**LifeGroup**

**Easter Changes Everything**

April 2, 2023

John 20:1-31

By dusk on Friday, Joseph and Nicodemus had finished burying the dead body of Jesus. The disciples were in hiding, fearing their own arrest, torture, and death. All their dreams of national liberation and spiritual revival had died when their Master had aptly cried "It is finished." While every other Jew in Jerusalem was celebrating the Passover, commemorating freedom from Egyptian slavery, the disciples of Jesus were cowering in fear. As the whole city was enjoying rest on the Sabbath, the disciples sat numb with grief.

Saturday passed. Night fell again. Shortly before dawn on Sunday, the women disciples who had followed Jesus from Galilee gathered to finish the burial Joseph and Nicodemus had begun (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:1, 10). As you read John 20:1-31, try to sense what Jesus' friends may have felt in these episodes.

**John 20:1-31 NLT**  Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.  (2)  She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”  (3)  Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.  (4)  They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.  (5)  He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in.  (6)  Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,  (7)  while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.  (8)  Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—  (9)  for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.  (10)  Then they went home.  (11)  Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in.  (12)  She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying.  (13)  “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”  (14)  She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him.  (15)  “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”  (16)  “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).  (17)  “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”  (18)  Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.  (19)  That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said.  (20)  As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!  (21)  Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”  (22)  Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.  (23)  If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”  (24)  One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came.  (25)  They told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”  (26)  Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” he said.  (27)  Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”  (28)  “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.  (29)  Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”  (30)  The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book.  (31)  But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

***The stone had been removed*** (20:1). The Greek implies that it was not rolled away, but lifted up out of its groove in some violent way.

***Folded up*** (20:7). "In recent years this has often been taken to mean that the grave clothes were just as they had been when placed round the body. That is to say, Jesus' body rose through the grave-clothes without disturbing them. This is not inconsistent with the language, but it should be borne in mind that John does not say this. That the headcloth was not with the others scarcely supports this, for had this been the case it would have been right alongside them, with no more than the length of the neck (if that) between them... However, whatever be the truth of this, John is plainly describing an orderly scene, not one of wild confusion. This means that the body had not been taken by grave-robbers. They would never have left the cloths wrapped neatly. They would have taken the body, cloths and all, or would have torn the cloths off and scattered them." The early Church bishop John Chrysostom commented that myrrh "glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead."

  1.  What evidence of Jesus' resurrection is recorded in 20:1-21:14?

2.  The disciples still did not understand that the Scriptures predicted the Resurrection even after they observed evidence that began to convince them that a resurrection had occurred (20:9). Why is this significant?

3.  What do these passages suggest about the resurrected Jesus, especially about His body?

20:14; 21:4

20:19, 26

20:20, 27

4.  Put yourself in Mary's place in 20:10-18, and read the passage meditatively a few times. How would she feel...

alone at the empty tomb (20:10-15)?

when Jesus says her name (20:16)?

5.  Why do you think Mary recognized Jesus when He said her name (20:16)? (See 10:3-4.)

***Do not hold on to me*** (20:17). The Greek means "Stop clinging to Me." Mary was apparently holding Jesus in joy and worship, but He assured her that He ***had not yet returned to the Father***—He would be around for awhile and there was no need to cling to Him as though He might vanish. Also, Mary was acting as though everything was the same between them, but in fact the Resurrection had changed many things.

6.  What is significant about the way Jesus refers to God in 20:17?

***Peace be with you*** (20:19, 21, 26). This is the usual Jewish greeting, but it is more than just a conventional "Hello" in 20:19. "After their conduct on Good Friday the disciples might have expected rebuke or blame. Instead Jesus pronounces peace upon them."He repeats the blessing of peace when He commissions them (20:21), perhaps to stress that the promise made before His arrest (14:27) is being fulfilled as a result of His death and insurrection.

7.  "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21). What does this comparison tell you about the mission Jesus has given to His followers?

***Breathed on them*** (20:22). Jesus re-created His disciples just as God created man in the beginning (Genesis 2:7). The spirit/breath in a person gives him or her physical life; the Spirit/breath of God gives him or her eternal life. Ezekiel 37:3-5 prophesied this life-giving breathing.

***If you forgive...*** (20:23). This verse has led to much disagreement among Christians. What is the meaning of this power to forgive and retain sins? Who has it? How is it exercised? Some interpretations are:

1. Each individual Christian has the authority to pronounce forgiveness upon a believer who confesses a sin.

2. Only ordained priests have the authority to do this, and they do it in the Sacrament of Penance (Confession, Reconciliation).

3. The Church as a whole has the right to forgive or retain a person's sins by admitting or barring him from baptism (by baptizing him, the Church recognizes that the person has become a believer). Or, the Church forgives or retains by recognizing or not recognizing someone as a real believer in some other way.

4. The Church (or an individual Christian?) forgives or retains sins by preaching the gospel. In doing this, the Church (or individual) forgives sins when the hearer repents and believes, and retains sins when the hearer rejects Jesus.

5. The Church (and individual Christians?) "has the power to isolate, repel, and negate evil and sin... It is an effective, not merely a declaratory, power against sin, a power that touches new and old followers of Christ, a power that challenges those who refuse to believe. John does not tell us how or by whom this power was exercised in the community for whom he wrote... Perhaps John's failure to specify may serve as a Christian guideline:... one cannot call upon this text as proof that the way in which a particular community exercises this power is not true to Scripture."[869]

There is agreement among Christians that whatever the power to forgive is, and whoever has it, it is not an arbitrary right. "It is the result of the indwelling Spirit and takes place only as that Spirit directs." Only those who are listening to the Spirit have the right to exercise this authority.

8.  a. Think about the authority Jesus' gives His disciples in 20:23. What do you think He is authorizing them to do?

b. How is this relevant to you?

9.  What did Thomas realize when he saw Jesus (20:28)? Explain in your own words.

10. What can we learn from Thomas's experience (20:24-29)?

***Many other miraculous signs*** (20:30). John explains that he has selected a few episodes of Jesus' life and omitted a great deal. We should never imagine that the Gospels tell us everything Jesus said and did, only everything we need to know for faith and life. They am not the biographies of a dead prophet, but a selective introduction to a living Person.

The "signs" include the works Jesus did in chapters 2 through 12, but in chapter 20 John is probably thinking above all of the Resurrection.

11. Three verbs for "to see" occur especially frequently in chapter 20. Why do you suppose John emphasizes seeing in this chapter? (What does seeing have to do with the point of the chapter?)

**Your response**

12. What one truth in these resurrection appearances stands out as personally significant to you?

13. How have you seen this truth affecting your life already?

14. How would you like it to affect what you do and think more than it does now?

15. What steps can you take to cooperate with God in making this possible?

16. List any questions you have about 20:1-31.