

2024

Seeing
and
Believing

A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



Lafayette
federated
church

180 Route 15, Lafayette, NJ 07848

973-383-4461 | www.lfc.org

LAFAYETTE FEDERATED CHURCH

Celebrate

EASTER AT LAFAYETTE FEDERATED CHURCH

MARCH 24TH: PALM SUNDAY

*9:00 AM Worship Service

10:30 AM Sunday School

MARCH 28TH: MAUNDY THURSDAY

*7:00 PM Communion Service

MARCH 29TH: GOOD FRIDAY

7:00 AM Men's Fellowship Breakfast

*7:00 PM Tenebrae Service

MARCH 30TH: EASTER EGG HUNT OUTREACH, 10 AM

MARCH 31ST: EASTER SUNDAY

6:30 AM Sunrise Service (Pavilion)

7:30 AM Easter Breakfast (Gym)

*9:00 AM Triumphant Resurrection Service

10:30 AM Sunday School

*Livestream available: www.lfc.org/media

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Seeing and Believing

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First a Lamb

He couldn't be my Savior

if He weren't first a Lamb.

I couldn't call Him Lord and King

if He'd not become a man.

He wouldn't be exalted now

unless He'd been brought low,

and I would have no hope of life

if He'd not died so long ago.

Not only died, but rose from death

to stand at God's right hand.

My Jesus suffered this for me;

My God was first "The Lamb".

By Marla Casbarro

9/8/2023

Seeing and Believing

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EASTER SUNDAY

Read: John 20:19-29

The remembrance of Holy Week traditionally ends Easter Sunday as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps more than any other Gospel, though, the Gospel of John makes clear that the resurrection was not simply meant to be celebrated as some holiday but believed in all the live long day. The resurrection of Jesus is something we're supposed to put our trust in that is thereby meant to transform the way we live because Jesus lives.

And while we were not there to see it with our eyes, we're able to now see it through the eyes of those like John, so that we might be "those who have not seen and yet have believed."

He is Risen. He is risen indeed!

Seeing and Believing

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our 2024 Holy Week Devotional entitled "*Seeing and Believing*." This year some of the members of our ministry staff and a few of their wives have written these daily reflections to help you prepare your heart for the celebration of our risen Savior this Easter Sunday. They are intended for you to use in your personal time with the Lord, with your family or friends, or along with others in a small group. We would encourage you to set aside some time each day to read and reflect on these wonderful truths that are anchored in those fateful days that led up to Jesus' death on the Cross and resurrection from the grave.

This year we will focus our attention on that week of Jesus' life and ministry as described in the Gospel of John. More than any of the other Gospel writers, John focuses his attention on those who saw Jesus and believed in him. And the final chapters of this magnificent work invite us to see him too through John's testimony and to believe in him ourselves. For as John himself says, "These things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you might have life in his name" (20:31).

Pastor Jesse Meekins

Seeing and Believing

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PALM SUNDAY

Read: [John 12:12-19](#)

While the Gospel of John dates the beginning of Holy Week to the day before Palm Sunday, with Jesus' private anointing at a dinner party in Bethany, we more commonly remember that last week of Jesus' ministry as commencing with his public entrance into Jerusalem. That day, as John himself records, Jesus was welcomed into the city by a throng of people who had gathered palm branches and greeted him with words taken from Psalm 118. And both the palm branches that they waved and the passage that they quoted identified Jesus as their long-awaited king.

The question that John raises, though, is whether Jesus was the kind of king for which this crowd was clamoring. And both the palms in their hands and the Psalm upon their lips suggest that he was not; that rather than calling for the kind of king they "needed," this was a crowd calling for the kind of king they "wanted" instead.

If you go back and read Psalm 118, it becomes evident that, as appropriate as this Psalm may have been for the coronation of a king, the crowd was using Psalm 118 to call on Jesus to be not only their kingly ruler but their royal conqueror. They wanted a king that would rise up against the political volatility of their day and free them from their Roman captors. And the branches in their hands only reinforced this desire, such palms long being held as a symbol of Jewish national independence ever since their last revolt against the Romans some 150 years before.

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SILENT SATURDAY

And not just approaching Jesus, but like Joseph of Arimathea caring for the corpse of the one his fellow Pharisees had killed – these two confessing with their lips and with their lives that Jesus is theirs.

And the hope for us is that while we now wait – not so much for Jesus' resurrection as for his return – we would likewise break the silence of Saturday as well. The hope is that seeing the way Jesus sacrificed his life for us we'd be emboldened to risk our lives for him.

Pastor Jesse Meekins

Seeing and Believing

A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

SILENT SATURDAY

Read: John 19:38-42

As night quickly approaches, the transition from Friday's crucifixion to the silence of Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, sets in. The Jewish laws regarding their holy day, require even Jesus' secret disciples to hasten his burial. Notice, though, the transformation that Jesus' death precipitates in the lives of these followers.

"Joseph of Arimathea" is an individual known from all four of the Gospels, in each associated with the burial of Jesus. Only here in John's Gospel, though, is this Joseph described as not only a "disciple of Jesus" but also that "secretly for fear of the Jews." Yet, look at Joseph now after his master has paid the ultimate price. When he ought to have been most afraid of identifying with Jesus, Joseph is found not only openly identifying with his master but doing so at the risk of his reputation and wellbeing. And this is only accentuated if Joseph of Arimathea is to be identified as one of the religious authorities mentioned earlier in John's Gospel, who believed in Jesus "but for fear of the Pharisees did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue" (12:42). Now he goes so far as to care for the corpse of the one his fellow leaders had crucified.

This transformation is not limited to Joseph of Arimathea, though. Notice who accompanies him. Nicodemus, a fellow religious leader, who was himself a Pharisee; a man who before had only approached Jesus under the cloak of night (cf. 3:1-2). But who now approaches Jesus before the night of Friday fully falls; before the silence of Saturday fully sets in.

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PALM SUNDAY

The problem is that even as Jesus consented to the crowd's coronation by entering the royal city like royal Solomon, riding on a donkey, it would become altogether clear that the king they saw and sought was not the kind of king Jesus came to be. For the king they wanted was not in fact the king they needed most.

Rather than come as the king we "want" – a king who will conquer our earthly foes and ensure our earthly comfort – Jesus comes as the king we actually "need." He comes as a king who instead of putting others to death for us offers to die himself on our behalf, who before walking out of the grave walks into it. And the only question is whether we will see him better – and seek him for better reasons – than those who saw and sought him that first Palm Sunday so long ago.

Pastor Jesse Meekins

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HOLY MONDAY

Read: [John 12:20-26](#)

What do you need to see before you know it's Easter? Is it the weather change or the flowers starting to bloom? Maybe it's when you see the Easter candy for sale in the stores. Whatever it is, there's a point where something tells us that it's time. Well, in today's scripture reading we see that Jesus clearly knew that his time on earth was coming to an end and that he would soon be carrying out his Father's will. So, he once again predicts his death to prepare his disciples because they still had not comprehended what was about to happen despite all his previous warnings. Focus with me for a moment on the "Greeks" who are mentioned in verse 20 when John tells us that "among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks."

We don't know much about these "Greeks," but many scholars believe that's the very reason they are mentioned, encompassing people from at least three broad categories: 1. those who were ethnically Greek but had converted to Judaism; 2. Greek God-fearers who had great respect for Judaism but didn't convert entirely; and 3. Greek travelers who were just drawn to Jesus out of curiosity. But why is this important for us? Because, as such, these Greeks represent many people today. People who are looking for Jesus can be pretty much placed into three categories as well: 1. those who love him and walk with him on a daily basis; 2. those who believe in him but don't fully know him, who have head-knowledge, but no heart knowledge; and 3. those who are just curious, not sure what to make of Him.

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GOOD FRIDAY

This was no common criminal, but Jesus, the Christ, offering in his finished work the atonement for the sins of all who would see it and believe in him as their Lord and Savior.

In yesterday's devotional, Kimberly challenged us to come to grips with the weight of our own sin and understand that Jesus came and died for us all. He died for the ones who put him on the cross. He died for the ones who sent him there. He died for the ones who passed him by and passed him up as a common criminal, just as much as he died for his dearest friends and vilest enemies. And with those words with which he gave up his spirit, we recognize that he died for us too.

Colossians 1:21 says that we all were once alienated from God, and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds – a picture that's maybe even more uncomfortable than the one painted here in John. But thanks be to God that it is a picture surrounded by truths that leave me feeling nothing but gratitude and awe for my Savior. We're told that Jesus made "peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20); and that, while we were once alienated from God, we have since been "reconciled in his body of flesh by his death" in order to present "holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (1:22). While the cross will to a degree always be difficult to read about – and maybe even more difficult to come to grips with – once we do, oh the peace we will find in it. Thank you, Jesus, for the cross.

Pastor Ryan Drew

Seeing and Believing

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GOOD FRIDAY

Read: [John 19:17-30](#)

This may be the most uncomfortable passage I have ever read.

Collectively, the Gospels paint a picture of Jesus enduring unbearable pain – unthinkable pain – through the course of the crucifixion. Yet, to think that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame” in order to bear a punishment that was not His own but in fact mine, is beyond what my mind can fathom. While I have a difficult time even reading about it, though, I cannot imagine what it must have felt like for the individuals who had to stand there and witness it. Maybe some of the Roman soldiers had become desensitized to it because crucifixion was part of their job, so much so that they were casting lots for Jesus’ clothing. Or perhaps some simply passed it off as they passed him by as the just end for certain criminals. But for those who knew the one hanging on the Cross as their master, teacher, and friend, the scene must have left them in a state of disbelief and deep sorrow. However, there was more to the crucifixion than all the agony and humiliation seen on the surface. There was something even more excruciating being born behind the scenes.

In verse 30, John records the final words Jesus spoke from the Cross, when he declared, “It is finished!” And this is John’s way of peeling back the veil to show the full weight of what Jesus was bearing – that the man nailed to the cross, who was not guilty of any crime or sin, was here willingly giving his own life as a sacrifice for the lives of others.

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HOLY MONDAY

Notice, though, how Jesus goes on in the next few verses to explain that, while many will seek him, only some of these “seekers” will inherit eternal life. Jesus says that “whoever loves his life loses it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (12:25). And he goes on to say that “If anyone serves me, he must follow me” (12:26). You see, Jesus clearly paints a picture here that, while many may seek him, the only ones who will inherit eternal life with him are those who surrender their life to him. The amazing thing is that what we give up, is nothing in comparison to what we gain. And the question is whether we will see that for ourselves and do our job as followers of Christ in helping others seeking Jesus to see that too.

Just like the flowers and candy remind us that Easter is coming soon, let’s be reminded daily by God’s Word that Jesus is coming soon too and that we ought to be found faithful as his disciples as we serve him with all our heart, all our soul, and all of our mind. Let’s help others to believe by letting them see Jesus through us and to see Easter for what it really is, the celebration of the love of our Savior who willingly went to the cross for you and for me.

Pastor Glenn Cohrs

Seeing and Believing

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HOLY TUESDAY

Read: [John 12:44-50](#)

Though the Gospel of John does not specifically say when Jesus “departed and hid himself” from public view (12:36), we can assume from the other Gospels that it was sometime after the religious leaders spent the better part of Tuesday trying to indict him with their questions. Against the backdrop of this departure, Jesus’ declaration at the end of chapter 12 functions as one final appeal, not only to the watching world, but to the reader as well. If you want to see and believe in God, you must see and believe in him through Jesus; and failing to see and believe in him, means you’ve failed to see and believe in his Father too.

However, the sad fact of the matter is that so many don’t see Jesus for who he is and refuse to believe in who he came to be. They’re attracted by his charisma and obvious communication skills but only listen to him like he’s one more good teacher – not like he has a divine authority to command. They’re left dumb-struck by his miracles and marvels, but never recognize the divine power that he wields. They’re willing to base their lives on his, but only as if he’s some moral philosopher – not as the ground of right and wrong itself. And yet this is what the Gospel of John has said from the beginning: that he is the one who was “with God” and “was God” in the very beginning (1:1-2), the very Word of God who took on flesh and dwelt among us (1:14). Sadly, though, this is the very side of Jesus that people miss the most: that when you look at Jesus, you’re looking at God in the flesh and that if you fail to see Jesus like this, then you’ve never really seen God at all.

Seeing and Believing

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

Our daughter Ellie had a medical procedure recently. And, in order to prevent infection, we were instructed to wash her thoroughly the night before and then clean her entire body with medicated wipes. The procedure involved a puncture so small you could barely see it with the naked eye. Yet a single bacterium entering that microscopic puncture could’ve led to massive complications and possible death. And so it is with sin. Since our God is holy, even the smallest sin in our lives leads to death. For just as Jesus says, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (13:8). He must clean us like Ryan and I had to clean Ellie. And thank God he did – not only laying aside his garments and pouring out the water like he did here, but laying aside his will and pouring out his life to clean us all the more. It’s beautiful, isn’t it?

2 Corinthians 5:15 says, “and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Christ desires to freely give the everlasting kind of love we see in this scene here in John 13. And he desires to give it to all who would be his own. The washing of the feet of Judas shows us that no matter how dirty the sin or how deep the betrayal, Christ died for that sin and is willing to wash it. The question is whether we will let him – whether we’re humble enough to accept this Maundy Thursday the humble sacrifice he demonstrated that first Maundy Thursday so long ago.

Kimberly Drew

Seeing and Believing

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

Read: [John 13:1-11](#)

The feast of Passover is so rich with symbolism and the foreshadowing of Christ, it's hard to comprehend the fact that the very Messiah to which Passover was meant to point to eventually sat in a room himself to share that sacred meal with his disciples. He would have led the disciples through the various aspects of the meal, all the while knowing that each was pointing to himself, the perfect sacrificial lamb. So began those precious last moments shared between Jesus and his disciples with his own sacrifice already hanging over the upper room before the feast had even begun. And as John says in verse 1, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Rereading this account, though, I'm struck by the extent of Christ's everlasting love – this love that not only drove him to serve the meal that symbolized his imminent sacrifice, but to then follow that up with the powerful and moving act of bending down to wash his disciple's feet. We see Jesus in this account using his final moments with his twelve disciples to show them what kind of king he was, the kind that would lower himself for the sake of those he loved. And not to be missed is the fact that among the twelve was none other than Judas. Judas who verse 2 tells us already had his heart set on betraying Jesus; Judas who in a matter of moments would be out the door scheming against Jesus. Yet not before Jesus had first bent down to serve Judas; not before Jesus showed Judas one last time what he needed to be made clean.

Seeing and Believing

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HOLY TUESDAY

What Jesus says publicly this one final time here in John 12, the Nicene Creed invites us to affirm like this:

"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made; being of the same essence as the Father."

And yet what a wonder that directly after declaring his divinity publicly for the last time, this very God of very God would lay down his life for wayward creatures like you and me. Surely, this was no mere miracle-worker or moral-philosopher – nor simply one more good teacher. I'm not ashamed to say that this was Jesus, the Christ – my Savior and Lord.

Catherine Meekins

Seeing and Believing

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HOLY WEDNESDAY

Read: [John 5:1-17](#)

The events of the Wednesday of Holy Week are conspicuously absent from our Gospel records, and that's no different for the Gospel of John. Yet the absence of any such accounts, does not mean that the story had somehow stopped. For just like Jesus declared earlier in the Gospel of John: even when it looks like nothing's happening, the Father, Son, and Spirit are at work accomplishing their good purposes. And, while the events of Holy Week are a powerful reminder of God's constant presence and his continual work for our salvation, looking back at an earlier account in John's Gospel about an invalid at the pool in Bethesda may help us better appreciate God's work behind the scenes on the Wednesday of Holy Week itself.

For thirty-eight years this invalid had sat by the edge of that pool, clinging to the hope that he might be the one to experience God's healing hand, that God might still heal him. And yet, even in his response to Jesus, you can tell that he wasn't holding to that hope very tightly. His story reminds us, though, how God's timing is not our timing. Thirty-eight years of waiting for healing at Bethesda must've felt like an eternity, a period of time during which God felt distant and indifferent. And yet, look at how Jesus – fully God and fully aware – wasn't unaware or unconcerned regarding this man's suffering at all.

We read in verse six that Jesus “knew” the man's suffering, the same way he knew the story of the Samaritan woman the chapter prior to this, before she even started sharing it.

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HOLY WEDNESDAY

And he knows our needs better than we do too. He knows, and he cares; and even in the silence when the story seems like it's somehow stopped, God's work continues – unseen but ever-present. And, as is so often the case, in greater ways and aimed at greater ends than we could ask or hope! Just like in this account where a paralyzed man, who's focused entirely on the physical, has an encounter with the one who wants to heal him spiritually too; one who doesn't necessarily work according to our timelines or according to our plans, but who's working nonetheless.

It's interesting that God's constant presence and continual work is brought back up at the end of this account. Jesus, himself, declares to the Jewish leaders, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (5:17). And that's as true in our lives today as it was true on that Wednesday of Holy Week so long ago, because like we sing:

Even when I don't see it, you are working!

Even when I don't feel it, you are working!

You never stop – you never stop working!

Way maker, Miracle Worker,

Promise Keeper, Light in the Darkness

My God – that is who You are

Pierre and Dina Lawrence