

bible⁺study: april 2018

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

April 1, 2018 Text: Luke 24:1-12, 30-35 “He Has Risen”

Back in 1992, the Duke men’s basketball team was playing in the National Championship Final Four. The games were being played in Minneapolis and were scheduled for Easter week-end. Bishop C. P. Minnick was in attendance. On Easter morning, as he walked across the hotel lobby to catch a cab for a worship service, he spotted Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski. He greeted him with the traditional Easter celebration: “He is risen!” Coach K responded, “He is risen indeed!”

The beauty of that exchange was that a United Methodist originally from Virginia and a Roman Catholic originally from Chicago had in common this central truth of the Gospel: the resurrection. In a sense, it was a way of saying that the resurrection was in the present tense.

Resurrection power often comes in the daily affairs of life (even a Minneapolis hotel lobby). In Luke 24:30-35, we are reminded that the risen Lord was recognized in the breaking of bread. That is still true in 2018 even if the bread comes from a back shelf at the Harris Teeter. Jesus shows up in our daily experiences.

In fact, the discovery that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead came in a routine moment, the routine anointing of a deceased body with spices (Luke 24:1). There were no trumpet fanfares. There were no impassioned drumbeats. There was no mighty chorus in song.

There was simply a group of women (Luke 24:10) who were going about the ordinary things of handling a death.

If I am waiting to see the Lord in some dramatic, spine-tingling moment, I may have not gotten the memo! The one who was born in a stable still comes among us in the daily routines. And on this day—April Fools’ Day, of all days!—who knows...maybe it will be when someone takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it (Luke 24:30) that the risen Lord will show up. “He is risen!” “He is risen indeed!”

What Someone Else Has Said:

In his book on the Apostles’ Creed (*Creed*, Abingdon Press), Adam Hamilton says: “If Jesus had to come from God to re-present and reveal God and God’s will for humanity, and if in some way Jesus was God’s response to the existential questions and struggles we face, then his resurrection not only made sense, it was absolutely essential...Jesus’ resurrection was God’s dramatic way of making clear that (evil, hate, sin, and death) really (don’t) have the last word.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Alleluia! When I see the empty tomb, I have to begin my prayer: ‘Alleluia!’...”

April 8, 2018 Text: John 21:1-14, “The Risen Lord Appears”

No wonder church folk like to eat! Jesus seems to have a special presence at meal time. How about the Passover meal in the upper room (1 Corinthians 11:23)? What about his breaking bread with disciples after journeying the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30)? How about fixing breakfast for these disciples (John 21:12)? How about having meals with all kinds of folks (Luke 5:29-30)? How about his surprise food with the disciples (Luke 24:42-3)? How about his insistence that the newly healed girl have something to eat (Luke 8:55)? How about what he said about who is invited to eat in the kingdom (Luke 14:15-24)? How about his description of himself as bread of heaven that is to be eaten (John 6:51)?

In this week’s study text, the disciples do not at first recognize Jesus (John 21:4). That is not surprising. We have the same problem of spiritual sight. We don’t always recognize Jesus. ... Suppose you are at dead-end church council meeting and suddenly someone suggests a new, life-giving way to be with the poor of the community. Was Jesus present? ... Suppose you are feeling bottomed-out emotionally and a friend calls and then just listens to you for an hour. Was Jesus present? ... Suppose you are a teen-ager struggling with a moral decision and you hear a song: “Doing right is always better, but it’s not always easier.” Was Jesus present?

The text does not make it clear why Peter (and the others) went back to fishing (John 21:3-4). Were they hungry? Were they bored? Were

they confused? Were they self-supporting? Were they lonely? Our motives are not always clear, even to ourselves. Our motives often have a mixture of ingredients. What is clear is that whatever put them there, Jesus met them where they were. And this just in! It’s kind of hard to hide from Jesus!

When the disciples realized that it was Jesus on shore, Peter slapped on some clothes and swam to meet the Lord (John 21:7), but the others followed in the boat (John 21:8). Answering the call of Jesus does not always look to same for every person. Some jump for joy. Others kneel in adoration. Others sit, letting it all sink in. Others speak; others are quiet. When I respond to Jesus I answer with who I am, not who my neighbor is. “Different strokes for different folks.” My spiritual journey may not look like yours, but at the end of the story, Jesus has fish and bread for everyone.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Martin Marty (*Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers*, Augsburg) has written: “Jesus walked among the disciples after his death and also, (we) believe, is present in (our) baptism, at the table, in the preached and spoken and sung words—present, *alive*, among (us) today.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Is that You, Lord?...”

April 15, 2018 Text: John 21:15-25 “Follow Me”

Have you ever recognized yourself in a biblical text? You know the saying: “The names have been changed to protect the innocent...uh, and/or the guilty.” I got that recognition feeling while reading John 21:23: Believers took a tiny portion of what they heard Jesus say, plucked it out of context, applied their own hopes and expectations, and came to a wrong conclusion about what our Lord meant. (Of course, it was you that I recognized in that text; personally, I’d never misinterpret what Jesus said...hmmm.)

Jesus makes no comment about left-handed people getting married. Does this mean that left-handed people should not get married?

Jesus said we should let the emperor have what belongs to the emperor (Matthew 22:21). Does this mean that those of us who live in a country without an emperor can keep all our money for ourselves? (Good question for April 15!)

Jesus said a slave was not above the master (Matthew 10:24). Does this mean that Jesus saw no problem with slavery?

John Wesley had a way of dealing with those tricky passages of Scripture. In the introduction to his Standard Sermons, he wrote about how he faced those “dark or intricate” passages. He got into a quiet space. He prayed for an openness to God’s Light. He sought other Scripture that had clarity on the same subject. He paused for additional meditation. He consulted commentaries and what others in the tradition had said. Then, based on what he had learned, he began to teach.

The “safeguards” in this approach happen at several levels: readiness to be in partnership in exploring the Scriptures and readiness to set aside pre-conceived notions. What is the total message of the biblical witness and how does it impact a troublesome text?

As someone has noted, the word of Jesus in John 21:19 is not “Watch
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me.” The word is “Follow me.” And that invitation is still open.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Adam’s Gift* (Duke University Press), Jimmy Creech quotes Philip Wogaman: “You may not get it quite right. But the most important thing is to communicate love. Love covers a lot of other mistakes, but if

there’s not a climate of love and caring, sensitivity, then you can get everything else right and it won’t matter.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Do you mean me, Lord?...”

April 22, 2018 Text: Revelation 4:1-6, 8-11 “The Lord God the Almighty”

I don’t know about you, but I get a little nervous when I notice that the assigned lesson for a day is from the Book of Revelation. All those strange images! All those heavy-duty predictions! All that otherworld stuff! Sometimes, it is hard to sort through all of that. So, let’s not try to solve all of it! Let’s focus on just a few of the descriptions in this text.

First, notice that in John’s vision, the door to heaven was wide open (Revelation 4:1). Most of us have made lists of folks who should find the door to heaven closed and locked tight. That’s not the image that John has. Part of the root for the word translated “open” is a prefix that means “repetitive.” John has a vision of a heaven whose door is consistently open. Praise God!

Students of the Bible have made numerous interpretations of the number twenty-four in Revelation 4:4. Who were these twenty-four who represent the saved in heaven? (The white garments are a sign of salvation; see Revelation 7:13-14). One meaningful insight suggests that “twelve” is often a symbol for the twelve tribes of Israel, so perhaps “twenty-four” means the Jewish Christians (that’s twelve) and the Gentile Christians (that’s another twelve.)

We sing the hymn “Holy. Holy, Holy” with fervor, but some of its poetic language slips away from us. How about the second stanza: “Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down their their golden crowns around the glassy sea...” Huh? Check out Reve-

lation 4:10-11 and Revelation 15:2-3. It is as if we take all that we prize and drop it before the throne of God in total worship and total submission.

Having stirred a bit in the Book of Revelation this week, I recall what Grace Kennett said. (Forgive me. I may have shared this story before.) One Sunday I preached on a text from Revelation. Grace Kennett—an octogenarian now of blessed memory—greeted me at the door. “Thank you, Reverend,” she said. “I’m confused now at a much higher level.” That may be the best we can do when we encounter God’s Word in this book!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (Abingdon), Stuart Henry tells this story: “Almost legendary is the story of Whitefield’s gazing toward heaven during one of his sermons and calling out to Father Abraham to inquire if there were any Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, or Independents in heaven. And being repeatedly told that such were not there, Whitefield cried, ‘Why, who have you then?’ to which Abraham replied: ‘We don’t know those names here. All that are here are (simply called) Christians.’”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Holy! Holy! Holy! Thank You, gracious God, for the open door into Your presence...”

April 29, 2018 Text: Revelation 5:6-14 “Blessing, Glory, Honor Forever”

When I was in seminary, I had a professor who told about a woman in a church he had served. He had mentioned to her that Revelation 5:9 says that in heaven those gathered at God’s throne “sing a new song.” The woman replied, “If they are going to sing a new song in heaven, then I’m not going.”

Quite apart from musical preferences, there is this good word in this biblical description of heaven. “A *new* song” (Revelation 5:9). “A *new* name” (Revelation 2:17). “A *new* heaven and a *new* earth” (Revelation 21:1). “The *new* Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:2). “I make all things *new*” (Revelation 21:5).

This theme of “newness” energizes much of Scripture. If I counted correctly, the word “new” appears one hundred forty-five times in the Bible. All of the usages of the word “new” do not carry the sense of freshness and beginning, but most of them do. God’s mercies are “new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23). “I will put a new spirit within you” (Ezekiel 11:19). “New wine must be put into new bottles” (Mark 2:22). “A new commandment I give you” (John 13:34). “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). “Anyone in Christ is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “I will establish a new covenant” (Hebrews 8:8).

Clearly, with God it is not “business as usual.” Where there is brokenness, a new beginning! Where there is grief, a new healing! Where

there is sin, a new forgiveness! Where there is injustice, a new justice! Where there is loneliness, a new family! Where there is death, a new life!

In John’s vision of heaven, so much seems to be done in a new way. In Revelation 5:1, there is a scroll with writing on both sides. Scrolls were usually written only on one side. That scroll was sealed with seven seals. Usually, a scroll would be sealed with just one seal. That scroll could not be opened by just anyone (Revelation 5:3); that was a new way of protecting a scroll. And, of course, it is the slain Lamb of God who is able to open the scroll (Revelation 5:6-9).

God invites us to begin to live into that newness even now. We pray “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” May it be so!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Thomas Oden (*John Wesley’s Teachings*, Volume 2, Zondervan) wrote: “The new birth is the entrance to the life in which one begins to grow in holiness.... Wesley argued that the new birth was the beginning point of growth in sanctification.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Create anew, O God!...”

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Crossword Puzzle Answers

Across: 1 Candle, 3 Light, 7 Corrupt, 8 Seek, 10 Alms, 13 Beatitudes, 15 Hypocrites, 18 Children of God, 20 Disciples, 22 Mammon, 23 Brethren, 24 Footstool

Down: 2 Lord’s prayer, 4 Treasures, 5 Raca, 6 Blessed, 9 Prayer, 11 Mountain, 12 Righteousness, 14 Pluck, 16 Hunger, 17 Fasting, 19 Twain, 21 Sand