

Monday, 4-4-16, John 11:1-44

Sometimes we wonder why Jesus didn't hurry right to his dear friend Lazarus, but the story explains the healing is to be an occasion to show God's glory. And it proved to be as we tell the story of the raising of Lazarus to this day. Then the time was right for Jesus to go to Bethany. Now we know the disciples were secretly glad Jesus had said, "no." They didn't want to go Bethany in Judea because there was a gleaming target on Jesus' back. They tried to talk him out of it because they were scared. First they said Lazarus didn't need Jesus because he was taking a nap. They learned he was already dead. Then they really didn't want to go back where the leaders were waiting to kill them. Not Thomas. If Jesus said, "go," Thomas would go. Thomas believed in Jesus. Jesus was his leader. If Jesus and his followers were going to die, they might as well all go together. He reminds me of a dedicated soldier who follows his leader without question. Have you been in a situation where you put yourself into a difficult or scary situation because you had absolute trust and confidence in your leader?

Tuesday, 4-5-16, John 14:1-31

Probably we all know a Thomas, the kid in class who raises his hand and asks the "dumb" question. We were equally clueless, but we pretended we needed to study our desktops or pull up our socks – anything but ask the dumb question. Then it turns out the question wasn't dumb. It was the question the teacher was hoping for, because the teacher KNOWS. Jesus knew his words were simple, but the meaning was profound, a metaphor for the promise of eternal life. Once Thomas asked the question (and got another enigmatic answer), Philip chimed in. Jesus had their attention and set up a teaching moment, thanks to Thomas' asking a "dumb" but realistic question. If people's words baffle you, do you ask open questions like Thomas? Does it occur to you that God may want you to open up a discussion so others may understand?

Wednesday, 4-6-16, Acts 5:27-32

Shortly after the resurrection, the disciples set to work establishing a Jesus-community, doing wonderful things for the people right on the porch of the Temple. This community drew the anger of the Temple leaders who wanted the focus inside the Temple, not out on the porch. People admired them, but they were wary. Soon the disciples were jailed for miraculously healing throngs of people in Jerusalem. God opened the doors of the jail, and they walked out. Then the High Priest called them back. He said, "Didn't we give you strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying your best to blame us for the death of this man." But Peter and the apostles answered, "It is necessary to obey God rather than to obey men." Are you wrestling with a decision where you must decide whether you are obeying God or obeying men?

Thursday, 4-7-16, John 20:19-31

It's interesting that while the other disciples are locked and bolted inside the house together in fear of the Jewish leaders, Thomas alone is out running around. Is it possible Thomas would rather stay in the real world rather than cower for days inside a locked room? But his independent attitude caused him to miss Jesus' first visit. And he was skeptical about the story his fellow disciples told him. Then Jesus appeared and placed Thomas' hands into the spear and nail holes. Thomas had seen these injuries happen. It was part of his reality of Jesus' death. And now here was Jesus in the flesh, deep wounds and all. In an instant, Thomas' perception of reality made a great shift. There is a greater reality – the mysterious and unexpected reality of grace. How open are you to a paradigm shift when you experience God's grace in a mystifying way?

Friday, 4-8-16, Psalm 118:14-24

We learn that over focusing upon our past and its losses is a factor of depression. We also learn that overly focusing upon the future and all we must accomplish is a factor of anxiety. The healthiest time to focus is upon today. How do I spend this one specific day? In Psalm 118, the poet rejoices in today. The LORD is our strength and our salvation. Let us live in righteousness and give praise to the LORD. In 118:24, we get the beloved invitation, "This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Saturday, 4-9-16, Psalm 150:1-6

Psalm 150 focuses upon praising God with music. Some of us study music. Some enter the rather tough discipline of singing or playing an instrument in a small group. Some listen to a religious music station and sing along in the car. Music is probably our easiest way to praise the Lord. Do you have some way you praise the Lord every day? The Psalmist advises music is a way to draw closer to God. It is a spiritual discipline to draw us closer to Jesus. If the discipline of daily prayer is hard for you to establish, try whatever faith-based music appeals to you, perhaps singing along.

Love: How do these devotions teach about the love of God and the love for one another?
Learn: What have you learned about where Jesus walked that helps you with where you walk?
Share: What key insights have you learned this week on how to share your faith with others?
Serve: Look at the prayer list. Who can you pray for? Who needs a little extra help in an area where you can make a difference?

Healing Strength: Rex Townsend, Stan Ensich, Lincoln Wallis, Chris Osborn (Ken and Sandy Grubb's daughter), Janet Coons (Donna's daughter)

Homebound: Mary Hicks, Mary Schmidt, Joann Young, Jeanne Carman

Military Personnel: Adam Walters, Joseph Roberts, Lucas Lamkin, Adam Clark