

# *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

## *week four*

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### **Welcome to Week Four**

For those of you who are just jumping into the guide now, here are a few quick notes:

1. Brief introductions to the format of this guide and to the Gospel of John can be found at the beginning of Week One.
2. This guide can be found in various electronic forms. You can find us as a blog at [dailybibleguide.wordpress.com](http://dailybibleguide.wordpress.com) or in PDF at [bostonvineyard.org/classesprograms/leap-of-faith](http://bostonvineyard.org/classesprograms/leap-of-faith). Or, download the app, for Android or iPhones: Blue Ocean Leap of Faith.
3. **Special family-friendly materials can easily be found by looking for the red text.** These materials include three 'For you and your family' Taking It Home sections per week, and a Spiritual Practice of the Week for Families.

### **Week 4: Spiritual Practice for Families: Confession and Forgiveness.**

How do you feel when you've done something wrong? Chances are you might say, "guilty," "heavy," or "bad." Jesus offers us freedom from the heaviness of our mistakes and bad behavior. Think of something that you're sorry you did or said today and talk to Jesus about it. Apologize and ask Jesus for forgiveness. Ask if you should apologize to anyone else in person, and then do so if Jesus says yes. At the end of the week, think about what you liked and what you might not have liked about this particular spiritual practice. Share your thoughts with each other.

### **Monday, March 19—John 9:18-41**

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. <sup>19</sup> They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?"

<sup>20</sup> His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, <sup>21</sup> but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> That's why they said, "He is old enough. Ask him."

<sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner."

<sup>25</sup> "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

<sup>26</sup> "But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?"

<sup>27</sup> "Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

<sup>28</sup> Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! <sup>29</sup>We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."

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<sup>30</sup> “Why, that’s very strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? <sup>31</sup> We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. <sup>32</sup> Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it.”

<sup>34</sup> “You were born a total sinner!” they answered. “Are you trying to teach us?” And they threw him out of the synagogue.

<sup>35</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

<sup>36</sup> The man answered, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”

<sup>37</sup> “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!”

<sup>38</sup> “Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

<sup>39</sup> Then Jesus told him, “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”

<sup>40</sup> Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, “Are you saying we’re blind?”

<sup>41</sup> “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty,” Jesus replied. “But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.”

**Points of Interest**

- ‘they called in his parents’--they’re unwilling to take the man’s word for it; so they call in further witnesses. According to the law of Moses, testimony is considered valid if it comes from two to three sources (Deuteronomy 19:15). Since the parents corroborate the man, the religious leaders have to accept as a legal fact that the man had been blind.
- ‘they were afraid of the Jewish leaders’--the religious leaders ask 3 questions: 1) Is this your son? 2) Was he born blind? and 3) How can he now see? The parents refuse to answer number 3 because they know the leaders won’t like the answer and may ‘shoot the messenger.’ They won’t disavow their boy--and how can they get in trouble for saying that he is indeed their son and was indeed blind--but they try to stay out of the whole issue of the healing. How terrible to have your son healed, but to have that healing lead to fear and anxiety instead of celebration.
- ‘I don’t know whether he is a sinner’--judging whether Jesus is a sinner or not is far less important to the man than the religious leaders think it ought to be. All the man knows is that Jesus’ effect on his life is extremely positive.
- ‘Why do you want to hear it again?’--no matter how many times he tells the story, it’s going to end with Jesus healing him. The religious leaders act as if there’s something missing from the story, but they’ve heard it all, and heard it right. They just object to how the story turns out.
- ‘Do you want to become his disciples, too?’--this is the second time someone has said something like this (7:26). Both times, it’s been pretty obvious that the religious leaders aren’t, in fact, interested in becoming Jesus’ followers. I think people are just noting that these leaders have an odd fixation with Jesus.
- ‘You were born a total sinner’--this goes back to the disciples’ initial theological question (9:2): for whose sins is he being divinely punished? The leaders decide that it must be for the man’s

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own actions. He's such a terrible person that he was struck blind for his wickedness before he was ever born. I think they're basically smearing his character, in an attempt to undercut the impact of his testimony.

- 'they threw him out of the synagogue'--they can't get the man to change his story; so instead they get rid of the man. They refuse to coexist with this living testimony to Jesus' goodness and power; so, they decide to pretend he doesn't exist. This is exactly what the man's parents were so afraid of.
- 'he found the man'--the synagogue is not only the center of worship, but the primary gathering place of the community. By throwing him out of the synagogue, the religious leaders are basically cutting the man off from society. Rough. He goes from being a blind beggar to being an outcast; it seems like normal life is really elusive to this man. Jesus doesn't let him stay in isolation for long, though.
- 'You have seen him'--this formerly blind man sees very well. A short while ago, he could see nothing. Now, he not only sees physically, but he sees spiritually much better than most.
- 'I entered this world to render judgment'--where judgment fits into Jesus' mission is a bit difficult for me to nail down. Twice now, he has told us that he's not interested in judging (3:17 and 8:15). Another time, he has claimed broad authority to judge (5:22). And here he says that judging is exactly what he came to do. So, in summary, Jesus is completely uninterested in judging except in that it's the very thing most essential to his mission. Hmm. Hopefully this will become clearer as we go along. It is at least worth noting that whenever judgment comes up, it's in reference, not to people who might conventionally be thought of as sinners, but to the religious leaders. That certainly gives me pause.
- 'because you claim you can see'--Jesus can heal blindness, but he can't make someone open their eyes if they insist on keeping them shut.

### **Taking It Home**

- For you: Spend some time today reflecting on your journey with Jesus. The blind man started out knowing Jesus just as this mystical eye-doctor figure; a little farther down the road he came to know him as God. What were your first impressions of Jesus? When do you feel like you first knew him? What does your relationship with him look like now? Are you in desperate need for a miracle, like the blind man in the beginning? Do you feel like you're still just trying to figure out who Jesus is? Would you say you've come to the place where you fully believe in Jesus and his promises? Or do you actually feel more like the Pharisees, wanting everything to make sense at a head-level and not engaging at a heart level? After remembering some key times in your life with Jesus, talk to Jesus about where you feel like you're at now. Tell Jesus your feelings, questions or thoughts about him.
- For your six: Just as Jesus sought out the blind-man to bring him out of isolation, ask Jesus to bring your six out of any isolation they may be experiencing.
- For our church: While Jesus' relationship to judgment may be a little hazy, I think it's safe to say that a) the Pharisees are full of judgment and b) we'd be best not to emulate them in that. Ask Jesus to protect our church from being judgmental. Ask Jesus to help us focus our attention on

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him, like the blind man did, and not to point fingers in a futile and uncalled for attempt to prove who is right and who is wrong.

#### **Tuesday, March 20—John 10:1-21**

“I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup> But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.”

<sup>6</sup> Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, <sup>7</sup> so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. <sup>10</sup> The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

<sup>17</sup> “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. <sup>18</sup> No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

<sup>19</sup> When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. <sup>20</sup> Some said, “He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” <sup>21</sup> Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

#### **Points of Interest**

- ‘I tell you the truth’--this passage is actually just a continuation of what Jesus was saying at the end of yesterday’s passage about the Pharisees and blindness. The chapter divisions--not original to John, but added much later--obscure this. Of course, I’ve done the same thing by my choice of passage division. I do believe there’s a slight change of topic here. Having answered the Pharisees’ question about blindness, Jesus remarks upon what has just happened to the formerly blind man.
- ‘anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold’--generally speaking, the owner of a house doesn’t have to break a window to get in; they can walk through the front door. If someone seems a bit shifty, maybe they don’t belong where they are. I think the shifty ones here are the religious leaders, who assassinate the character of the blind man so that they don’t have to face

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the fact that Jesus does indeed have miracle-working power. That makes them spiritual thieves, not spiritual shepherds.

- ‘the shepherd of the sheep’--Jesus is following in the tradition of a number of Old Testament passages which use shepherds as models of caring leadership. Perhaps Jesus’ closest model is Ezekiel 34, which contrasts God’s good shepherding with the selfish and careless shepherding of the people’s human leaders:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, and I will stop them from feeding themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey (Ezekiel 34:10)

- ‘He calls his own sheep by name’--I think the image here is of several flocks being held in one pen. The shepherds separate out their flocks to take them to pasture by giving their own, unique call, which their sheep recognize. One of the complaints God makes of the bad shepherd in Ezekiel 34 is that they abandon the sheep. That’s exactly what the religious leaders do to the blind man in yesterday’s passage, by throwing him out of the synagogue. Jesus then calls the man, and the man follows him. It’s a match. This man is part of Jesus’ flock, and Jesus is this man’s shepherd.
- ‘will come and go freely and will find good pastures’--this reminds me of what Jesus tells Nathanael when they first meet: ‘you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth’(John 1:51).
- ‘The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy’--the religious leaders’ primary concern is to maintain their own status. They’re willing to kill Jesus and ruin the formerly blind man’s life to do so.
- ‘My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life’--I think this is perhaps the best articulation yet of Jesus’ mission statement in John’s gospel. Again and again, he uses every opportunity to point people toward a richer and more satisfying life.
- ‘A hired hand will run’--a thief eats the sheep. A shepherd cares for the sheep. A hired hand is more or less indifferent to the sheep; they’ll care for the sheep as long as it’s easy enough. It’s not worth the paycheck to put themselves in actual danger for the sheep’s sake. Strange as it may seem, I think the formerly blind man’s parents are the hired hands in this situation. When things get dangerous, they abandon their son and fend for themselves.
- ‘I have other sheep, too’--Jesus is just getting started at gathering his flock.
- ‘because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again’--in a surprise twist, this very good shepherd is leading his sheep toward death. But somehow it’s a death that’s not the end of the story. This reminds me of probably the most famous biblical shepherd reference:

**1** The LORD is my shepherd;

I have all that I need.

**2** He lets me rest in green meadows;

he leads me beside peaceful streams.

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**3** He renews my strength.  
He guides me along right paths,  
bringing honor to his name.

**4** Even when I walk  
through the dark valley of death,  
I will not be afraid,  
for you are close beside me.  
Your rod and your staff  
protect and comfort me (Psalm 23:1-4, alternate reading).

**Taking It Home**

- **For you and your family:** Discuss with your family or friends what a shepherd's job is (e.g., leading the sheep to good grass, clean water, etc., providing protection, keeping them together, etc.). Jesus says that he's the good shepherd who gathers, protects, and leads. Tell one another how Jesus has done one of these things for you, and praise Him together.
- **For your six:** Ask Jesus to give your six the rich and satisfying life he promises. Ask that nothing would get in the way of them receiving that.
- **For our church:** Ask Jesus to bless all of the leaders in our church. Ask him to be a good shepherd to our leaders, and to make our church a community that is filled with caring leaders who themselves emulate the characteristics of a good shepherd as well.

**Wednesday, March 21—John 10:22-42**

<sup>22</sup> It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. <sup>23</sup> He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. <sup>26</sup> But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, <sup>29</sup> for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one."

<sup>31</sup> Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?"

<sup>33</sup> They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God."

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, "It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, 'I say, you are gods!' <sup>35</sup> And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So if those people who received God's message were called 'gods,' <sup>36</sup> why do you call it blasphemy when I say, 'I am the Son of God'? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world. <sup>37</sup> Don't believe me unless I carry out my Father's work. <sup>38</sup> But if I do his work, believe in the evidence of the miraculous works I have

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done, even if you don't believe me. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father."

<sup>39</sup> Once again they tried to arrest him, but he got away and left them. <sup>40</sup> He went beyond the Jordan River near the place where John was first baptizing and stayed there awhile. <sup>41</sup> And many followed him. "John didn't perform miraculous signs," they remarked to one another, "but everything he said about this man has come true." <sup>42</sup> And many who were there believed in Jesus.

#### **Points of Interest**

- 'Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah'--it seems like in John's gospel Jesus is always in Jerusalem for a holiday. I wonder why John focuses so much on the holidays. Is John trying to make a further statement about Jesus' identity by setting the story during various festivals-- Jesus basically claiming, 'I am Passover; I am Hanukkah,' just like he says, 'I am the light of the world; I am the bread from heaven'? Or is it just because his story is a very Jerusalem-based story, and the holidays are when Jesus is in Jerusalem?
- 'If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly'--he hasn't exactly been subtle. Just last holiday, he said he happens to have the exact same name as God (8:53).
- 'Once again the people picked up stones to kill him'--I'd call these people fickle. They want Jesus to tell them that he is God's Special Agent. But when he responds by saying that God and he are like this (imagine me crossing my fingers), they're suddenly horribly offended.
- 'I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?'--Jesus gets sarcastic: 'I'd like to know the exact charges. Is it turning water into wine, or bringing sight to the blind?' These are the kinds of things that would usually get people awards, but they want to punish him instead.
- 'your own Scriptures'--I think this is more sarcasm: 'Why don't we take a look at those scriptures you seem to like so much?' They are, of course, Jesus' scriptures too.
- 'I say, you are gods!'--this is Psalm 82:6. I'm not certain, but I think Jesus is toying with them here, poking fun at the wooden and superficial way they treat the Bible. If I'm understanding Jesus and the psalm both correctly, Jesus is doing what we call proof-texting: taking a verse out of context, and using it to prove a point it doesn't actually intend. Jesus' argument is, 'You see, God himself calls people gods. So, what's the big deal about me calling myself merely a son of God?' But he's only using half of the stanza. Add the next verse in, and the overall point of the psalm's stanza is along the lines of, 'Say you were gods, I'd still knock you down like any mere mortal.' Quite a different spin.
- 'why do you call it blasphemy'--here I think Jesus is asking a genuine question. Why, exactly, do they say he is blaspheming? They've judged him, and sentenced him; but all of the evidence actually points away from him blaspheming.
- 'everything he said about this man has come true'--this next group of people does, in fact, sift the evidence. Their verdict is, John the Baptist was right; this is the Lamb of God.
- 'many who were there believed in Jesus'--while the focus of the story is firmly on the heated dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees, John still slips in the key detail that in the midst of it all MANY were still coming to Jesus and following him. With the camera narrowed in on the

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Pharisees, things look pretty grim for Jesus; but pan out a little and the Pharisees aren't such a big deal after all.

#### **Taking It Home**

- For you: I wonder if, in the same way it's easy to lose track of the many who were starting to follow Jesus because of all of the attention on the Pharisees, it's easy to overlook the many good things happening in our lives because our problems take center stage. What's bothering you the most today? Instead of focusing on it, try just ignoring it. Shift your attention away from what's not working to the things in your life that you are grateful for, past ways that you have seen God work, current ways that you see God working in other areas of your life. See if you can find the MANY ways God is working around you.
- For your six: Pray that your six would hear Jesus' voice. Ask Jesus to give them the ability to hear and to speak to them personally in a way that makes sense to them.
- For our church: I'm not a big fan of arguments generally, but the one in this passage seems especially pointless and hopeless. It's hard to picture the Pharisees ever sitting down for coffee with Jesus and talking things out civilly, but I keep wishing there was a better way than how they're going about things here. Disagreeing well is a tough thing to pull off. Ask Jesus to help our church somehow be really good at it. Ask Jesus to help us know how to wade through conflicts, and the opinions and emotions that they entail, well. Pray for ministries such as PeaceWorks that help individuals and organizations navigate conflict.

#### **Thursday, March 22—John 11:1-16**

<sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. <sup>2</sup>This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

<sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." <sup>5</sup> So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> he stayed where he was for the next two days. <sup>7</sup> Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

<sup>8</sup> But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"

<sup>9</sup> Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." <sup>11</sup> Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" <sup>13</sup> They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.

<sup>14</sup> So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus."

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#### **Points of Interest**

- ‘This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume’--again, John seems to be assuming that we’re familiar with the general storyline: ‘you know, the Mary with the perfume.’ John is just filling in the story with his own favorite episodes, and with some of his own reflections on favorite episodes from the other gospels. I think John mentions the perfume episode here to indicate that these people are Jesus’ close friends.
- ‘he stayed where he was for the next two days’--Jesus’ close friend is sick, but he waits around for two days before going to see him. He knows that Lazarus will be fine. He has a bigger goal in mind, one that requires a little waiting.
- ‘Let’s go back to Judea’--Bethany is in Judea, just outside of Jerusalem. In fact, many Bible readers think that whenever Jesus is in Jerusalem for the festivals, he stays with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha at their house in nearby Bethany. As I mentioned earlier, finding rooms in Jerusalem itself could be quite difficult; so having a good friend in Bethany would be pretty handy for a regular festival attendee like Jesus.
- ‘But his disciples objected’--his disciples object, not to waiting two days, but to going at all. When Jesus waits the two days, they’re relieved that Jesus doesn’t rush to his friend’s bedside. Someday, the people of Jerusalem are actually going to throw those rocks. To use the passage from two days ago, the disciples are hired hands here; Jesus, the good shepherd, is willing to sacrifice his life for Lazarus (10:15).
- ‘at night there is danger of stumbling’--I think what he’s saying here is that Lazarus won’t be able to find his way out of death without a guide.
- ‘They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping’--someday, I’ll stop pointing out when people take Jesus’ metaphors literally.
- ‘now you will really believe’--for reasons that will become clear, it’s very important to Jesus that the disciples know that someone can die and live again.
- ‘Let’s go, too—and die with Jesus’--they might not believe what Jesus is saying about death being reversible, but they’re willing to stick by Jesus to the death. That says something.

#### **Taking It Home**

- For you: I like that Jesus is in the business of bringing the dead back to life. Are there any aspects of your life that feel rather dead: old dreams that have died? your finances? core aspects to your personality that you’ve shut off? dissolved relationships? Ask Jesus to bring life back to these places. Anywhere in your life that feels like it has no hope or future, ask God for his provision and back-from-dead power.
- For your six: I like the fact that though they disagree about when or whether or why to go to Bethany, once they decide to do it, Jesus and the disciples are doing it together. There is some sense of community and togetherness as they face the situation in front of them. Ask Jesus to give your six a strong community of people who follow him. Pray that your six would find an abundance of support, love, and care as they face whatever is in front of them.
- For our church: Lazarus’ illness and death is a complicated piece of news for the disciples to know what to do with. There are so many factors at play: their friends’ hardship and sadness,

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their own feelings for their friend, the danger it could put them in, and more. They seem incapacitated by the news and its implications. Jesus, though, sees a pretty clear path ahead. Ask Jesus to help our church know how best to respond when surprising and complex news comes our way. Specifically ask Jesus to give us the wisdom to know when to wait, when to act, and how.

**Friday, March 23—John 11:17-44**

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. <sup>20</sup> When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” <sup>28</sup> Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” <sup>29</sup> So Mary immediately went to him.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. <sup>31</sup> When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there. <sup>32</sup> When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you put him?” he asked them.

They told him, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup> Then Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” <sup>37</sup> But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. <sup>39</sup> “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”

<sup>40</sup> Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” <sup>41</sup> So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. <sup>42</sup> You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” <sup>43</sup> Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup> And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

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#### **Points of Interest**

- ‘for four days’--Lazarus was dead before news of his illness ever reached Jesus. Jesus wasn’t waiting for Lazarus to die before he came; he was trying to show that he wasn’t worried; this isn’t an emergency situation.
- ‘many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary’--apparently Lazarus’ family is well-known in Jerusalem society.
- ‘even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask’--from what follows, it doesn’t seem that Martha has immediate resurrection in mind here. I think she’s telling Jesus that this one disappointment doesn’t shake her general faith in him.
- ‘he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day’--Jesus does a successful double-fake here. Martha has caught on to Jesus’ communication style. She anticipates that Jesus is going to take the situation in a spiritual, metaphorical direction; so she goes spiritual in her own interpretation of, ‘he will rise again.’ This time, though, Jesus is being literal.
- ‘I am the resurrection and the life’--There is no reason why they have to wait until the last day for Lazarus to rise. Jesus is here. He’s the resurrection. Why not do it now?
- ‘I have always believed you are the Messiah’--it seems to me that Martha still isn’t quite ready to hope specifically that Jesus can do something in this very circumstance.
- ‘a deep anger welled up within him’--I can’t decide whether I think that Jesus is angry at them for not believing, angry because he can’t seem to get them to understand the good news he has for them, angry simply because he doesn’t like the Jerusalemites, angry at the death of his friend, or angry at the very existence of death.
- ‘Then Jesus wept’--regardless of where exactly the emotions are coming from, this is clearly a very emotional moment for Jesus. First anger, then weeping, then more anger.
- ‘Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?’--I think this is one that all of us are tempted to wonder at one time or another: if God really cares, why doesn’t he just stop bad things from happening in the first place? With both the man born blind and Lazarus, it seems like Jesus’ answer is that the ‘why?’ question is usually difficult, confusing, and unhelpful. But no matter what happens, it’s worth believing that it hasn’t stopped God from bringing things to a good end. Neither incurable illness nor even death itself is too big for God to tackle.
- ‘he has been dead for four days’--they think Jesus wants what we call a viewing, but it’s a little late for that. I think John adds this tidbit in order to show that there’s little chance that Lazarus is simply unconscious. He’s been dead and in the grave for days; they expect that the body has already started to decay.
- ‘Unwrap him and let him go!’--I like the fact that Lazarus comes stumbling out all tangled up in his grave clothes--sort of like a cartoon mummy. This resurrection is amazing, and also quite human, and even a little awkward and funny.

#### **Taking It Home**

- For you: Regardless of what the specific source might be, I like that Jesus gives himself space to feel the emotion and intensity of what is happening around him. Whether you are one who sheds lots of tears every day or one that sheds one tear every ten years, is there something

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intense that has happened in your life (either currently or previously) that you just need to take some time to process and feel? If nothing comes to mind, ask Jesus if there is anything you've been shoving out of sight that he would like to bring up. For starters take some time just to be still and reflect. Be open to feeling whatever emotions come to the surface. Talk to Jesus about the situation, how you are feeling and how to make sense of it. If you feel devoid of emotion, take the time to just recall whatever comes to mind and ask Jesus to show you what he wants you to learn to from this situation.

- For your six: Just as Jesus' followers get hung up in wondering why 'couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?', what are the 'why' questions that your six are hung up on? Ask Jesus to help your six make sense of them. And, in the midst of such hard questions, ask Jesus to still show up powerfully for your six like he did for Lazarus' friends and family.
- For our church: It seems like no one has any idea of just how good Jesus is or just how miraculous are the things he is capable of. Like Michael Phelps in swimming or Michael Jordan in basketball, just when everyone thinks Jesus has reached his limit, he takes his miracle-working to a whole new level. Ask Jesus to expand our imagination of the miraculous things he is capable of.

### **Saturday, March 24—John 11:45-12:11**

<sup>45</sup> Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. <sup>46</sup> But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup> Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. <sup>48</sup> If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation."

<sup>49</sup> Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! <sup>50</sup> You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed."

<sup>51</sup> He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. <sup>52</sup> And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

<sup>53</sup> So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death. <sup>54</sup> As a result, Jesus stopped his public ministry among the people and left Jerusalem. He went to a place near the wilderness, to the village of Ephraim, and stayed there with his disciples.

<sup>55</sup> It was now almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration, and many people from all over the country arrived in Jerusalem several days early so they could go through the purification ceremony before Passover began. <sup>56</sup> They kept looking for Jesus, but as they stood around in the Temple, they said to each other, "What do you think? He won't come for Passover, will he?" <sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the leading priests and Pharisees had publicly ordered that anyone seeing Jesus must report it immediately so they could arrest him.

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12:1 Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

<sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, <sup>5</sup> "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." <sup>6</sup> Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

<sup>9</sup> When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, <sup>11</sup> for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

#### **Points of Interest**

- 'some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done'--this reminds me of Jesus asking in Wednesday's passage, 'For which [of my good works] are you going to stone me?' (10:32). Somehow these people think that raising someone from the dead is some sort of misdeed for which Jesus should be reported to the authorities.
- 'the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation'--some of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah pictured a conquering hero who would not only rescue the Jews from foreign domination but would wreak revenge on their foreign masters. Zechariah 12 is a good example:

On that day the LORD will defend the people of Jerusalem; the weakest among them will be as mighty as King David! And the royal descendants will be like God, like the angel of the LORD who goes before them! **9** For on that day I will begin to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:8-9).

This, of course, would be unwelcome news to the current foreign overlords, the Romans. Curiously, the council takes Jesus' miraculous deeds seriously enough to think that he may indeed be the Messiah and may indeed try to take on the Romans, but they think he will fail; they expect the Romans to come out on top over God's Special Agent.

Military action is not at all what Jesus has in mind. There are indeed rebellions against the Romans, in 70 AD and in 132 AD, which lead to the destruction of first the temple and then the Jewish nation; but neither Jesus nor his disciples have anything to do with those rebellions.

- 'it's better for you that one man should die'--Caiaphas unwittingly plays Jesus' role of speaking on a deeper level. Caiaphas is simply saying that pure utilitarianism requires that they get rid of Jesus to protect the whole nation from Roman retaliation. But there's a deeper truth to what he's saying; it's Jesus' own plan to face death on behalf of the entire world.
- 'to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world'--while one stream of prophecy pictures the Messiah as a Jewish military hero, another stream portrays him

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as the one who brings the whole world together as one family under God. Isaiah 66:18 is a good example: 'And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory' (TNIV). In John's eyes, this is the more accurate and relevant picture of Jesus.

- 'As a result, Jesus stopped his public ministry'--Jesus continues to walk a careful line. He's willing to provoke the religious leaders when the stakes are worth it, but he's also trying to delay the final showdown as much as possible.
- 'It was now almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration'--apparently, Jesus' underground period only lasts until the next feast. I imagine some time must have passed between Jesus' move to the desert and this Passover, or there would be little point to the previous verse.
- 'the man he had raised from the dead'--this isn't exactly a quiet return to the public eye. Jesus stays with a well-known man, who lives on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and who Jesus recently raised from the dead. Is Jesus now trying to cause a stir, or does he just not care?
- 'anointed Jesus' feet with it'--anointing was a ritual symbolizing God's favor and God's commissioning of a person for a special task. A prophet or priest poured scented oil over the person's head, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. I think Mary doesn't consider herself worthy to anoint Jesus' head--she's not a priest or a prophet or anything--so she anoints his feet instead.
- 'Not that he cared for the poor'--Judas is simultaneously outraged by the extravagance of Mary's action and peeved at the missed opportunity for selfish gain. He's manages to be both more conventionally pious and more unprincipled than Mary.
- 'She did this in preparation for my burial'--corpses were treated with scented oils before burial. Jesus sees his death close enough that Mary may as well get started now with the funeral preparations.
- 'You will always have the poor among you'--I don't think Jesus is being callous toward the poor here. He's merely saying that this is a special occasion, on which Mary's actions are more appropriate than the usual charitable giving. He's actually quoting a Bible verse which encourages generosity: 'There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need' (Deuteronomy 15:11).
- 'the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too'--they want to reverse Jesus' good deed, by killing the one he raised from the dead. They kick the formerly blind man out of the synagogue. With Lazarus, they aim for a more drastic and permanent removal. This is, by the way, yet another perfect illustration of the thieves and the good shepherd: 'The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life' (10:10). Jesus brings life, and they try to kill it.

### **Taking It Home**

- *For you and your family: Mary gives generously, whereas Judas looks at things from a viewpoint of scarcity. For families, time is often perceived as scarce resource. What would feel like a joyous and abundant use of time together this week? How could you spend time with each*

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other or for each other this week? Pray that Jesus would create opportunities for that time to be spent together.

- For your six: I don't imagine that any of your six have active death threats against them like Jesus did. Nonetheless, ask Jesus today to protect your six from any enemies they might have or anyone who is wishing them harm.
- For our church: I love the imagery of the house being 'filled with the fragrance' of the woman's offering. I think of just how good, comforting, and welcoming it is when you walk into a room filled with a wonderful aroma. Imagine the smell of freshly baked bread or a fire burning in the fireplace or a favorite food being cooked for you when you step into the door. Obviously the woman's offering smells wonderful because her offering is, in fact, a wonderful-smelling-perfume, but I wonder if all of our extravagant sacrifices to God fill the areas around us with a certain kind of sweetness. Ask Jesus to help our church be abundantly generous in our gifts and sacrifices to him. Ask Jesus for our church to be a place that is filled with a sweetness of people generously and abundantly offering gifts and sacrifices to him.

### **Sunday, March 25—John 12:12-33**

<sup>12</sup> The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors <sup>13</sup> took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted,

"Praise God!  
Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hail to the King of Israel!"

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

<sup>15</sup> "Don't be afraid, people of Jerusalem.  
Look, your King is coming,  
riding on a donkey's colt."

<sup>16</sup> His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

<sup>17</sup> Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. <sup>18</sup> That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. <sup>19</sup> Then the Pharisees said to each other, "There's nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!"

<sup>20</sup> Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration <sup>21</sup> paid a visit to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. They said, "Sir, we want to meet Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. <sup>24</sup> I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life in this world will lose it.

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Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. <sup>26</sup> Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

<sup>27</sup> “Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came! <sup>28</sup> Father, bring glory to your name.”

Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, “I have already brought glory to my name, and I will do so again.” <sup>29</sup> When the crowd heard the voice, some thought it was thunder, while others declared an angel had spoken to him.

<sup>30</sup> Then Jesus told them, “The voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

#### **Points of Interest**

- ‘the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city’--apparently Jesus’ stop in Bethany heightens the anticipation. Everyone is watching and wondering whether he would dare to actually enter Jerusalem itself. It seems everyone senses that if he does so, it signals a fundamental shift of some sort.
- ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’--they’re quoting Psalm 118:25,26. This was a common song for greeting pilgrim’s arriving for the festival, though it seems to be invested with special significance in this circumstance.
- ‘Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt’--this is from Zechariah 9:9:  
Rejoice, O people of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!  
Look, your king is coming to you.  
He is righteous and victorious,  
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—  
riding on a donkey’s colt.
- ‘His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy’--I think John is telling us that the disciples didn’t intentionally manufacture a fulfillment of prophecy; they didn’t even catch it at the time. Of course, Jesus could still be knowingly following Zechariah’s script, in which case he is finally answering the request from last festival: ‘If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly’ (10:24).
- ‘There’s nothing we can do’--Jesus has ‘crossed the Rubicon.’ Since he has declared himself God’s king, in an impromptu parade, in Jerusalem, during a festival, there’s no putting a brake to events anymore. Who knows how things will turn out, but they will very quickly make their way to a conclusion.
- ‘Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem’--these people are not necessarily from Greece itself. ‘Greeks’ is the common term Jesus and his disciples would use for any non-Jew, Greek being the general language and culture of their part of the world at the time. This is a first sign that Jesus’ goal ‘to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world’ (11:52) has begun to be accomplished.

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- ‘its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives’--a single seed buried in the ground (thus ‘dying’) produces many, many seeds. Jesus knows that he will soon be buried in the ground. But that’s the way it has to be. And it’s a good thing: his one death will produce life for many.
- ‘Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me’--it’s not so much that Jesus is dying so that his followers don’t have to. They’re followers. And he expects them to follow him even in this. Follow him to death; it’s the only way to get through to the eternal life on the other side. This reminds me again of Psalm 23: ‘Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid’ (v.4 alternate reading).
- ‘Now my soul is deeply troubled’--this isn’t easy even for Jesus. He wants there to be some other way to get to life, for him and those who follow him. Just as his disciples trust him to guide them, he’s trusting his Father to guide him.
- ‘when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out’--perhaps we finally have the answer to our judgment puzzle here. The object of Jesus’ judgment is Satan, the great enemy of God, portrayed here as a usurper. Jesus has not come to fight the Romans, but to wrest authority over the world from Satan.

### **Taking It Home**

- *For you and your family: When Jesus comes to Jerusalem, it’s like a big parade or celebration. Have you ever been to a parade? What were you celebrating? Where would you like to be in this story? Why? Imagine a parade for Jesus coming to town. Where would you like to be? Do something together today to celebrate Jesus.*
- **For your six:** I like that Jesus says it’s his job to draw people to himself, maybe only because the task of trying to push my six to Jesus myself would feel daunting and joyless. Thank Jesus that he is in fact drawing each of your six to him. Ask him to keep it up, and tell him you would like to be helpful in any way possible.
- **For our church:** Just as Jesus looks to God to help him actually complete what he came on earth to do, ask Jesus to help our church fulfill our unique mission and purpose. Ask Jesus to empower and sustain our church even when the task feels daunting.