

Background for Week 16

If you read each resurrection narrative alongside one another, you'll notice discrepancies, as will happen when reading most of the stories. It is important to remember that each gospel is an interpretation, a faith report, to inspire and produce belief as well as bring meaning and purpose to the people in the writer's context. Fact and faith are interwoven. Each is a distinct portrait if you will of the one we call Jesus.

As we've been learning, John has a tendency in most of the stories he relays to bring the reader backward and/or forward to another point in time. Thus he is constantly weaving together what at first may appear to be distinct accounts into one large integrated testament.

There is question as to whether this gospel was written, as Robert Kysar states, "to win converts or strengthen the faith of those who already believed." In these chapters though, as well as in many others, seeing and believing are intimately connected. Thus through believing then we "may have life in [Jesus] name."

Text for this week: John 20:1-21:25

1. Read John 20:1-21:25 in its entirety. What jumps out at you in the text? What thoughts are inspired by it? What questions arise?
2. Next, we'll break it down by verses.
 - a) 20:1-10: Notice each of the three disciples reacts differently to the resurrection. This leaves room then for people in varying states of faith to enter into the story. Which person do you relate to the most in this portion of the text as you read it? Why?
 - Vs. 1-2: How would you react if you visited a loved one's grave and it was disturbed? Mary refers to Jesus as "the Lord." Who is Jesus in your life? The language of 'Lord' can have positive and/or negative connotations for different people. What about for you? Are there other terms used for God that are particularly meaningful for you, or ones that you especially don't like?
 - Vs. 5-8: It is suggested that John stresses the linen wrappings in order to lead the reader into realizing it could not have been grave robbers. Tomb looting was quite common then, so Mary's likely assumption, based on her statement, "*they* have taken the Lord out of the tomb," in verse 2 would have been a natural reaction. However, grave robbers would not have left the linens. It is at the sight of these that the "other disciple" believes. What have you seen that's made you believe? Have there been things you've seen that have made you question?

b) 11-18:

- Vs. 16-17: Mary doesn't recognize Jesus until he speaks her name. What do you think he meant when he said, "Do not hold on to me?" When and/or where have you "seen" the Lord?

c) 19-31:

- 19: Have you ever been fearful of repercussions because of your faith? Have you ever had to hide your faith?
 - Vs. 19, 21, 26: Jesus came and stood among the gathered disciples and shared the peace. Three times in fact. Why do we continue that practice in the church? What is its function or role in worship? Do you think people have some understanding of its larger purpose or is it just another insincere church ritual?
- 20: Our Western culture is influenced quite a bit by Greek thought, which includes a separation of spirit and body. Here in John though, it wasn't enough that Jesus appeared and spoke to them. It was also important to emphasize the physical element as well. Christ did not just come as a ghostly apparition, but in bodily form, as evidenced by the marks in his hands and side. In the Apostle's creed we profess in the third article, "I believe...in the resurrection of the body." Some people struggle with *bodily* resurrection. What are your thoughts?
- Vs. 22-23: When John writes that Jesus "...breathed on them..." what is this reminiscent of or what does it allude to? In his giving of the Spirit, Jesus forms them into a community rooted in forgiveness. What does this say about the power of forgiveness? How do we abuse this power given to us? What are your thoughts on cheap grace? Can there be forgiveness without confession?
- Vs. 19-23: What worship elements do you recognize in these verses?
- 24: Because of this one moment, Thomas was, unfortunately, forever dubbed as 'doubting Thomas.' Notice though that it is within the community, on separate occasions, that Thomas both doubts and professes faith. Have you ever had to prove God's existence? If not, what would you say to someone who asked for proof? How would you explain faith to someone who seeks evidence by way of the senses? Have you ever doubted?
- Vs. 30-31: A final statement about the ultimate purpose of the gospel, what John has been trying to engender this whole time: belief. How has your belief changed over your lifetime so far? Has it changed in any way as you've been participating in this study?

d) 21:1-14: Many scholars, according to the Oxford Annotated Bible, consider this chapter to have been added later on by someone else. This account is not

recorded in any of the other gospels.

- 3: The same day Peter sees with his very own eyes the empty tomb, he encounters the living Lord in the flesh. Then again a week later. Why do you think he goes fishing? What would you do if you were in his shoes?
- 4: A third time Jesus appears to the disciples, and they still don't know that it's him until after they reel in a big haul. Hindsight is 20/20. Recall times you did not recognize God's presence in different situations until afterwards.
- Vs. 9 & 13: These verses are reminiscent both of the feeding of the multitude and the Lord's supper. Today, the church continues to gather around a meal, both communion and otherwise. What is the significance of these meals for the community? For you personally?

e) 15-19:

- Vs. 15-17: There are differing thoughts as to what "These," refers to in verse 15. According to the OAB, it is the other disciples. Elsewhere, it's believed to mean possessions, specifically the fishing equipment. A third opinion is that Jesus is asking, "Do you love me more than these do?" What do you think? Numbers sometimes are significant to the story, though it is not always clear what meaning lies behind them (such as in verse 11). Three times Jesus specifically asks Peter if he loves him, and three times he replies to Peter's responses with commands (the Greek verbs are in the imperative form). What do you think the author is recalling here? The Greek verb translated as "tend" in 16 can also mean, "lead, guide, rule." Does this change the tone of the verse at all, and if so how?
- Vs. 18-19: From the phrase, "...stretch out your hands..." it is believed that the verse refers to the back to 13:36 when Jesus told Peter he could not follow him (to his death) at that time, but would do so afterwards. According to tradition, Peter was also crucified under a Roman ruler about 64-68 CE. As a follower of Jesus then, he would glorify God through his death.

f) 20-25:

- 21: Throughout chapters 19 and 20, there is a slight sense of tension between Peter and this disciple whom Jesus loved. He always seems to have one up on Peter. Like two rivaling siblings, Peter says, "what about him?" Jesus points out that it is his business, and Peter has more important things to worry about, like following him. When have you felt in competition with others? Competition is a major driving force in our society, and it is held in high esteem. What is your take on the place it should have in our lives? Where do you see it in the church? In those circumstances does it have a negative or positive influence?

3. General questions:

a) After having studied various portions of all four gospels now, is belief in Jesus Christ all there is to faith? Why or why not?

For your prayers:

Dear Living Lord, you continue to come among us, your gathered disciples: teaching, challenging, feeding, and commissioning. Thank you for your persistent presence. Amen.

Next week: Acts 1:1-11