

that you may BELIEVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

John 20 | March 27, 2016

Prepared by Rev. Curtis A. Bronzan, ThM
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

This week in our series *That You May Believe*, we encounter the resurrection of Jesus!

II. Connecting with One Another

In his book *Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life*, Eric Metaxas reflects upon the parting of the Red Sea, concluding "If it was merely a freak of nature, something that happened to happen, it would not be a miracle. If it happened forty thousand years before the Israelites existed, it wouldn't be a miracle. What makes it a miracle is that God performed it specifically to make himself known, to communicate with human beings. When God pokes into our world through the miraculous, he is communicating with us, otherwise we cannot appropriately use the term 'miraculous' to describe an event."

Have you ever experienced a miracle? Do you know someone who has?

Would you agree with this definition? Why or why not?

III. Study the Text

a. Read John 20.1-10.

This is only the second time we meet Mary Magdalene in John's gospel, the first being "near the cross" in 19.25. While she is included in other accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection (see Matthew 27.56- 28.1, Mark 15.40-16.9, and Luke 24.10), only Luke provides us with any background to her life, in Luke 8.1-3.

What do you make of Luke's "introduction" of Mary Magdalene?

In light of this, why do you think she filled such a central role in experiencing and announcing the good news of Easter? If you were making this story up, would you have included her so prominently? Why or why not?

b. Reread John 20.2.

What does Mary think happened to Jesus' body?

Who do you think is the "they" she refers to?

c. A first century "Ordinance of Caesar" uncovered near Nazareth states, "It is my pleasure that graves and tombs - whoever has made them as a pious service for ancestors or children or members of their house - that these remain unmolested in perpetuity. But if any person lay information that another either has destroyed them, or has in any other way cast out the bodies which have been there, or with malicious deception has transferred them to other places... in such a case I command that a trial be instituted... Let no one remove them for any reason. If anyone does so, however, it is my will that he shall suffer capital punishment on the charge of tomb robbery."

How does this prospect of capital punishment affect your understanding of Mary's concerns discussed above?

- d. Though both Peter and the "other disciple" run to the tomb, they have different responses to Jesus' absence.

We aren't sure who the "other disciple" is, though it may be Lazarus, who "Jesus loved" (see verse 2) and had experienced resurrection (see John 11.1-44). Meanwhile, Peter resorted to violence at Jesus' arrest (see John 18.1-11), then fulfilled the prediction in John 13.31-38 that he would deny Jesus three times (see John 18.15-18 and 25-27).

One biblical scholar explains, "the author would have us understand that Peter did not consider the option of God interrupting the dying-burial process with a resurrection, although the beloved disciple 'believes.' This is not surprising if the beloved disciple were Lazarus, since Jesus intervened to have God interrupt the dying-burial process in his case."

How could their earlier personal encounters have shaped these two disciples' perspectives on the empty tomb?

- e. In verse 9, John writes, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." While this could be a reference to Scripture as a whole (similar to Luke 24.25-27, 32, 44-47), it may point to a specific passage, such as Psalm 16.9-11, Isaiah 52.13-53.12 (note especially 53.10-12), or Hosea 6.1-3 (especially verse 2).

Which of these passages - if any - do you think John may be referencing? Why?

- f. Read John 20.11-18.

Similar to Peter, Mary "does not consider the option of God interrupting the dying-burial process with a resurrection." Instead, she wishes that Jesus' body would continue the long process of death, which - in this culture - continued for an entire year. At the conclusion of a year, the bones of the now deceased person would be collected and placed in a box, ready for God to create a new body with the old bones.

How does knowing this help you understand Mary's statements in verses 2, 13, and 15? (Notice especially the questions to her in 13 and 15)

- g. Recall Genesis 1.1-2.3, the seven days of God's creation, and John 1.1-18, which picks up on similar creation themes (also note the successive days see John 1.29, 35, 43, and 2.1). Then - time permitting - scan the seven (yes, *seven!*) miracles of Jesus throughout John's gospel: 2.1-11, 4.43-54, 5.1-18, 6.5-14, 6.16-24, 9.1-7, and 11.1-45.

What do you think John is trying to communicate with these seven signs? Is it intentional? Does it echo the seven days of creation? Why or why not?

What do you make of John 20.1 and 20.19, where John writes that it was the "first day of the week"? What about the resurrection being the "eighth sign"?

- h. N.T. Wright puts it this way: "John tells us quite plainly: Easter day is the first day of the week. John doesn't waste words. It isn't just that Easter day happened to be on a Sunday. John wants his readers to figure out that Easter day is the first day of God's new creation. Easter morning was the birthday of God's new world. On the sixth day of the week, the Friday, God finished all his work; the great shout of *tetelestai*, "It is finished!" in John 19.30 looks all the way back to the sixth day in Genesis 1 when, with the creation of human beings in his own image, God finished the initial work of creation. Now, says John (19.5), "Behold the Man!" here on Good Friday is the truly

human being. John then invites us to see the Saturday, the sabbath between Good Friday and Easter day in terms of the sabbath rest of God after creation was done...

Then on Easter morning it is the first day of the week. Creation is complete; new creation can now begin. The Spirit who brooded over the waters of creation at the beginning broods now over God's world, ready to bring it bursting to springtime life. Mary goes to the tomb while it's still dark and in the morning light meets Jesus in the garden. She thinks he is the gardener, and in one important sense he indeed is. This is the new creation. This is the new Genesis." (The connections continue through verse 23, where Jesus' breath brings the Holy Spirit, recalling the breath that brought Adam and Eve to life)

If, indeed, Jesus is "the gardener" who brings forth new life, what new creation has he birthed in your life? What is he seeking to birth in your life right now?

i. Read John 20.19-23.

It's been written, "The disciples' commissioning in 20.21-23 climaxes the characterization of Jesus as the sent Son and shows Jesus' followers as drawn into the unity and mission of Father, Son, and Spirit."

How does Jesus as the new creation send us out as new creation? What is the significance of our being sent in the same way He was sent? To whom are you sent? (Time permitting, check out what the Apostle Paul does with these themes in 2nd Corinthians 5)

j. Jesus' breathing on the disciples "is best understood as a symbolic promise of the impending gift of the Spirit, not the actual giving of it fifty days later at Pentecost." (see Acts 2 for that account)

How have you received the breath of the Spirit in your life? What do you think is the connection between receiving the Holy Spirit and forgiving others sins (in verse 23)?

k. Read John 20.24-31.

In what seasons of your life have you been like Thomas? How did God meet you in those times? How have you been encouraged through this series to "believe... [and] have life in his name"?

IV. Pray

a. Lift up our Easter Sunday gatherings - and those at Christian churches around the world: That God would draw all people to Him through the good news of the resurrection,

b. Pray for our Mexico Mission trip, that our team would travel safely and have a meaningful week of service,

c. Ask God to use our upcoming series *Going Viral* to transform us into a "Resurrection People" - who are equipped and empowered to share our faith in the Risen Jesus.