

JOURNEY
THROUGH JOHN

40
DAYS
of
JOHN

A LENTEN DAILY DEVOTIONAL

by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville

WEEK 7

SUNDAY

Take time today to reflect on the readings from this past week, reread some of the most meaningful passages, or catch up on any devotionals you missed. Rest in the grace of God that is freely and extravagantly given today and every day.

DAY 35

MONDAY, APRIL 6

READ

John 19:1-27

REFLECT

It is Holy Week. If we are to make it to Easter, we must walk with Jesus first to Golgotha. The crowds have just been singing, “Hosanna, King of the Jews!” Now they are shouting, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Would we have been in those fickle mobs or deserting him with the disciples? The physical pain of the cross was excruciating, yet the mental and spiritual suffering was unimaginable. Jesus was taking on the anguish of the whole world. It is the Day of Preparation for Passover. The lambs are being slaughtered for the Passover meal. Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), is being slaughtered on the cross. Exodus was the liberation from slavery. The cross sets us free from sin. Free from suffering? No. Free to follow Jesus as beloved children of God. Free to suffer with Christ for the broken world. Free to suffer with all who are in pain. Free to set aside our illusions of power, wealth, and success to follow Jesus.

RESPOND

Walk with Jesus this week even if it means to allow yourself to feel his suffering. Jesus has prayed for us to be one with him. He is one with your pain. Christ is walking with you setting you free to love.

PRAY

Gracious Lord, we are overwhelmed by your love, your suffering for us. Set us free to love as you love. Help us this day to walk with others who are hurting. Amen.

DAY 36

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

READ

John 19:28-42

REFLECT

This must have been one of the most painful memories for John to recall. To record this scene must have taken every ounce of faithfulness he had to offer. Writing on the other side of the resurrection, I'd imagine every gospel writer was tempted to rush past the crucifixion. John takes his time. He spends a few verses recording in detail how the body of Jesus was handled in death. His legs were not broken. Water and blood poured from his side. Scripture was fulfilled. Essential to the good news of Jesus' resurrection is his death. Without Jesus' death, the resurrection would ring hollow. As we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, may we be willing to reflect upon a God who sent a savior that would experience the fullness of death on the path to resurrection.

RESPOND

Why was death part of God's great plan of salvation? Does John's willingness to include these verses stir anything in me? If I were to take Jesus' death seriously, how might that change how I live in light of the resurrection?

PRAY

God of heaven above and earth below, may I cherish your willingness to come down, be born, and die the death of a criminal, that I may dwell with you in the fullness of your Kingdom. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

READ

John 20:1-18

REFLECT

On the first day of the week, while it is still dark, Mary Magdalene travels to the tomb of her beloved teacher, Jesus. She anticipates finding Jesus' dead body behind a tombstone. Instead, Mary finds the stone removed from the tomb and His body gone. Mary believes that Jesus' body has been stolen. What a wild spectrum of emotions Mary must have encountered in such a brief time: grief, shock, dismay, confusion, and then....

Mary is met by a man she supposes to be the gardener. But when Jesus says her name, "Mary," there is something in His voice, perhaps the way He says her name, and she knows that this One before her is Jesus. And yet, Mary does not really know who Jesus is. Mary calls Jesus, "Rabboni" or teacher and she must have tried to touch Jesus. Jesus responds, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Jesus was teaching Mary who He is, more than a rabbi or teacher. Jesus is Lord, the Son of God.

RESPOND

Who is Jesus to you? Are you allowing Jesus Christ to teach you who He is? Can you let go of whatever you find yourself clinging to or the many things you are juggling, in order to receive from God the most important gift we will ever receive? Are you willing to offer back to God the blessings of your life with thanksgiving? Are you willing to allow God to transform grasping hands of fear into open hands of gratitude?

When we live life with open hands of gratitude for the blessings of life, we are free to hold the hand of a Living God and entrust ourselves and our loved ones to His care.

PRAY

Gracious God, Help me to live with open hands of gratitude, offering back to You all the blessings of my life and entrusting all that I hold so dear to Your care. Teach me who You are and help me to trust You and love You more. May I receive peace in the assurance that in life and in death I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

READ

John 20:19-30

REFLECT

After news of the resurrection, the disciples can be found back in the upper room, hiding in fear with the door locked. The good news of the resurrection is unbelievable for what's left of the twelve (Judas is no longer with them and Thomas is absent for some reason). It's in that place of fear and doubt that Jesus appears to them. "Peace be with you," Jesus says. If there is anything that could be farther from their hearts, it's peace. The Peace of Christ breaks through and ignores the barriers of their fear, shame, and doubt. Christ's peace does the same thing in our lives, ignoring the padlocked doors of hearts and appearing to us right in the middle of our fear and loneliness. Thomas wasn't with the disciples in that upper room when Jesus appeared. When he hears what happened, he refuses to believe. Thomas says, *Unless I put my fingers in the holes in his hands and feet and stick my hand in his side, I will not believe.* How often do we respond the same way to Christ's peace? Unless we can see, know, and understand where Christ's peace is in the midst of all this fear and shame and grief, we will not believe. Thomas' doubt is enough to keep the disciples in the upper room. They've grown a little in their faith. Now the door is only shut and no longer locked. Jesus decides to take Thomas up on his challenge. He appears a second time with Thomas present. When Thomas responds with belief Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

RESPOND

Where are the places you are demanding that the risen Lord show up in recognizable ways that you can see and touch? Where are the places in your life that you need to hear Christ say, peace be *with you*? Have you allowed your fear, shame, loneliness, and doubt to lock the door of your heart? What would it be like if in pure Thomas-like fashion, you waited for Christ to show up?

PRAY

Today, just sit still. Take a minute (or five or fifteen or more) sitting like the disciples did. Name your fear and doubt. Offer it to Christ in prayer and sit still. Listen for the voice of Christ Jesus. "Peace be with you." If you don't feel like you can open yourself up to God in this moment, don't worry. Christ can work with your padlocked heart. Offer it to him, sit still, and listen. Amen.

DAY 39

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

READ

20:19-30

REFLECT

“When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord... he threw himself into the sea”

As a giggling adolescent, my friends and I would always snicker at the part of this story when Peter has to get dressed because apparently fishermen in the Ancient Near East went out on the boat naked to do their work. Of course, our nervous laughter covered up our own embarrassment and inflated sense of self at that tenuous age. However, I realize I have not grown so much more mature even in adulthood as I read this passage and find myself critiquing Peter’s impetuosity. C’mon dude, you’re not THAT far away from the shore! Why don’t you wait? Take your time. Get dressed. And for goodness sakes, help your friends haul that huge load of fish in!

But Peter is not sensible or measured in his response to the risen Savior. He throws himself into the sea to greet him. And it’s not as if this is the first or only time Peter has seen the Lord after his resurrection. Jesus had already come to the disciples when they were locked in a room that first Easter night; he witnessed the encounter between Jesus and his doubting friend, Thomas. So why the urgency?

RESPOND

As we become more and more familiar with the Good News, it’s easy for us to lose our passion. We become reticent to “throw ourselves into the sea” of the unknown or to risk being seen as foolish or impulsive. On this Good Friday, as we stand at the foot of the cross and look up at our suffering Savior, we see that Jesus stopped at nothing to come to us. So we can take our cues from Peter, and rush to his side. What would that look like for you today?

PRAY

Jesus, as this year’s Good Friday feels a little more somber and strange, help us to stay in the discomfort a bit longer so that we might rush to be with You even in Your suffering. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 11

READ

John 21:15-25

REFLECT

Try not to draw conclusions about why Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Try not to assume you know why he used the words he did in talking about love and sheep. The best scholars don’t agree on those things.

Instead, let’s reflect on the big picture: before departing, Jesus called Peter to act toward Christians as one who has loving, gracious, responsible power.

“Shepherd” to Israelites was a well-known metaphor, one applied to kings, to God himself, and then to Jesus as the incarnate LORD.

How does God exercise authority? By laying down his life. Among followers of Jesus, authority is exercised not by lording it over others, but by taking up a cross. Let that be your marching order. You must exercise the authority you have been given, rather than avoiding it. The way that you exercise your authority is what matters. Clearly, your concern has to be the well-being of the flock, not any praise or respect or credit that you would receive.

Jesus says it another way in the synoptic gospels: “Anyone who would become my follower must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

RESPOND

If you tend to criticize people in authority, pray for God to purify your thoughts, to give you respect for authorities (See Romans 13). If you exercise authority, pray for God to purify your exercise of it, to conform your exercise of authority to the way of Jesus.

PRAY

Come, Lord Jesus Christ, in this season. Be gracious to every leader in this season, they all may exercise authority in the way of Jesus. Amen.



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