angry shouts and the sickening sounds of Jesus being beaten inside. Maybe it was the fear that overwhelmed him and took over. But that night around a flickering fire, three times—3 times!—he had denied even knowing Jesus.

Ever since that devastating night, Peter has been unable to silence the condemning voice in his head that kept shouting at him over and over and over,

**"Simon Peter, you are a failure, a loser, an imposter.
You said you loved Jesus and then look what you did!
Peter, whatever possessed you to even think that
you could count yourself a friend of Jesus'?"**

Peter was done deluding himself. He heads back home to Galilee, rigs up his boat, and goes back to his old life as a fisherman.

After a long night of frustrating and futile fishing with his friends, the sun is coming up and on the advice of a random guy on the beach, they try a different fishing strategy that leads to an extraordinary catch of fish. As they approach the shore, someone recognizes who the man on the beach is and yells, "It's the Lord!" And suddenly something inside Peter just breaks. He pulls a tunic over his head, jumps overboard, and starts booking it toward Jesus, stumbling through the waves and the weeds, probably bawling his eyes out. And when he gets there, he finds breakfast waiting for him—bread and fish, cooking over a charcoal fire.

You see, Jesus is well aware of the pain and shame Peter is carrying. That's why he seeks him out on the lakeshore- to ask him one essential question, the only question that really matters. He asks him not once, not twice but three times,

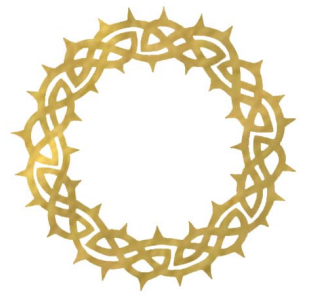
"Peter, do you love me?"



John 21:17

The third time
he said to him
"Simon son of
John, do you
love me?"

Peter was hurt
because Jesus
asked him the
third time,
"Do you love me?"
He said, "Lord,
you know all
things; you know
that I love you."
(NIV)



After all of Peter's lies and deceit. After his failure and cowardice. After his deep betrayal of the one who loved him and believed in him. After all that, Jesus simply asks him one essential question: "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus shows up on a beach to eat breakfast with the one he still loves, but will Peter be able to receive that love? Three times, Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" And finally, emptied of all his boasting and bravado, humbled by his failure and more sorry than he has ever felt before, Peter simply says, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Despite the failure, the betrayal and the mess of his life, Peter is finally able to admit how desperately he longs to be loved by Jesus.

When you find yourself assuming that it's over, that everything is lost, gone, broken, and it can never be put back together again, hold on a minute because in that moment Jesus shows up on the lakeshore of your life and offers you some breakfast and asks you one question, the one essential question,

"Child, do you love me?"

No matter how deep your shame, no matter how loud the voice of self-condemnation, Jesus wants to restore you, Jesus wants to love you, Jesus wants to recommission you.

Are you ready to sit down with Jesus at a charcoal fire on a beach, bringing your fear and shame into the warmth and light of his love?

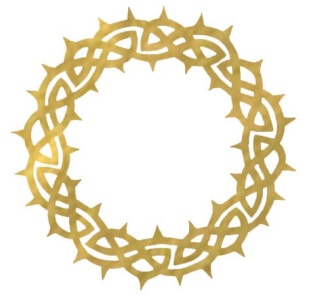
Are you ready to let Jesus feed you with his grace, so that you can go out and offer the same life-giving food to a grace-starved world?

Jesus is waiting on the lakeshore to have breakfast with you.
Will you join him?

Theme: A Vocation of Excellence

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Prepared by: Clifford Weber



The dream for the ability for the average person to go to space is probably closer than it is farther away. And is made more possible each day that dedicated people of passion perform their vocation in the space industry and related fields. Our Canadian, Chris Hadfield is certainly one of those individuals who has demonstrated excellence in this regard. In his book, *An Astronauts Guide to Life on Earth*, he brings a perspective unique to his experiences. Much of it from out of this world.

One thing that struck me was his observation that those who make it to space are often overwhelmed with their own convictions.

He writes that those who believe in God believe more, and those who don't, don't—even more.

It is a loose paraphrase but it echos of the experience of the disciples post-resurrection.

Some believed more, and some believed less.

Imagine that, the disciples of Jesus, who learned from and lived with Jesus experiencing much of the same things together, still came to a conclusion where some believed more, and some a little less. It seems reasonable that everyone given the same information would come to the same conclusion. However, just one minute on social media demonstrates that it is not that way at all. Evidence for Hadfield's observation of humanity abound everywhere. Some will believe the same, some will believe different.

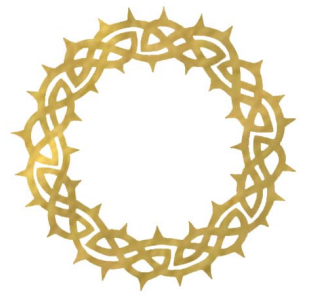
Today many are glad for the ancient monks that instead of making wine from water learned how to make beer from grains. Perhaps not the miracle Jesus intended us to teach others but seems allowable within the general sense of the verses in today's scripture. And to see differently is okay.



Matthew 28:19-20

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(NIV)



Thankfully humanity learns and lives different things from the life of Jesus:

'Some for proclaiming good news to the poor.
Some for proclaiming freedom for the prisoners.
Some to recover sight for the blind.
Some to set the oppressed free.
Some to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'
(Luke 4:18-19, loosely.)

Because there are all kinds of needs in the world, the world needs all kinds of disciples of Jesus. What, therefore, is your vocation of excellence? What have you learned from Christ and from living with others?

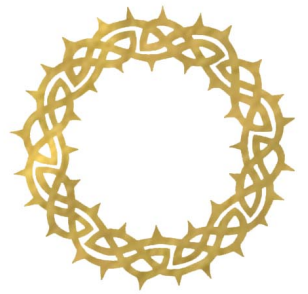
Prayer of Reflection:
"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed,
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him."
(Colossians 3:17 NIV)

DAY 52: APRIL 9

Theme: The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Scripture: John 16:5-22, 33

Prepared by: Sylvia Casey



As I was reading this passage, my focus kept returning to verse 7. Depending on the translation, the Spirit is referred to as:

| | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------------------|------------|
| Advocate | Comforter | Helper | Counsellor |
| Friend | Intercessor | Strengtheners | Standby |
| | Companion | Divine Encourager | |

These descriptors/characteristics point to a deep understanding that we will face difficulties and that we are not meant to face them alone. Prior to this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that those who hated and persecuted Him will hate and persecute them, even while thinking they are doing what God wants. He then tells them (again) that He will be going away. And throughout this passage, Jesus tells His disciples that they will experience great difficulties and He offers them words of encouragement to press on:

I am going away ... and I will send the Spirit to you. (v 5-7)

You will weep and mourn and grieve ...
and your grief will turn to joy. (v 20)

You will have many trials and sorrows ...
and you can have peace in Me. (v 33)

When looking at the list of the descriptors of the Spirit, what aspects are you in need of right now? Do you experience those within you? Do you experience those through others? What aspects are within you that you can offer to others?

Prayer:

Spirit, as I go throughout my day, remind me
that You are with me and within me.

Help me to be aware of Your presence, to pay attention to
what You are saying, to be a presence in someone else's life.

Songs:

Holy Spirit by Francesca Battistelli (Listen [HERE](#))

You Shine by Brian Doerksen (Listen [HERE](#))



John 16:33

"I have told you
these things,
so that in
me you may
have peace.

In this
world you will
have trouble.
But take heart!
I have overcome
the world."
(NIV)

Theme: The Ascension

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Prepared by: Andrew Haak



Are we there yet?

As I child I can recall times when I had a partially formed idea of where we were going, but no concept of when we would arrive and what things would look like when we got there. Whether it was driving across the Prairies for the first time or travelling down to Disneyland, I'm sure my siblings and I inquired far too frequently, "Are we there yet?"

This is the same kind of feeling I get when I see the disciples ask Jesus, "Now is the kingdom going to be restored?" For them, this is what the journey was supposed to lead to. Over the three years with Jesus they have experienced many highs and lows, and none higher and lower than the last month. I picture them making not-so-subtle eye contact with one another, nudging each other around the table, until one of them asks Jesus timidly, "Are we there yet?"

Not only does Jesus evade a straight answer, he essentially tosses them the keys, steps out of the driver seat, and promises them that he'll send them a navigator so that they can continue without him the journey he started them on.

The ascension of Jesus brings a strange mix of feelings. On the one hand, it's an awe-inspiring supernatural send off complete with angels and a mind-boggling miracle. This is a triumphant and poetic conclusion to Jesus' time on earth, a parallel to Elijah's departure when he commissioned Elisha to pick up his mantle (literally and figuratively).

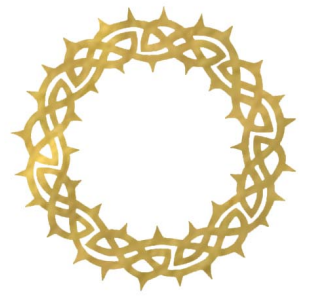
And yet, on the other hand this event is damped by a sullen mood: Jesus is taken from them, again. As readers, this tension is palatable. We can see where they might be coming from: why bother with the convincing proofs of his genuine return if he only comes to leave again? I wouldn't fault the disciples if they were feeling a little confused, jilted or dismayed. If the church is the bride of Christ, this kind of feels like being left at the altar.



Acts 1:11

"Men of Galilee,"
they said, "why
do you stand
here looking
into the sky?"

This same Jesus,
who has been
taken from you
into heaven, will
come back in the
same way you
have seen him
go into heaven."
(NIV)



This isn't the only counterintuitive dilemma they are given during their relatively short reunion with Jesus.

They are told to stay ... so that they can be sent.

They are to let go of Jesus ... so that they can receive the Holy Spirit.

They are to see the kingdom be re-established ... by bringing the message of God's kingdom to the world, even to their enemies.

It's easy for our eyes to fixate on the miracle and not the mission. Understandably we may be drawn to the manner in which Jesus vacates earth, but the way this story is framed seems to imply that the emphasis should be on what Jesus said and not what Jesus did.

As followers of Jesus, we inherit this two thousand year-old mission. We are sent by the Holy Spirit into the world to be Christ's witnesses. It's as relevant and radical now as it was then. And as much as we often want Jesus to take the wheel, that's not the way he's left it. The Holy Spirit isn't our chauffeur, leaving us passively in the backseat. According to God's design and will, picking up Christ's mission means we are thrust into the driver seat with the Holy Spirit as our passenger seat instructor and navigator, just like the original disciples.

Are we there yet? No we are not. The mission remains the same and we still have a ways to go, but we do not go alone.

Prayer:

Today I express my gratitude for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

May my ears be open to the Spirit's guidance;
may my hands be strengthened by the Spirit's power;
may my heart be fuelled with the Spirit's love;
and may my voice convey the Spirit's truth.

Reflect:

To whom are you witnessing?
Where is the Spirit directing you to go?
What does picking up Christ's mission on earth look like to you?

COLOURING ACTIVITY

For all ages of contemplative colourers, sensational scribblers or meditative makers.

