



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, April 12, 2009

Easter

Go Through the Door to a Cross Shaped Life

TRIETSCH

John 20: 1-18

The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mark 16: 5-8

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Historical Evidence

Josh McDowell says this about the resurrection: "For centuries, many of the world's distinguished philosophers have assaulted Christianity as being irrational, superstitious and absurd. Many have chosen simply to ignore the central issue of the resurrection. Others have tried to explain it away through various theories. But the historical evidence just can't be discounted."

"A student at the University of Uruguay said to me, 'Professor McDowell, why can't you refute Christianity?'

"For a simple reason,' I answered. 'I am not able to explain away an event in history -- the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'"

When considering the evidence, the eyewitness accounts are overwhelming. All the followers of Jesus give witness to the appearances of Jesus after his death. The scriptures list at least 10 separate occasions of Jesus' resurrected glory. He appears in both physical and spiritual form, proving that the empty tomb of Easter morning is not just a result of grave robbers. This evidence is even more convincing when we consider that the tomb of Jesus was guarded by soldiers to prevent such an abduction.

But the most compelling argument comes from the apostle Paul, who was the most aggressive and violent opponent of Christianity in the first century. Paul is converted as he witnesses the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. The apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus appeared not only to him and to the other disciples but also at one time to over 500 witnesses.

John 20: 1-18

John reports to us the first resurrection eyewitness. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early that Easter morning. The other gospel accounts include other women who went with her. They find the tomb open and empty. It is Mary Magdalene who runs to inform the disciples of what appears to be a grave robbing. Peter and, we believe John, run to the tomb to confirm what Mary has reported. They witness the empty tomb, but return home without believing.

Mary is overcome with grief. Angels appear to her to announce the resurrection of Jesus. Blinded by her grief, Mary does not understand. Even as the resurrected Jesus appears to her, she does not recognize him. As Jesus calls her by name, she realizes the truth of what has happened. Overwhelming grief transforms into marvelous joy. She runs to tell the others.

Mark 16:5-8

Mark tells us that fear and dread seized the earliest witnesses of the empty tomb. While the angels instructed them to tell the disciples about the resurrection and that Jesus was going ahead of them to meet them in Galilee, these early witnesses said nothing to no one.

Their reaction is interesting. Throughout the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus instructing those who have received and witnessed his miracles to "tell no one, his time had not yet come." Now the time has come and they are frozen with fear.

The Appearances of Christ

Not only was the tomb empty, but the disciples actually saw Jesus on at least 10 separate occasions.

1. To Mary Magdalene (*John 20: 11-18; Mark 16: 9*)
2. To the other women (*Matthew 28: 8-10*)
3. To Peter (*Luke 24: 34; I Corinthians 15:5*)
4. To the two on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24: 13- 35; Mark 16:12*)
5. To 10 of the disciples (*Luke 24: 36-43; John 20: 19-29*)
6. To all 11 disciples, eight days later (*John 20: 24-29*)
7. To seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberius (*John 21:1-23*)
8. To 500 followers (*I Corinthians 15:6*)
9. To James (*I Corinthians 15:7*)
10. To the 11, at the ascension (*Acts 1: 3-12*)

Notes

Daily Readings

Please note: We began 2009 by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. We have come now to the resurrection of Jesus, and we will take a look at the resurrection account in each of the four gospels. Beginning in May, we will read through the book of Acts.

Monday, April 13 – Read Matthew 28:1-10. Matthew speaks of the fear of the early followers when they first experienced the resurrected Jesus. Do you think they were afraid of Jesus because of their early responses of fear, denial, and doubt? How would you respond to the resurrected Christ?

Tuesday, April 14 – Read Matthew 28:11-15. In this passage we are reminded of the schemes to defraud the resurrection of Jesus. There are still many that doubt the resurrection of Jesus. Who in your life shared with you their doubts or ridiculed your faith? Will you pray for them today?

Wednesday, April 15 – Read Matthew 28:16-20. Jesus' command to go and make disciples is specific. We are to baptize and teach. This command comes with a promise of presence and authority. In what ways are you making disciples for Jesus Christ?

Thursday, April 16 – Read Mark 16:1-8. The angels command these first witnesses to go and spread the good news, and yet they say nothing because of their fear. How often do you speak of Christ's resurrection? If not often, why not?

Friday, April 17 – Read Mark 16:9-20. This unexplained later addition to Mark speaks of the signs of the gospel message. What signs and wonders have you experienced?