

Reading Schedule for February 12-18, 2018

We began reading the Gospel of John as we closed out 2017 and launched into the New Year. The Gospel of John is always one of my favorites, and now we conclude this week with Jesus' death and resurrection. This coming Wednesday is known as Ash Wednesday, and the beginning of Lent. Even though we don't practice that per se, it is a great way to prepare for the meaning of Easter and appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus. May we draw near to him in love and devotion.

February 12 – John 19:17-27: “Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.' This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, 'They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.' So this is what the soldiers did.” (v.24) I don't know how familiar you are to Psalm 22, but there are several references to the crucifixion in that particular Psalm. I mentioned it last week as well. This is a quote from verse 18 of Psalm 22. There is also mention of him being pierced as well as the strong words from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It is always fascinating to me that David shared these words a thousand years before Christ's crucifixion. David is one of John's favorite psalmist, as he refers to his words in verse 28, 36 and 37. The Roman soldiers had no idea about the Old Testament Scripture that they just fulfilled by casting lots for his garment. Their reasoning was that they did not want to tear Jesus' tunic, which was formed out of one piece of cloth. I want to refer you to Psalm 22:15-18 for David's specific prophecy. How does this inspire you? What else do you notice about the crucifixion of Christ that touches your heart?

February 13 – John 19:28-42: “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (v.30) This is always one of my “go to” verses because it means “paid in full.” It was a market term that people would use when they received enough money for a particular purchase. They would announce, “tetelestai.” It is in the perfect tense that means something has been completed and also has continuing results. This means there was no more penalty to be paid for sins, for Jesus' suffering finished, or completed, the payment. These are inspiring moments that are almost unimaginable. What prayer of appreciation might you share with Christ as he gave himself for you and me?

February 14 – John 20:1-10: “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.” (v.1) I know that Valentine's Day isn't a very big deal in the context of God's Word, but it affirms friendship and love, and also has some Christian roots in it with Saint Valentine. I don't mention that with any ulterior motive – just wanted to acknowledge the day. And also the fact that a woman was the first to witness the empty tomb. This was not the norm, nor would anyone acknowledge it except the honesty of God's Word. Women were not referred to as reliable witnesses in that day, as strange as that may seem. But Mary came to the tomb first and she went to report it to the disciples. There are just ten verses here about the resurrection, and I wanted you to have a day of contemplation about the wonder of Jesus being raised from the dead. In verse 2 there is an affirmation that Mary was not alone – that she had other women with her, because she says “we don't know where they have put him,” which matches the other Gospels in their account of the resurrection. What does the resurrection mean to you? What if there was no resurrection? Then what?

February 15 – John 20:11-18: “Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').” (v.16) I have especially appreciated this interaction between Jesus and Mary. Again it is fascinating that Jesus would reveal himself to Mary, as a woman, but I love the inclusive aspect of our faith, and in Christ there is neither male nor female, but we are equal in God's sight. The verse I chose is the idea that Jesus announced her name, and that is how she recognized him. It is in his tone of voice that his identity was revealed. I am sure that Jesus had addressed her by name many times. It is the

voice of Jesus that I long to hear. It says in John 10:3 & 4 that Jesus calls his sheep by name and they know his voice. Literally in verse 18 it said that Mary Magdalene announced this to the disciples with a sense of exclamation. This is a marvelous aspect of the story that encourages me to encounter Jesus as the resurrected Savior. If I am quiet enough, I might hear him say my name. How do you respond to this heartfelt interaction between Mary and Jesus?

February 16 – John 20:19-30: “Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'” (v.28) Thomas gets a bad rap, but I think of him as a courageous individual. He was skeptical without personal experience. It wouldn't take long for Jesus to reveal himself to Thomas, and this would change Thomas completely. He would take 180° turn and announce that Jesus is Lord and God. That is no small profession because he was acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. He could have said, “I believe and affirm Jesus as a great prophet.” But Thomas' statement is a clear confession that Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings of the universe. He would live with those kind of convictions, even though his Jewish culture would oppose him from that moment on. I don't think of Thomas as doubting, but rather courageous. History tells us that Thomas went to India and spread the Gospel as he courageously did so even to die a martyr's death. Yesterday we saw Mary encountering the risen Christ, and now Thomas experiencing him firsthand as well. What is your response to the risen Christ?

February 17 – John 21:1-14: “'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” (v.3) It is an interesting backdrop to what is happening. There is no question that Peter is ashamed of his cowardly denial the night of Jesus' crucifixion. Even though Jesus had revealed himself to the disciples previously, it seems that Peter is still in a funk. What does Peter know to do? He is a fisherman, so he wants to go fishing and the others don't want him to be alone. They say that they will go with him because they are concerned about Peter's emotional stability. A small fact that fishing in ancient times was preferred at night because it was cooler and also, fish would be closer to the surface. This is a breakthrough moment for Peter as he jumps in the water to meet Jesus. These personal encounters with Jesus and his disciples, and specifically with Peter even as we will read more tomorrow, are endearing to me. I want a close, personal relationship with Jesus. The way that they interact with Jesus gives insight into how he might respond to me. If I am discouraged, Jesus will call out to me. Will I turn towards him? Will I jump in the water? Will I find my strength in him? Paul said that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

February 18 – John 21:15-25: “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.” (v.24) John recognized himself as someone chosen by God to bear witness of the events that took place in the life of Christ. He has done a work that has inspired millions of people. I wonder if John had any idea how significant his contribution would be to the furtherance of Christ's kingdom? It is interesting and special that John refers to himself as the “the disciple whom he loved.” I imagine that every disciple could have written that as well, but here is John acknowledging it. John had the courage to write this story, and to continue to do so even though he was exiled to the island of Patmos. The truth that Christ loves him and continued to love him, sustained John as the Gospel writer and the evangelist up to the very point of his death. This insight about John being loved by Jesus is something that applies to my life, and to yours as well. Do you know that you are loved by Jesus? The more that you believe and receive his love, the more you will share it. Do you agree? How do you respond to this marvelous Gospel written by John?

Prayers: Please pray for our students as High Schoolers attend a special conference at Multnomah University this weekend, and remember the mid-high as our group of 6th through 8th graders is growing.