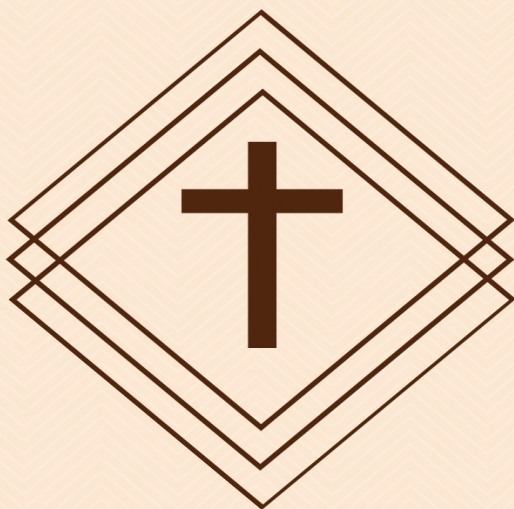


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NAME:

The Woman at the Well

Passage: John 4:1-30

This is one of those stories that, with a little extra digging, reveals so much about the heart of Jesus not just for the specific woman in this story, but all of humanity.

Historically, Jews (Jesus) and Samaritans (this woman) had a lot of hostility toward one another, which is why the woman was “surprised” (v. 9) that Jesus spoke to her and the disciples were “shocked” (v.27) to find Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. We could investigate all of the ways that this situation was strange but just know this was NOT normal or culturally acceptable. While this woman may not have known Jesus’ identity, He knew hers and He chose to go out of His way to have this conversation with her regardless of how it might have looked from the outside. He proceeds to offer her “living water” (connection with God) (v. 10), and then after that He makes a comment about what would have been viewed as her very shameful lifestyle. At first glance it might appear that Jesus was trying to make the woman feel bad - but let’s dig a little deeper. He offers relationship, He offers love through living water, and then He says, “I know you.” He has heard things about her, but it’s more than that. Truly deep down she is known by Him. This short interaction with Jesus was so impactful on the woman that she proceeds to go tell the entire town about this man - she was transformed by the love of Jesus.

The world might try to give you a list of reasons why having a relationship with Jesus isn’t “normal” - but the truth is He wants a relationship with everyone. You might try to disqualify yourself from receiving Jesus’ offer of living water, but remember that He knows your past, your failures, your joys, and your fears, and He still loves you and wants a relationship with you. And I think that when we truly understand everything that Jesus is offering us, just like He offered the Samaritan woman, we can’t help but go out into the world living lives that are radically transformed by Jesus.

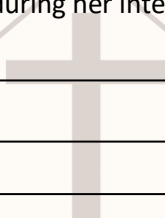
Ashley Nikonchuk

Prayer:

God - thank You that even though You are overwhelmingly big, You are also incredibly personal. Thank You for reaching out to have a relationship with me on an individual level. God - I ask that I would be open to accepting Your love and that this love would transform me. Please show me that I am seen by You and give me eyes to pay attention to that. Amen.

Questions:

Try to put yourself in the woman's shoes - what do you think she was thinking / feeling during her interaction with Jesus?



Why do you think that she responded the way that she did when Jesus brought up all of her sin?

How have you experienced feeling seen and known by Jesus? How do you respond to that?

Jesus Feeds the 5,000

Passage: John 6:1-15

All of the things Jesus did during His life on Earth were absolutely incredible, whether they were big or small. One of the biggest things He did was the feeding of the 5,000. Providing food for that many people is an amazing thing on its own, but it is the way in which He fed them that makes the story even more special. When Jesus sat down with His disciples to discuss how they were going to feed this crowd, He knew that there was no way they could gather enough food to feed everyone. But because Jesus is Jesus and He seeks for all people to be seen, loved, and have abundant life, He provided a way for all of those people to be fed.

A boy that was with them had five loaves of bread and two fish, all of which he gave to Jesus so that the crowd could be fed. Jesus thanked God for the food, and then distributed it to the people. Depending on your translation, this reading might say that 5,000 was just the number of men there, not including women and children, so there were possibly even more than 5,000 people there! On top of feeding that many people with that small amount of food, it is written that there was even food left over! Meaning that all of those people were given more than enough. After seeing something like this happen, one would have no choice but to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

We don't know what prompted the boy to give Jesus his fish and bread, but when I read this passage I like to imagine that even at a young age this boy saw how special Jesus was, that Jesus was a figure he could trust, a person who dearly loved him. I imagine this is the reason why he gave Jesus his fish and bread, but also because he knew that Jesus would be able to work something wonderful from whatever the boy gave him. **That is exactly what Jesus does with our lives.** We might not have much to give Him, but when we offer ourselves to Him, He begins to work something wonderful.

Logan Nelson

Prayer:

Jesus, I thank You for all of the ways in which You provide for me, that You have given me this life, and life abundantly. Thank You for the people I share my life with, and may the time I spend glorify who You are and the things You have wonderfully worked. Father, teach me Your ways, show me Your heart and love, and Spirit lead me to be more like You. May I draw closer to You, from this day until we meet face-to-face. I love You, I thank You, and in Your name I pray, amen!

Questions:

What is the craziest thing you have ever seen happen?

If you were there, what thoughts would you have about Jesus feeding you and all of those people?

What do you or we as people have to offer Jesus?

What area of your life are you are needing Jesus to transform?

The Last Supper

Passage: Luke 22:1-22

Communion has been a revolutionary experience in my relationship with Jesus. Many times when I am reading scripture, I try to place myself in the stories as if I am there listening and living the experience in real time. During the Last Supper, Jesus gathered with his disciples to enjoy one last meal before his crucifixion, knowing well before that Judas, one of the disciples, would betray Him.

Jesus then took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it out, and He also took the cup (vv. 22–23). He referred to them as “my body” and “my blood”. They underline for us His sacrifice on the cross, and when we receive and eat and drink, we are expressing our trust in Him (1 Cor 11:26) and are sustained by His life in us (John 6:56). Today, we continue to celebrate the Last Supper, ultimately remembering Jesus’ true sacrifice and create time in our lives to be filled with gratitude.

Take a brief moment and place yourself into the passage. You’re sitting around the table, remembering the stories and experiences you had with Jesus - the miracles, the travel, the people you had the chance to meet. Jesus begins to talk about His sacrifice and the lamb, and at the time you may not have considered that Jesus, the Savior of the world, would be crucified in the following days. After Communion had taken place, I imagine Jesus looking at Judas and saying, “Whatever you do, do it quickly.” Imagine the scene, the gut-wrenching guilt and shame in Judas’ heart because he knew that Jesus already knew who would betray Him. As Judas left the house, I can only imagine the thoughts that were going through his mind.

Yet at the end of this passage, I consider my own brokenness and flaws. I consider the shame and guilt that I would have had to live with. However, in the midst of all my brokenness, my overwhelming sense of shame, I come back to a heart of gratitude for Jesus’ sacrifice. I can live with the freedom knowing that Jesus and only Jesus forgives and gives me peace that surpasses all understanding. Take a moment this week and remember the freedom that comes with Jesus’ sacrifice.

Tim Litovchenko

Prayer:

Jesus, I want to come back to a heart of gratitude. Fill me with freedom and peace that surpasses all understanding. Jesus, I come to You with my brokenness and my flaws and yet You prepare a table for me. You have already been the ultimate sacrifice for my life and have removed any feeling of guilt and shame, because by Your blood and body I have been set free. Lord, I am so grateful for the ways You see me - help me remember Your faithfulness in my life. Point out the moments with You, God, and open my heart to see Your presence. Amen.

Questions:

Have you ever participated in communion? What was that experience like?

How do you think Judas felt during the Last Supper?

How can you find freedom in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice?

The Death of Jesus

Passage: Matthew 27: 45-55

Possibly one of the most controversial points in history, Jesus' death marks the beginning of a new life for us. It reinforces our purpose and shows the ultimate sacrifice; Jesus taking on the wages of sin on our behalf so that we may experience true relationship with God. Jesus' death marked the restoration of humanity stemming all the way from the Garden of Eden. After Jesus was wrongfully accused, He found Himself hanging next to two rebels. In the midst of the pain and agony, one of the rebels still accepted Jesus' act of forgiveness in his life.

Jesus still saw the rebel, his true selfless act humbling himself on the cross - acknowledging the Savior of the world hanging next to him. As Jesus took his final breaths, He looked up to God and said, "It is finished" - one of my favorite moments in scripture. All the prophecies have been fulfilled, all the suffering has been taken, relationship with God has been restored, forgiveness and hope reach all people, and Jesus marks the end of sin's stronghold on our lives. God's plan all the way from Genesis in the Garden has been fulfilled.

Jesus continued to value each person as He took his final breaths. From the people watching to the guards and the rebels hanging next to Him - He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus extended forgiveness in His final moments regardless of who it was. The beauty in this display of true love is that Jesus continues to see and value you today - He continues to extend his forgiveness to you. The story of Jesus' death doesn't end there. Hope would arise three days later on Easter - the true full fulfillment of God's plan.

Take a moment to reflect on the death of Jesus. As you read the story, imagine yourself watching what is happening, the unveiling of God's redemption story for each one of us. Consider the feelings that the disciples had watching Jesus, the leader they had been following, be crucified on the cross. To them, the story was finished. Despite this, God had a different plan to ensure ultimate forgiveness for you and me. What is Jesus pointing out to you today?

Tim Litovchenko

Prayer:

God, I thank You for having a plan. I thank You for sending your son Jesus to fulfill Your redemption story. Jesus, with the act of true humility and love, was sacrificed so that we may experience true authentic relationships with You, God. Jesus, I am so grateful for the bridge that was built - that I may freely dive deeper into a relationship with You. God, may I never take for granted the display of Your love as I continue to pursue You daily. Jesus, forgive me for making our relationship transactional at times - help me see and experience You just a little more today. Amen.

Questions:

How do you and your family celebrate Easter?

What do you think the disciples, the guards, the rebels, and the audience feel at the sight of Jesus being crucified?

What is something that can hold people back from accepting Jesus' forgiveness?

Jesus has Risen!

Passage: Matthew 28:1-10

Good Friday is a reflective and sad day for many people. It marks the day in which Jesus paid the price for our sin and bought our forgiveness with His life. The death of Jesus was not the end of the story, if anything it was a new beginning. When Jesus died He accomplished multiple things: He fulfilled prophecies, paid the debt of our sins, and truly overcame the powers of sin and death by being raised to life. Easter is the day in which we remember that death truly has no sting. Jesus died and made a way into eternal life with Him. The whole concept is absolutely mind-blowing. **Jesus was killed by the people He had come to save.** He was dead for three days, and then by the power of the Holy Spirit came back to life to share His good news with the very same people who betrayed and killed him.

After being raised back to life, Jesus truly was not finished. What Jesus wanted was for the movement He began to continue on after his time on Earth. When the two Mary's came to check on His tomb, they found it empty, and an angel informed them that He had risen. They left the tomb, and were startled when Jesus greeted them. The man they watched die with their very eyes was standing before them. He told them, "hello," and "do not be afraid." It is one thing to be reunited with someone you have not seen in a long time, but being reunited with someone who died is something else entirely.

The beauty in this interaction is that the first thing the women do is fall to His feet and worship Him. Out of joy, fear, sadness, and elation. Obviously we might not have a moment where the risen Jesus comes and stands before us, *but what He has done for us is still worthy of that same response* that Mary and Mary Magdalene gave him. As we go throughout life, there will be times when we will have mixed emotions regarding Jesus: fear, joy, worry, impatience, gratitude, exhaustion, love, hope, and even frustration. When we get to those moments and we don't know what to do, we simply need to fall down at His feet and worship the one who is deserving of all of our praise, regardless of what our lives look like in the moment.

Logan Nelson

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Son, who You so willingly and generously gave, that He was sacrificed in my place in order to make a way for me into Your family. Thank You for welcoming me with open arms and Your magnificently joyous heart. You are truly deserving of all praise. Thank You that Your story was not finished when Jesus was placed in that tomb, that instead You wanted an ongoing relationship with me. Thank You for Your sacrifice and thank You for Your Son. Holy Spirit, lead me away from the sin in my life, and guide me to seek You when I begin to forget who You have called me to be. I love You, I thank You, and in Your name I pray, Amen!

Questions:

What is something that you could thank Jesus for right now?

What is something that you are struggling to see Jesus in?

What are things you can look back to in order to remind yourself of who He is?

Imagine yourself in place of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, what would be the first thing you would want to say to Jesus?

Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

Passage: John 21

Jesus wasn't done. In John 21, Jesus asks the disciples to put their faith in Him one more time. Simon Peter and a couple of disciples went out to fish all night, catching nothing. After a long night, they were coming back when someone from shore (Jesus) asked them if they had caught anything. Jesus already knew they didn't catch anything, and directed them to cast their net in again, 100 yards from shore. In the Sea of Galilee where the disciples were fishing, typically most fishermen would fish at night because that's when the fish come up to the surface. For the disciples to cast their net in during the day 100 yards away from shore would be unheard of. The disciples listened to the unknown man (Jesus) and were unable to pull the net up because of how many fish were in it. Then they realized who was on shore.

Sometimes we get so caught up with what we are doing, working ourselves to exhaustion, that we miss the voice of God, the call to action. To cast our nets and follow the guidance of Jesus in our lives - and reap the fruit. As soon as they realized it was Jesus, Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to Him. Relationship with Jesus can be hard. Hearing Him vs. what the world is saying or your own thoughts can be very challenging. However, in the midst of the hardships, Peter still praises Jesus. They still took the step to cast their nets one more time. Jesus then revealed his identity through His faithfulness.

One of my favorite parts about John 21 is when the disciples get back to shore. Jesus already had a warm place for them along with breakfast. He already had the coals ready for the fish and the fire going so that the disciples can all be around Him in community. There is something secure in knowing that Jesus has already prepared His table for you and me. He has a warm place for you at the end of a long journey, and the hardships and struggles are all relative in comparison to the presence of Jesus. The coals already had fish and bread on them (v.9). Jesus didn't need the disciples to bring Him the fish - He just wanted their time - to take delight in their presence and who they are. Take a moment and rest in God's plan and center your heart on His display of faithfulness and love.

Tim Litovchenko

Prayer:

Jesus, I come to You with my flaws. I'm sorry for the ways that I may have doubted Your faithfulness and love. Open my eyes to the ways You are pursuing me and inviting me to a personal relationship with You. Jesus, help me see how You delight in my presence. I thank You for the way You have created me. Help me rest in Your faithfulness and love - the fact that You have prepared the warm place on the shore for me. I am in awe of Your heart, God.

Amen.

Questions:

How does the heart of Jesus stand out to you in John 21?

What are some ways you have questions Jesus' faithfulness or love?

Do you believe Jesus delights in who you are? Why or why not?

The Early Church is Born

Passage: Acts 2:42-47

This is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture. Something about the way that the early church is described here just feels right in my soul - like this is how we were always meant to live together. This passage describes a group of people who understand the value of God's Word, eat together, pray for one another, take care of one another, praise God, and pursue a common goal together. Can you imagine getting to live nearby all of your friends in this way - sharing everything, having dinner together every night, being there to support one another and seeking God together? It sounds like a dream and I think that even back then there must have been something about these early Christians' lifestyle that was very appealing because in verse 47 it says that the Lord "kept adding to their number those who were being saved."

I read this description of the early church's lifestyle and it seems too good to be true, but Jesus seems to be showing us the way that He intends for us to live with one another. This is a group of people who have been so radically transformed by the Good News of Jesus that they can't help but live generously, share the Gospel, and praise God together. Does anybody know if there's somewhere I can go to sign up for this kind of a community? I think we all know that there isn't - that isn't how this works, but I am personally challenged as I read these verses and desire this kind of community to ask myself - how can I create this type of community around me? If I really do believe that Jesus has changed my life and that He is my provider and that He desires for me to have a close community - then why don't I live more generously? Why don't I read the Bible with my friends more often? Why don't I take time to pray for the people around me? I really do believe that if we've been transformed by Jesus then we are empowered to create these changes in our communities, in our families, in our friend groups, *but that it starts with us choosing to live differently.*

Ashley Nikonchuk

Prayer:

Jesus - thank You for giving us such a cool picture of community in the early church. Please give me a heart that desires this type of community for myself and the people around me, and show me the ways that I can be a part of creating this type of community. Make me brave and bold to pursue you with my friends because of the ways that I've been transformed. Amen.

Questions:

What do you think it was like to live in this early church community?

Is there any part of the early church's lifestyle that sounds appealing to you?

What do you think empowered these Christians to live so generously and on mission together?

How can we embrace the lifestyle of the early church today?

Harmony of the Early Church

Passage: Acts 4:32-36

Today when you think of church you may think about ways in which a church has hurt you or someone you know. Maybe when you think of church, you might even think of UNITED and the things we do when we gather, or perhaps the ways in which some churches help people. There are so many ways you can think about the church, but there is one thing I want to clarify: The Church is not a place but a people.

The Church might not always get it right today, but in the book of Acts, a wonderful image of how the Church is supposed to operate is illustrated. In Acts, it is said that all of the people who believed in Jesus were of the same heart and mind, meaning they all had love in their hearts for those around them, and they all had the same idea of what Jesus had done and called them to do. It's said in Acts, that in order to love and care for people, the believers of the church shared their possessions and met the needs of everyone in their community. It is said that in order to meet needs, occasionally people would sell their own homes or pieces of land to make money that would provide for others. This is what the Church is supposed to be about.

Whatever your views on church are, I hope you are able to be encouraged by what we set out to be. One of the greatest works of the Church is simply sharing what we have, and loving everyone. Somewhere along the way this was lost on certain people, but just because people have fallen short in the past, does not mean that we have to be a generation that does so as well. One of my biggest dreams for UNITED is that peoples' views on Church would change because they saw the ways in which Whatcom County's youth loved each other and took care of one another. My hope is that people would see a generation who genuinely loves Jesus, and lets their actions be an outpouring of the love they have already received!

Logan Nelson

Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for the example You set out for us in loving one another. Thank You for giving us a sense of direction in how we are to live our lives, how we are to care for one another. God, I pray that my generation may be one that changes the way people view church. That people would be shocked by how deeply we love one another, and wish to be a part of what You have called us to do. Holy Spirit, be convicting my heart and leading me to serve those around me. Open up opportunities, and open my eyes to the needs around me. God, may I be Your hands and feet in this world, and shine Your light, love, hope, joy and peace. I love You, I thank You, and in Your name I pray, Amen!

Questions:

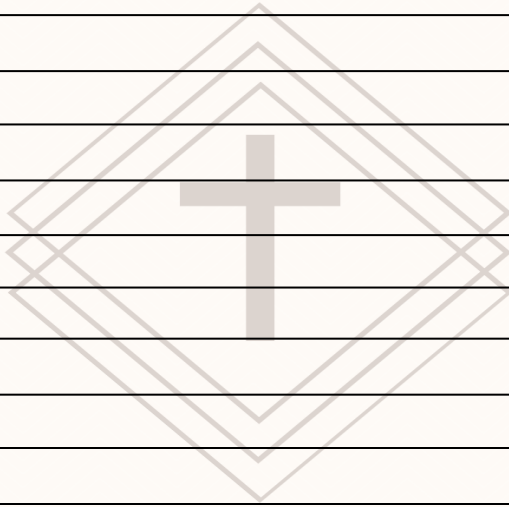
What thoughts come to mind when you think about church today?

How do people you know view church?

Are there differences between what you think and what we see in Acts?

What things need to change within church for us to become THE Church (The example we see in Acts)?

Notes



Notes

