

HELLO

my name is

Jesus

**What would you do if you
could meet Jesus again
for the first time?**

Jan. 6 - Apr. 21

*April 2019 - Weeks 14-17
Curriculum for Small Groups
and Personal Studies*

Small Groups at The Well GROUP

COVENANT

Groups are encouraged to write a group covenant. The covenant can cover:

- Starting/ending on time
- No cell phones on
- Sharing “airtime” - how the group will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak
- Encourage one another to use the “Step Up/Step Back” guideline. If you have been quiet and not shared, you may want to “Step Up” and speak. If you have been talking a lot, pay attention to when you should “Step Back” so that others have time/space to share.
- “Pass” is always an acceptable statement if someone prefers not to answer a question.
- Observing confidentiality
- Use “I” statements
- Silence is okay! Some people need time to think before they answer a question. When a question is asked, don’t feel you need to jump right in to fill the silence. Learn to see silence as another member at the table.
- Respect the beliefs/opinions of others, especially when you do not agree.
- Pray for one another

Welcome to “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time”, a study about Jesus based on the gospel of Matthew.

Who was Matthew?

Some scholars say Matthew was the tax collector. Most scholars say that all of the New Testament gospels are anonymous, in other words, there is no definitive authorship. Others will say that the words and teachings of Matthew were gathered together, thus the gospel “according to Matthew”. “For Christians, of course, what matters is not the tradition of human authorship, but our confidence that God speaks to us through these texts and that they preserve the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.” ¹

Date written?

Most scholars place the time of Matthew’s writing somewhere between 60-80 AD.

How does Matthew relate to Mark, Luke and John’s gospels?

Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar. Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the *Synoptic* gospels: *syn* - “with”, *optic*- has to do with looking or seeing. So the three are “seen” together. They tell the same stories, often in the same order. Their use of similar language and sequence of events leads most scholars to believe that they were based on one source document, which is often referred to as “Q” or “Quelle” which means source. Many scholars believe that the gospel of Mark is that source, and that Matthew and Luke expanded on Mark. Other scholars suggest Matthew as the earliest gospel. Each synoptic uses unique words or a slant on an event.

John’s gospel is very different. Jesus has a longer ministry in John, three years as opposed to one year in the synoptics. Jesus spends a lot of time in Jerusalem, and John’s gospel explores different theological concepts than the synoptics. Events in John’s gospel don’t occur at the same time as they do in the synoptics. John includes some events that are not in the synoptics (raising of Lazarus from the dead).

Who was Matthew’s intended audience?

Matthew is a gospel written by a Jew, for Jews. Mark writes to a Gentile community. Matthew uses language that would have been familiar to a Jewish audience. Matthew speaks of rabbis and teachers of the law, who were regarded as interpreters of the law. Matthew’s gospel treats the texts from Hebrew scripture (the Old Testament) with deep respect. Matthew seeks to show that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew writes of Jesus coming not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, and that the Law will not pass away. Matthew was written by one who knew and loved the Law. Matthew is the only gospel to use the word *church* to describe a group of believers. The synoptic gospels all record the account of Jesus asking the disciples, “Who do people say I am?” with Peter saying, “You are the Christ.” Only Matthew adds Jesus telling Peter, “. . . you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18)

¹ NIV Cultural Study Bible. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, MI. 2016. p. 1603

Key Passages:

- The Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5-7, Jesus' longest teaching in the New Testament
- The Parables of the Kingdom - Matthew 10
- Greatness and Forgiveness in the Kingdom - Matthew 18
- The Coming of the King - Matthew 24,25
- *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* 28:19

Where does Matthew's gospel start?

Each gospel starts differently. Mark begins with John the Baptist and Jesus first appears when he is coming for baptism. John begins by saying the "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Luke begins with the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Luke's gospel has the traditional birth narrative that is heard on Christmas.

Matthew's gospel is the only one to contain the genealogy of Jesus, tracing Jesus through the line of King David (Israel's most important King) all the way back to Abraham. The list includes several women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's Wife and Mary the mother of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is recorded in seven short verses (Matthew 1:18-25).

Matthew uses the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" instead of "Kingdom of God" as other gospel writers do. He uses Kingdom of Heaven out of deep respect for God's name, which the Jews thought was so holy that it was not uttered or written. In Jewish writing you will often see God written as G-D.

Week Fourteen – Matthew 25:31-46

Parable of the last judgment

Ice Breakers - pick one or more of the following questions, introduce yourself

1. Did anyone in your group ever have sheep or goats? What was it like?
2. When you are really hungry, what food do you crave?
3. Have you ever visited someone in prison? (Share if you feel comfortable)

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew 25:31-46 - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Judgment of the Nations

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates

the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the

foundation of the world; 35 for I was

hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36

I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king

will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44

Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”



Study Notes

- Chapters 23-25 of Matthew are called the “Final Discourse”. The setting is the temple, and the time is early in Holy Week - sometime between Palm Sunday and Holy/Maundy Thursday.
- Jesus has been teaching about “readiness” in the parables of “The Faithful and Unfaithful Servant” (MT 24:45-41), “The Wise and Foolish Virgins” (MT 25:1-13), “Parable of the Talents” (MT 25:14-30).
- Now he turns to the idea of faithfulness and judgment.
- This passage, known as “The Judgment of the Nations” is often referred to as the “Parable of the Sheep and Goats”. Both the righteous and the unrighteous will be surprised by Jesus’ judgment.
- **Son of Man** - recall that this is the way Jesus often refers to himself.
- This passage uses different titles for Christ, for the one sent by God to redeem God’s people.
 - Son of Man (v. 31)
 - Shepherd (v. 32)
 - King (v. 34,40)
 - Lord (v. 37, 44)
- V. 32 **Nations** - the word is *ethne* was often used to refer to Gentiles (non-Jews). *Ethne* is also used to mean people in general. The love of God is extended to all *ethne*, to all people.
- **Sheep and Goats** - Sheep were considered more valuable because of their wool, meat and milk and were usually raised in greater number. Sheep were much more obedient than goats, but sheep are not very smart. They get lost, stuck and put themselves in dangerous situations. (Sounds like us doesn’t it!) Shepherd/sheep is an image Jesus uses frequently.
- **King** - Jesus had referred to himself as Shepherd, and now the word is King. The Shepherd has become King.
- **Inheritance** - this is a designated gift, a planned gift. God has prepared the kingdom since the beginning of the world.
- **Hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, in prison**. These are six kinds of mercy (there are more). All of us can do these things.
- **When did we see you hungry?** They are surprised, these mercy-givers, that they have been noticed. They performed these acts of mercy for the right reasons; not for attention or reward.
- **You didn’t do it to me**. The king blessed those who extended mercy and now the king curses/judges those who refused to show mercy. These are sins of omission rather than sins of commission, they are things we should have done but did not do.
- **Eternal Fire** - the gospel includes both grace and judgment.

Discussion Questions

1. Is this a parable or is this a prophecy? Is this a story/parable Jesus is telling to help us see ourselves? Or is he saying that this is something that will happen? Is it both?
2. What are the six things Jesus says will be used to judge us? Are these acts of justice? Mercy? Compassion? Discipleship?
3. Does God love us more if we do these things? Does God love us less if we do not? If our doing them does not change the way God looks at us, why would we do them?

4. Of those six actions by which we will be judged, for whom do we do them? For the person we are serving? For us? For God? For the world?
5. Who else besides those listed here might be considered the least of these?
6. Which of these actions are the easiest for you? Why? Which is the most challenging? Why? Where do you find yourself serving most naturally? Is there a particular population from those listed you feel called to serve? (hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, stranger, imprisoned)
7. *Nations* - the Greek word refers to “all people” and to “Gentiles” or non-Jews. Which does it refer to in this passage; all people? Gentiles? Both? Who are “ethne” in the world today?
8. Is the concept of judgment consistent with how you see Jesus?
9. What is the relationship between judgment and grace? Christians, and Christian churches can tend to value one or the other more highly. As United Methodists we place a high value on God’s grace.
 - *Prevenient Grace* - the grace that goes before. This is God’s grace moving in our lives before we even are aware of it. It is grace that precedes any human decision to follow God. We baptize babies because we believe God’s prevenient grace is already alive and flowing in these little ones. As we become aware of our own sin and need for God, it is prevenient grace that has guided us to that point.
 - *Justifying Grace* - is God making things right. Scripture says that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. (Romans 3:23) Try as we might, we cannot be good enough to earn God’s love. Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of our sins. When we are justified we are made right with God. In a pamphlet titled *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, John Wesley likens this moment in our spiritual development to a door. At the moment of justification, we cross the threshold from unbelief to belief. This, however, is not of Our own doing. Think of scrambled words on your computer screen, and then hitting “justify” and the words become neatly arranged and readable.
 - *Sanctifying Grace* - sanctify simply means “to make holy”, but it’s not a holier-than-thou kind of thing. It means that God’s sanctifying grace in our lives should be transforming us more and more into the image of Christ. It is a reminder that we have not arrived - but are under construction. For example, as we grow in our relationship with God, our lives should reflect that. We should become more loving, more kind, more generous, more peaceful, more engaged in works of justice and mercy.
10. Can you remember when you first became aware of God, that there was something bigger than humanity? What were your earliest messages about God?
11. For some people justification is a one-time, highly emotional and significant event. People hear and respond to God’s grace through Jesus. For others, justification is a slow, life-long process from learning about God’s love as a young child, to following Christ. You could think of it like a microwave oven or a crock pot. Both serve the same purpose, to cook food, they just do it with different timing. What about you? Are you a microwave Christian who had a profound conversion experience (maybe at a camp or retreat)? Are you a crockpot Christian with your temperature slowly turning up and up?
12. Some churches and Christians believe you need to be able to point to an exact date/experience on which you were “saved”. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**It is important to remember that to a shepherd, the sheep and the goats are both valuable. Each of us has been a sheep and we've also been a goat.

Closing

1. What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church
2. What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

Holy God,

*When we forget your name, written on our hearts,
have mercy on us, loving God.*

*When we forget your law of love, engraved in our lives,
have mercy on us, loving God.*

*When we neglect your Spirit living in and through each of us,
have mercy on us, loving God.*

*When we ignore your beauty, brightening our lives,
have mercy on us, loving God.*

*Shine in us and through us, God of light and love,
that we may remember this truth:*

*You are our God, and we are your people,
a people blessed by mercy and love.*

May we bless others in that same way.

In the name of Jesus our Christ,

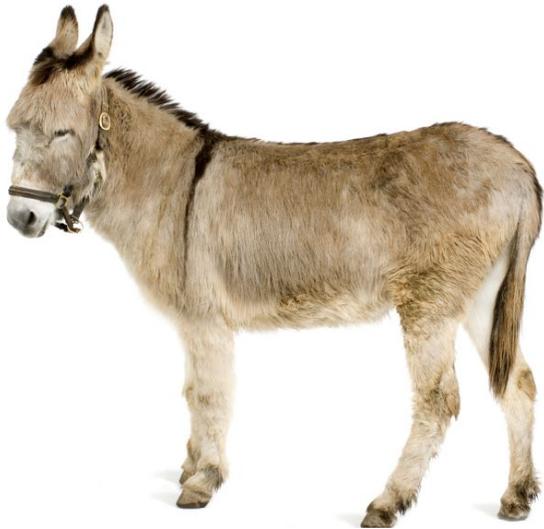
Amen.

Week Fifteen – Matthew 21:1-17

Triumphal entry, cleansing the temple

Ice Breakers - pick one or more of the following questions, introduce yourself

1. What is your favorite parade to attend?
2. Have you ever been a participant in a parade?
What group were you part of in the parade?
3. What is the biggest parade you have ever seen?



Read Matthew 21:1-17

Matthew 21:1-17 Common English Bible (CEB)

Entry into Jerusalem

1 When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. 2 He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them.” He sent them off right away. 4 Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, 5 Say to Daughter Zion, “Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.” 6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them.

Then he sat on them. 8 Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they asked. 11 The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Cleansing the temple

12 Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. 13 He said to them, “It’s written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you’ve made it a hideout for crooks.”

14 People who were blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and legal experts saw the amazing things he was doing and the children shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were angry. 16 They said to Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” “Yes,” he answered. “Haven’t you ever read, *From the mouths of babies and infants you’ve arranged praise for yourself?*” 17 Then he left them and went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.

Study Notes

- The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was 17 miles, with a rise in elevation of 3000 feet. Jerusalem is called the “city on a hill” because it was visible from a distance.
- **The Lord needs them.** Authorities could commandeer people or animals for service. Could that be the case here? Or perhaps had arrangements been made with a follower of Jesus to loan them the donkey and her colt? In either case, these animals were of great value to their owner. This person recognized Jesus’ authority.
- **Passover.** This most holy of Jewish festivals told the story of the angel of death passing over the firstborn sons of Israel, saving them. Passover is a story of deliverance. Each year on Passover, the Jews who were oppressed by Rome, would have been looking for a deliverer.
- **Donkey and colt.** A king would typically ride into town on a war horse, preferably a white horse. The majesty and strength of this animal was fitting for a king. Jesus comes into town on a lowly donkey. Zechariah 9:9 says,

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion.
Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.
Look, your king will come to you.
He is righteous and victorious.
He is humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.*

- **Spread their cloaks.** People would honor new kings by throwing their cloaks down where the king would sit. Others cut branches and lay them before him.
- The people would have been very familiar with Psalms 118:25-26, most knowing it by heart. It was sung by the people at Passover season.

*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.*

- **Hosanna to the Son of David.** Hosanna means “Save”. Son of David is a title that signals Jesus as a messianic figure.
- **From Nazareth in Galilee.** Most of Jesus’ supporters were from Galilee.
- **House of prayer/den of robbers.** Jesus reminded them of the temple’s true purpose. The money changers were overcharging Jewish worshippers for the animals purchased for sacrifice at the temple. They took advantage of people.
- **Chief priests and the teachers of the law.** The priests belonged to the wealthy class, which was responsible for keeping peace.

Discussion Questions

1. If the president or a famous person came to your town, how would you arrange for them to have maximum exposure? What TV shows, radio spots, social media platforms would you use? How does that compare to the exposure Jesus received on Palm Sunday? Remember, there was no mass communication at that time. How do you suppose the word spread that Jesus was coming to town?
2. What would it have been like to be in the crowd that day? The people were shouting “Hosanna” which means Lord save us. Do you think they understood what they were saying? How did they expect Jesus to save them? Did he save them in the way they expected? How might their differing expectations of Jesus lead to them shouting “crucify him” a few short days later?
3. What do you know about the significance of Jerusalem? Why was his coming into Jerusalem so steeped in meaning?
4. The season is Passover, the Jewish feast that celebrated the angel of death passing over the sons of Jewish slaves, sparing their lives. The large crowds were in town to celebrate this important day. Is this a new kind of Passover?
5. What upset Jesus so much at the temple?
6. The money changers were taking advantage of people by overcharging worshippers and creating a stumbling block for them to be able to worship at the temple. Is there an equivalent today to the money changers? How do the poor and the most vulnerable continue to be vulnerable to people taking financial advantage of them?
7. Would you have been likely to be part of the crowd that Palm Sunday? Who would you have thought Jesus was? Who do you say he is? Why does Jesus matter to you?

Closing

1. What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church
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Prayer Requests Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer - Blessing of Palms by Jan Richardson

*This blessing
can be heard coming
from a long way off.*

*This blessing
is making
its steady way
up the road
toward you.*

*This blessing
blooms in the throats
of women
springs from the hearts
of men
tumbles from the mouths
of children.*

*This blessing
is stitched into
the seams
of the cloaks
that line the road,
etched into
the branches
that trace the path,
echoes in the
breathing of the willing colt,
the click of the donkey's hoof
against the stones.*

*Something is rising
beneath this blessing.
Something will try
to drown it out.*

*But this blessing
cannot be turned back,
cannot be made
to still its voice,
cannot cease
to sing its praise
of the one who comes
along the way
it makes.*

—Jan Richardson

Readings for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday

Read Matthew 26:17-30

Preparing for the Last Supper, mention of betrayal

Matthew 26:17-30 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Passover with the Disciples

17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

20 When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; 21 and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22 And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 25 Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Read Matthew 27:27-61

Crucifixion

Matthew 27:27-61 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" 44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

The Death of Jesus

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The Burial of Jesus

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Week Sixteen - Matthew 28:1-10

Resurrection!

Ice Breakers - pick one or more of the following questions, introduce yourself.

1. Did your family have Easter traditions when you were young? Share one or two.
2. Is there a certain dish/food you associate with Easter?
3. What is your favorite part of Easter Sunday worship and why?
4. What do you like to do first thing in the morning?

Read Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew 28:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Study Notes

- *"Each of the four Gospels includes an account of the resurrection, and there are differences among the accounts. These differences do not discredit the scriptures, but simply suggest that the four accounts were written independently rather than collaboratively."*¹
- The women went to the tomb to prepare the body. They are the first to witness the resurrection. As women, they would have not been considered reliable witnesses in a court of law, yet God chose them to be the first to experience the resurrection.
- **Violent earthquake** - The earthquake and rolling away of the stone are signs that God is ushering in a new age.
- **His appearance was like lightning** - The angel's shining face calls to mind the face of Moses when he received the Ten Commandments, and of Jesus at his transfiguration.
- **Became like dead men** - maybe the guards fainted when they saw the resurrected Jesus
- **Do not be afraid** - The women would have been afraid the Roman guards would harass them. The earthquake would have frightened them. Someone telling them that Jesus' body had been stolen would have frightened them. "Do not be afraid" is the same thing the angel said to Mary when told she would become pregnant while still a virgin.
- **Go and tell** - The women are the first evangelists, the first to share the good news of the resurrection.

¹ Donovan, Richard. Lectionary.com

Discussion questions

1. Who visits the tomb? When? Why?
2. What do you think the women were thinking/feeling as they made their way to the tomb? What might they have been thinking/feeling when they met Jesus?
3. What were the specific instructions the women received? What do you make of the instructions?
4. Why do you think Jesus appeared first to the women? What does that say about how Jesus views people/this world?
5. What do you think the guards told their supervisor about Jesus' body being missing?
6. Why would the chief priests and others prefer to believe that Jesus' body had been stolen? (read Mt 27:11-15)
7. What does the resurrection mean to you? What does it mean for you?
8. Where do you most need resurrection hope in your life right now?

Closing

1. What questions do you have about Jesus? Start a list of questions your group has about Jesus, and re-visit them from time to time during this study to see if you have discovered answers. Send some of your questions to Pastor Karen Bruins throughout this study. kbruins@thewellmn.church
2. What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer

God of amazing surprises and powerful love,

Your Easter victory is our sign of hope.

Your Easter triumph is our promise of new beginnings.

Your Easter alleluia is unexpected, undeserved and graciously welcomed.

We need Easter for we, too, know loss and grief.

We need your Easter--

The promise that dawn brings new possibilities,

The assurance that your love is stronger than death,

The hope that every day might be touched by Easter joy.

Our words seem too timid and our songs not loud enough to trumpet our joy, to express our alleluias. Hear the glad beat of our heart and the songs we long to shout, for you have brought us to life. Let everyone feel the possibilities for living life surrounded by your powerful love and surprising grace. In the name of our Risen Lord. Amen.

Week Seventeen - Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission

Ice Breakers - pick one or more of the following questions, introduce yourself.

1. What was your first job?
2. What is the best good news you have been able to share? (ex. excitement over getting a new job, becoming an aunt/uncle, someone's cancer went into remission, etc.)
With whom did you share this good news?
3. Have you been baptized? What do you know about your baptism (when, where, who was there, etc.)

Read Matthew 28:16-20

Matthew 28:16-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Study Notes

- **Eleven disciples.** Judas has hanged himself. Read Matthew 27:1-5. Judas will be replaced by Matthias in Acts 1:12-26.
- **Mountain.** Throughout scripture, significant encounters with God often take place on a mountain.
- **Jesus came to them.** A person usually went to the person of authority, but here the Savior came to the disciples.
- **All authority.** The authority of Jesus is both in this world, and beyond this world.
- **Disciple.** A disciple is a "student" or a "learner". A modern parallel is an apprentice.
- **All nations.** The word is *ethne* is often translated as "nations" But Greek-speaking Jews also applied it to Gentiles (non-Jews). *Gentiles play a major role in Matthew's gospel.*
 - Jesus' genealogy includes Gentile women -- Ruth and Rahab (1:5).
 - The wise men were Gentiles "from the East" (2:1).
 - God is able to raise up children of Abraham even from stones (3:9).
 - Jesus withdraws to Galilee of the Gentiles (4:15).
 - A Roman centurion expresses faith that exceeds anything that Jesus has found in Israel, prompting his comment, "many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (8:10-11).
 - Jesus delivers two demoniacs in Gentile territory (8:28).
 - The Gentiles of Nineveh will condemn this generation (12:41).
 - Jesus rewards a Canaanite woman for her great faith (15:28).
 - "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations" (24:14).
 - The Son of Man will judge all the nations in accord with their response to human need (25:31-46).
 - A Roman centurion proclaims, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (27:54).

Discussion Questions

1. Who was most influential in sharing faith with you? How did they make you a disciple? Have you told that person how meaningful they have been to you in your faith development?
2. Judas was despondent over betraying Jesus. People have long wrestled with whether Judas had a choice in this or not. What do you think? Why? Would the events of the crucifixion still have happened if Judas had not betrayed him? The angry mob, the priests and scribes and the Roman officials all wanted to get rid of Jesus. If not Judas, who else might have betrayed Jesus?
3. V. 17 says that “When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.” We read this story with resurrection eyes, we know the story, but the disciples were experiencing it all first hand. Why do you think some doubted? Why do you think some worshipped? Which would you have been; a worshipper or a doubter? Why?
4. What do you think it means that “Jesus came to them” rather than the other way around? What does this reveal to you about God?
5. Are you a “student”, “learner”, “apprentice” of Jesus? How are you doing at following him, learning from him, and applying what you have learned and experienced?
6. Jesus says “remember I am with you always”. What does this mean to you? Do you have a story of a time in your life when you felt Jesus’ presence with you?
7. What are you, as a follower of Jesus, doing to make disciples?
8. How will you fulfill the Great Commission in your family, work, neighborhood, friendship circles, church, community?
9. As you have read/studied the Gospel of Matthew, what have you learned? How have your ideas about Jesus changed or become solidified?
10. What has participation in this small group meant to you? What is God calling you to do, to change or to be, as a result of the passage you studied today?

Prayer Requests Go around the circle and share prayer requests. Remember to treat all of these prayer requests as confidential, not to be shared outside of the group.

Closing Prayer/Group Blessing

Walk in the light of God.

Live in the light of God.

Bask in the light of God.

May the Light of all lights

transform your doubts into faith,

and your sorrows into joy.

Go with the peace of God. Amen.