

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 7: John 20:1-18- Jesus: The God Who Knows Our Name

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the past six weeks in John. What has stood out to you? What stories/images/passages do you most remember? Do you remember what we stated as the main purpose in John (hint, look at John 20: 31)? If you were asked to describe the gospel of John in a few words, what words might you choose? What has it been like to be part of this group, gathering together each week around the Word?

Today's Passage: Today we end our study of John at the empty tomb. In John 18-19, Jesus has willingly given his life on the cross. After his death, he is buried in a garden tomb by one of his followers, and then the world goes quiet. But in the darkness of early morning, a woman is about to have an encounter that will change her life, and will forever change the course of history. This chapter ends the 4th section (remember our 5 sections?) of John's gospel, and is often thought to be the original ending of the gospel itself. As confusion and grief give way to understanding and joy, the full purpose of Jesus' life is finally understood: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1: 14).

CONTENT:

Read John 20:1-18 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. There are three witnesses in this passage. Describe their actions and reactions as they encounter the empty tomb.

2. Compare Mary Magdalene's language in vs 2 and 13 as she describes the source of her grief. The explanations are almost the same, but there are subtle differences. What do you notice? What does it tell you about her relationship to Jesus?
3. Recall that John 1: 1-3 uses language that takes the reader back to Genesis ("In the beginning...") and clearly ties Jesus to creation ("Through him all things were made...") In this chapter, John uses language that again takes us back to the "garden" of Genesis (he is the only gospel writer that uses the word "garden" associated with the resurrection story) and the first creation story.
4. Look at John 19: 41, John 20: 1, 15, 19. What words/images tie this story with the Creation story from Genesis (leader hint- notice "garden", "first day", "evening of the first day")? Why might this tie be so important to John? What does it indicate is happening in the resurrection?
5. What is the word that turns Mary from grief towards unexpected hope (vs 16)? Why do you think this word had so much power for her?
6. Jesus uses "my/your" language in verse 17. What does this tell us?
7. Mary is entrusted as the first evangelist- the first one to proclaim what has happened in the garden. What does she say in vs 18?

APPLICATION:

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion.

- When Jesus meets Mary in the garden- before he reveals who He is- He asks her two questions: "Why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for?" This is similar to what Jesus does in John 1, when he asks the two curious followers, "What do you want?" Why do you imagine that Jesus- the Lord of the Universe, the one who knows our thoughts before we even think them- chooses to engage us this way?
- Our names hold so much of our identity. When Mary hears her name on the lips of Jesus, everything becomes clear. What does it mean to you to have a God who calls you by name (John 10: 3)? Are there muddled places in your life where you need to hear Jesus speak your name?
- Mary declares to the gathered and still confused disciples, "I have seen the Lord!!" Share any places in your own life where you have clearly seen the hand and face of Christ.
- The gospel of John gives us a host of unexpected people that serve as chief agents, witnesses, apostles, and evangelists. Have you ever learned something about faith or Jesus or the life of discipleship from an unexpected person? Who was it and what did they teach you?
- John 20:31 says: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." How has your faith been formed by spending time in this gospel? Do you sense any places in your life where God is bringing renewed "life"? What might be one truth from this study that you carry with you?

PRAYER:

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below.

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

Father, Son, and Spirit-

We thank you that you are a God who knows our name.

That you speak tenderly to us in our grief, in our confusion, in our distraction, in our disbelief-

And that your voice gives light and life and joy.

We praise you for the truth that the grave holds no power.

That the Lamb of God has truly conquered sin and death.

That we stand in the dawning light of a new garden- whole and known and loved.

May we be people who proclaim with our whole lives, "I have seen the Lord!"

We pray this in the name of the One who accomplished it all, Jesus Christ.

Amen.