

biblestudy: april 2023

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

April 2, 2023 Text: Matthew 26:36-46 “Your Will Be Done”

Mr. Hall was in church every Sunday. He sat in the same pew near the front and every week he went to sleep, sometimes even before my sermon! Someone once asked him why he came to church if he was going to go to sleep. He replied, “I just want God to know which side I am on.”

The three disciples went with Jesus to let Him know which side they were on. Peter had just said, “Even if I must die alongside you, I won’t deny you.” Oops.

Do you remember the lesson a few weeks ago when Jesus asked James and John if they could drink the cup He was about to drink (Matthew 20:22)? Now, Jesus is wondering aloud in His prayer if the cup of suffering might be taken away before He has to drink it (Matthew 26:39). There is a beauty of authenticity in Jesus’ desire to escape the impending cross. He doesn’t say “Hooray! I get to suffer just to show much good I am! Hooray! I get to suffer just to show how obedient I am! Hooray! I get to suffer just to save sinners!” He does not seek the cross, but He does not turn from it. He prays, “Not what I want, but what You want...not my will, but Thine” (Matthew 26:42). There is a sense in which all of the teachings of Jesus become more believable because of the genuineness of this moment. If He is truthful about His feelings at this moment, how true He has been in times of lesser stress!

And the three disciples sleep. People these days brag about having been at a World Series game or at the Final Four basketball tournament.

April 9, 2023 Text: Matthew 28:1-15 “Resurrection Turns Everything Upside Down”

My house is out in the country, and my mailbox is about three-hundred yards away at the road. Today, I walked up to the mailbox around 10:00 AM to see if the mail had come. It had not. I went again around noon. The mail had not come. At 3:00, I walked up there again. No mail. Finally, when I went back around 4:30, I found the box packed with magazines and bills and advertisements. It took four trips, but I got what I was looking for. I knew what I would eventually find.

Not so at that first Easter. The women had not kept making trips to the tomb, each time looking for a resurrected Jesus. They did not anticipate that eventually one of their trips would be rewarded with the news that the tomb was empty, just as they expected. No! They went once and did not find at all what they expected. There was no body. Instead, there was an angel, some terrified guards, and the surprising news that Jesus was not there. He had risen from the dead! It was not what they had gone looking for. There was Good News when they did not expect any.

Jesus had two instructions for the women (Matthew 28:10) and I believe they are also instructions for us. (1) The first is (as Weymouth translates it) “Dismiss all fear.” (2) The second is “Let others know about this.” Which of these is more difficult for you to do? Letting go of our fears and anxieties is not easy. Finding ways to let others know that Jesus is alive is not automatic.

April 16, 2023 Text: John 20:11-29 “Too Good to Be True?”

Would Thomas fit in very well at your church? After all, even after the other disciples have witnessed to him about the risen Lord, Thomas refused to get on board (John 20:25-26). Let’s give the disciples credit for not pushing Thomas aside just because he did not believe in the same way they did. I am not always comfortable around folks who don’t agree with me on politics and religion. Would Thomas fit in very well at your church?

Would Jesus fit in very well at your church? The disciples had tried to signal that they did not want anything to do with others. They had locked the door (John 20:19, 26). It may have been out of fear (v. 19); it may have been out of the uncertainty because they did not want to have to use the spiritual power of forgiveness that Jesus had given him (v. 23). Has your congregation in some way sent a signal as to who was and who was not welcomed? Has your congregation ever hesitated to undertake some mission planted by Jesus? (Oops. I just looked in the mirror.) Would Jesus fit in very well at your church?

Do you think the disciples bragged about being with Jesus at this pivotal moment in the story? Me thinks not. If they wanted to show which side they were on, it begins to look like they play for “the other team.”

Judas walks up (Matthew 26:47). And the plot thickens. It moves unfailingly toward the cross (Matthew 26:47-27:50). “Then, he died” (Matthew 27:50). You’d think that would be the end of the story, but (spoiler alert), it isn’t.

Because I know “the rest of the story,” it is easy for me to think that I would have been faithfully awake with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is easy for me to think that I would have been a consistent and loyal follower. Truthfully, even knowing how the story ends, there is too much evidence of my “sleeping on the job” to think that this account would be any different if you substituted my name for James or John. Are you awake?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Philip William Otterbein* (Board of Publication, Evangelical United Brethren Church), author Arthur Core quotes Otterbein: “Where in us has Christ destroyed the power of death?”

Prayer:

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

The New Testament word for “fear” carries with it the implication of something that is done to you. The thing that frightens you may not even be intended to be frightening. Or, it may be frightful in one context and not in another; a campfire flame cooking a meal is wonderful; an out-of-control burst of forest fire is frightening. The women were overwhelmed by the unexpected news of Jesus’ resurrection, so our Lord tells them that fear is not needed.

How do we do what Jesus has asked the women to do---go tell others? My actions often speak louder than my words. Do I live in a way that shows that I believe that Jesus is alive? Do I live in a way that shows that I accept Jesus’ presence in my life today? Do I live in such a way that Jesus gets the credit?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In his book *The Joy of the Gospel* (Image), Pope Francis wrote: “Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Hallelujah! You are alive!...”

But look what happened! Jesus just walked on in anyhow! He just came through the locked doors that were intended to lock out the uninvited (John 20:26). Where in my life have I tried to close out others (including Jesus) and found that Jesus has a way of getting in?

In John 20:29 Jesus mentions you and me. He blesses those who have not seen Him and yet have believed. The Gospel writer says that he has written this account just for that reason, so those who were not in that room with Jesus can believe and have life (John 20:31). There is a little of Thomas in each of us, wondering “Is this too good to be true?” That question is answered for Thomas when he sees and touches Jesus. For many of us, that question is answered when we see evidence of Jesus’ presence: forgiveness, care for the poor, persons equally loved, healing, acceptance, life-changing teaching, community, faith. It is good and it is true!

In Mark 9:14-29, there is a story that fits today’s theme. A father brings
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his seriously ill son to Jesus. The boy is foaming at the mouth and rolling around on the ground (Mark 9:20). The father begs Jesus to help them (v. 22). Jesus says that “all things can be done for the one who

What Someone Else Has Said:

Jean Wise (*Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room*, Barbour) quotes Oswald Chambers: “Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading.”

April 23, 2023 Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-28 “Unwrapping the Gift of the Resurrection”

If I counted correctly, in the Common English Bible translation, there are 306 words in this week’s focal text. That means that there are about 306 ways we could study these verses. Wow! Paul had a lot to say to the Corinthians about the resurrection! Where to begin?

If I counted correctly, in my copy of a Greek New Testament, there are 257 words in this week’s study text. That means that there are about 257 Greek words we could examine as we explore what Paul said about the resurrection of the dead. Where to begin?

If I counted correctly...before I pull that Spanish New Testament off the shelf, let me admit what must be obvious: I am stalling before digging into these long and complex passages.

Paul has heard that there are folks in Corinth who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12). If Christ is not raised from the dead then all the Church says and does is useless (vv. 14-15). If Christ is not raised from the dead, then we are pathetic (v. 19).

But Christ has been raised and He was human (v. 22). It is evidence that Death does not have the last word for humans ((v. 23). Death has been brought under the control of Christ (vv. 26-27). In Christ, there is life available for all (v. 22).

April 30, 2023 Text: 1 Peter 1:3-16 “A Living Hope and Nonperishable Inheritance”

When we sing the hymn “Holy, Holy., Holy,” we know that we are singing about God (“Lord God Almighty”). The writer of 1 Peter has added another dimension: “But, as obedient children, you must be holy in every aspect of your lives, just as the one who called you is holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Me, holy? This must be a misprint in every Bible on my shelf.

Many students of the Bible conclude that this letter was addressed primarily to Gentile Christians. These believers would not automatically see themselves in the heritage and learnings of Jewish Christians, so Peter reminds them of how they fit into that story. He quotes Leviticus 19:2: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the whole community of the Israelites: You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’”

One meaning of the word “holy” is “set apart.” If I am “set apart,” my values are not the values of the world. My priorities are not the priorities of the world. My words, my actions, are not the words and actions of the world.

Let’s come down “the ladder of abstraction.” (Thanks to S. J. Hayakawa for that term.) How holy is our church budget? For that matter, how holy is my pocketbook? (Do I spend money in the same way as non-believers?) How holy is my use of time? How holy is my attitude toward the woman holding up the sign “Homeless”? How holy am I toward those with whom I disagree? How holy am I toward the clerk at the supermarket?

believes” (v. 23). Then comes the moment the father speaks for all of us: “I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). That is the plea that I make. How about you?

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, help my unbelief...”

This morning my car would not start. I figured the battery was dead, so I called AAA. About a half hour later, a huge wrecker truck pulled into my driveway, ready to help this hapless old man. To show the guy from the wrecker service the problem, I stepped into the car and pressed the start button. The engine laughed and offered full power. I thought it was dead, but it came with new life.

When I reflect on the death of loved ones and even when I ponder my own demise, I think things look pretty dead. But in Christ Jesus I see the hope and promise of resurrection into new life. Christ is just the first fruit of the harvest (v. 20). There is more to come!

Incidentally, I know you have been wondering. There were 334 words in the Spanish translation.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Margaret Thrall (*I and Li Corinthians*, Cambridge) wrote: “The preliminary defeat of Death took place when Jesus was raised from the dead, but complete victory will not be achieved until the general resurrection occurs.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Risen Lord...”

Being holy looks like an impossible task. Peter puts all of this in the context of hope (v. 6). He acknowledges that it is not easy or simple—note he acknowledges that his readers are in times of “various trials” (vv. 3, 6). Even so, the believers move on the journey with hope, a hope that lives because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“Hope” and “holy.” Those two themes describe the gift and challenge of living a faithful life. We have hope because of what we have seen in Jesus Christ. We are to be holy because we are shaped by a holy God. It’s not too soon to start.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Mud and Poetry* (Fresh Air Books), Tyler Blanski has written: “But holiness is also never a life of extremes for the sake of extremes. It’s extreme because Jesus demands of us the impossible. He wants us daily to die to ourselves, to forget ourselves, so that we might find our identity in him alone. And this includes every part of our lives...”to forget ourselves, so that we might find our identity in him alone. And this includes every part of our lives...”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Christ, the Holy One, shape me to be what I must be in order to follow You...”

Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’

He is not here; he has risen!

Luke 24:6-7 NKJV