



grow. pray. study.

April 21, 2019 An Easter Message: “Mary, Weeping at the Tomb”

Scripture: John 20:1-11

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Jesus’ followers worshipped

MONDAY 4.22.19 Acts 13:1-3, 16:23-25

The Easter stories in the gospels tell us that as soon as Jesus’ followers met him alive again, they worshipped him ([Matthew 28:9, 17](#); [Luke 24:52-53](#), [John 20:24-28](#)). But worship was not just a one-time, impulsive response for them. It was a continual life practice. The Antioch church commissioned Barnabas and Saul (soon to go by “Paul”) for their first missionary journey “as they were worshipping.” And in a poignant scene of worship, Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison after a flogging, with their feet in stocks.

- Let’s think about this—“Around midnight [in stocks in prison], Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.” To what extent can you deal with even a long line at the store or slow traffic by praying and singing hymns (inwardly if not outwardly)? In what ways does Paul and Silas’ story provide a benchmark to help you assess how much room you have to keep growing in your personal practice of grateful worship?
- We see the inter-connections between the five spiritual practices in Acts 13. The act of worshipping opened the minds and hearts of the Antioch Christians to sense the Holy Spirit’s direction to send Barnabas and Saul to share the faith in other places. When have you sensed an inner nudge, large or small, from the Holy Spirit as you were worshipping? How can you maintain an openness to anything God wants to say to you in worship?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the ultimate Source of all that I am and have. I’m not likely to end up in stocks, but embed the habit of praise and gratitude in me so firmly that even there I could sing and pray. Amen.

Jesus' followers grew spiritually

TUESDAY 4.23.19 Acts 17:10-11, Ephesians 4:12-16; 2 Peter 3:14, 18

When the risen Jesus walked to Emmaus or met with his disciples, he didn't just say, "Look—it's me." He "interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures" ([Luke 24:25-27, 44-45](#)). The apostles Paul and Peter pointed their converts to the Scriptures as the challenging, invaluable source of their deepest understandings of God and God's love. From the start, Jesus' followers believed deeply that the Bible (at first, only the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament), carefully and rightly read, bore witness to Jesus.

- Paul was a methodical Bible reader. Acts 17:2-3 said he "interacted with [people] on the basis of the scriptures. Through his interpretation of the scriptures, he demonstrated that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. He declared, 'This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.'" It mattered to Paul that his faith in the resurrected Jesus was rooted in the Biblical documents. What role does the Bible play in your faith walk with Jesus?
- Methodism's founder John Wesley urged readers to "To set apart a little time, if you can, every morning and evening for [reading the Scripture] It might also be of use, if while we read, we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts, and lives." * Have the GPS and/or other tools helped you make daily Bible reading a habit? How can you reinforce and deepen that habit?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you worked with many human hands and voices to bring me the Bible. You speak to my heart and millions more through this amazing book. Renew my hunger to read and understand your one-of-a-kind story. Amen.

* Found at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.ii.i.html?highlight=set,apart,a,little,time#highlight>

Jesus' followers served

WEDNESDAY 4.24.19 Acts 6:1-6, 1 Peter 4:9-11

When the risen Christ met the apostle Peter, he gave him a chance (which Peter took) to "undo" his triple denial of Jesus (cf. [John 21:15-17](#)). That came with a renewed call to serve: "Feed my sheep." And that was for all of Jesus' followers, not just for Peter. So in Acts 6, the earliest church identified seven people to care more effectively for widows who felt passed over. In a later letter, Peter urged all disciples to serve each other according to the gifts God gave them.

- Does it surprise you to read that "a complaint" arose even in the very early church in Jerusalem? How did "the Twelve" lead "all the disciples" in making the community stronger by listening and responding to the valid issue the complaint had raised? How did their response reflect their commitment to live out Jesus' call to serve?
- The early church's ultimate goal, as reflected in today's passages, was to recruit people to serve primarily by using their God-given gifts. None of us are equally good at everything! As Peter put it, God calls us to be "good managers of God's diverse gifts." How are you managing and using your gifts to serve God's kingdom today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said you did not come to be served, but to serve. And you call me to follow in your steps. Help me to better serve your kingdom through the gifts you've given me. Amen.

Jesus' followers were generous

THURSDAY 4.25.19 Acts 4:32-37, 2 Corinthians 9:5-9

[Luke 24:28-29](#) showed two of Jesus' followers acting generously even before they realized he had risen and was the one walking with them. Acts 4 reported that the early Christians continued that pattern of generously sharing with one another. This expressed mutual love and caring, but it also recognized reality. They knew, as Pastor Hamilton wrote, that "we don't really own anything. God owns it all. As the psalmist wrote, 'The earth is the LORD's, and all that is in it' (Psalm 24:1)." *

- God-given love, the apostle Paul said, leads believers to be generous. His teaching to Christians in Corinth echoed Proverbs 11:24-25, saying that generally "Those who give generously receive more.... Generous persons will prosper." He saw giving not just as a material act, but as a way to express gratitude for all God gives us. What helps you to see your giving (whether you can give much or little) as a way to express your trust that "God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace," and not just one more bill to pay?
- Today is Thursday, so you're not likely to be where anyone will pass an offering plate. In what everyday ways can you show a generous spirit today? What is one thing you can identify that shows God's great generosity toward you? How can focusing on God's generosity toward you help you be more cheerfully generous toward others?

Prayer: Living Lord Jesus, you gave yourself fully for my sake. Grow in me a heart that more fully mirrors your generous spirit as I relate to others in my world. Amen.

* Adam Hamilton, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009, p. 79.

Jesus' followers shared their faith

FRIDAY 4.26.19 Acts 4:18-21; Acts 8:30-35

Three of the gospels report the risen Jesus telling his followers to share what they knew of Jesus with others ([Matthew 28:18-20](#), [Luke 24:47-48](#), [John 20:21-22](#)). The book of Acts ("volume 2" of Luke's gospel, in effect) showed the determination and responsiveness with which Jesus' followers lived out his commission. Confident that their crucified king was alive again, the formerly timid disciples were willing to proclaim him to anyone anywhere.

- The very same people who asked Pilate to kill Jesus arrested Peter and John and ordered them to stop preaching. But they were changed men. Jesus' resurrection and grace replaced their fear with earth-shaking boldness. When the council and the high priest ordered them NOT to preach, they had no doubt who they would obey. Have you ever had to decide whether to obey God or some human authority? If so, what did you decide to do?
- Pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie wrote, "Don't miss the fact that it was what the apostles had seen and heard that prompted their statement. That included their life with Jesus, His death for them, the Resurrection, Pentecost, and a miracle done through them." * They didn't share opinion or theory—they were eyewitnesses. How can their eyewitness testimony across the centuries help you trust that Jesus was who he said he was, and rose from the dead as he said he would?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you defeated death, hatred and evil. You ask me to be a witness to your Lordship. Give me the same courage you gave your first followers, without whose witness I might never have known you. Amen.

* Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 28: Acts*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983, p. 103.

Jesus' followers: lives built on Jesus' practices

SATURDAY 4.27.19 Acts 2:42-47

The very first Christians lived out their faith as a largely unknown group, living in a city that had crucified their Lord. But their certainty that the risen Christ was with them, reinforced by the apostles' teaching, prayer, fellowship and a radical spirit of helping one another bound them together. From their earliest days, they shared their faith in ways whose powerful effects in making people's lives better showed they were part of something that would ultimately be bigger than even the armies of the Roman Empire.

- The foundations of the early Christians' powerful impact were the five practices we have studied: worship, study, serve, give and share. In which of these areas do you sense God inviting you to grow in the light of Easter's wonderful news? What challenges do you face when it comes to contributing to the well-being of others? What holds you back? When have you found strength and courage for life through the encouragement you received from other Christians? How can you make it a holy habit to make your impact on others a consistently encouraging one?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Easter is a moving "mountaintop" experience. I ask you to help me live in its light, not just one weekend a year, but every day as I walk with you. Amen.

Family Activity: Celebrate Jesus and his resurrection by creating a small Easter garden! Select a container, fill it with dirt and place some simple plants inside. Build an empty tomb using rocks and sticks. Since Mary came to the tomb when it was still dark, add miniature candles to the garden to help light a path to the tomb. Collect one flat rock for each family member. Using a permanent marker, invite each person to write a word or phrase representing Easter such as "Hope" or "Jesus is Alive!" Place these rocks around the empty tomb. Read John 20:1-18. As your family tends the Easter garden in the coming weeks and months, let it be a reminder to also tend to your relationship with Jesus!

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer