

VCEFC Daily Devotion, April 17-23

April 17 John 19: 8-11 The Silence of Jesus.

Notes:

- v. 8 Pilate became increasingly afraid by the trial, which is unusual to him. The impression made by Jesus upon him in the face of the accusations of His enemies, which he knew were groundless, and his bearing after the flogging and the cries of the crowd for his death fill him with awe. Then to hear that this man claimed to be the Son of God causes him to be seized with sudden fear. The idea that gods could come down and appear in the likeness of men was common enough in the pagan society of his time.
- V. 9 Pilate's question to Jesus expresses his anxiety to know whether Jesus is a man or a god. The silence of Jesus in this setting recalls Isaiah 53:7. Also, since Pilate is not a sincere seeker of the truth and has rejected Jesus' earlier revelation in the first interrogation, he will not be able to understand Jesus' relationship to God even Jesus does answer him. Only faith can grasp the mystery of Jesus.
- V. 10-11 Pilate's fear turns to annoyance. He is not used to people declining to answer his questions, least of all a prisoner whose life is in his hands. He is conscious of possessing authority from the most powerful man on earth and representing the most powerful nation on earth. He thinks he has the authority to release or to destroy Jesus. But Jesus reminds him his authority has been given to him from God. The one who handed Jesus over to him may be Judas, but more possibly, the religious authorities, especially Annas and Caiaphas.

Meditate: Jesus' silence about his identity is a sign that Pilate has already passed judgment on himself by rejecting Jesus' revelation of the truth. Similarly, if our hearts are hardened and not receiving the truth, God may remain silent to us. Be sure to open your hearts to receive the truth.

April 18: John 19: 12-16 Who is in control?

Notes:

- v. 12 Being deeply affected by what Jesus has said, Pilate really wants to release Jesus. However, the Jewish leaders threaten to denounce Pilate before Caesar if he sets Jesus free. Caesar Tiberius was notoriously suspicious of any who threatened his position, and he dealt with them ruthlessly. Pilate knows that an accusation of aiding a revolutionary king in Palestine will be highly dangerous to him. He is caught in a trap and unable to escape.
- V. 13-14 Pilate brings Jesus out and he takes the judge's seat on a raised platform from which he can survey the area and make his public pronouncements on behalf of the Roman empire. Jesus is made to stand beside him for the sentence is about to be passed publicly in the presence of the accusers and the accused. John carefully records the place, the day and the hour of this momentous event. At the sixth hour of the Preparation day, the Jews cease their work, leaven is gathered out of the houses and burned, the slaughtering of the Passover lambs commences, and the Passover festival begins. Passover is the great celebration of Israel's deliverance from slavery by God's almighty power. Now in this Passover, the Jews gather before Pilate to take part in the fulfillment of the Passover, a second Exodus, wherein God would achieve an emancipation for all nations, giving them

life in the promised land of His eternal kingdom. Instead of announcing the crime for which Jesus is now to be put to death, Pilate makes an unexpected statement, "Here is your king." He changes the moment of condemnation of Jesus to proclamation of His kingship.

- V 15-16 In the context of the trial of Jesus, of the Man who proclaimed to the nation the kingdom of God, and manifested it in His deeds, and called on Israel to repent and believe, the Jewish leaders' declaration that "we have no king but Caesar" is nothing less than the abandonment of the messianic hope of Israel. Their repudiation of Jesus in the name of a pretended loyalty to the emperor entailed their repudiation of the promise of the kingdom of God.

Meditate: By far the most complex scenes in John's passion account occur in the trial of Jesus before Pilate. John orchestrates these scenes to highlight Jesus' faithfulness to the truth and His ability to perceive the unfolding events from a heavenly perspective. Throughout the trial, John illuminates the contrast between the calm majesty of Jesus, the lack of resolve in Pilate, and the blind rage of the chief priests who stand accusing Jesus. John portrays the Roman procurator as constantly moving back and forth- outside the palace to speak with Jesus' enemies, and then inside to consult with Jesus. The central scene inside the palace is the scourging of Christ. In what is meant to be abject humiliation, Jesus' dignity and authority shine through, and Pilate becomes even more afraid. Even in this grueling test of faith, Jesus shows that His authority comes from above- something that only further infuriates His opponents and unnerves Pilate. With each of Pilate's trips outside to speak with the Jews, with each hint that Pilate wants to release Jesus, the emotion and the hostility escalate. Finally, Pilate feels trapped into giving in to the demands of the Jews- the very thing that Jesus knew must happen for His Father's will to be accomplished.

1. Who is in control of the whole event?
2. Who do you think Jesus is? How does this conclusion change your attitude of life?

April 19 John 19:17-22 The King of the Jews

Notes:

- v. 17 The cross that Jesus carried was not the whole instrument of crucifixion but the cross-beam on which the crucified hung. The usual procedure was for the condemned person to have his outstretched arms nailed to the cross-beam as he lay on the ground, it was then lifted up with his body on it and affixed to the vertical post which was already in the ground, at Golgotha such posts will presumably have been standing permanently. Jesus carrying the cross and setting out for Golgotha reminds us of Isaac carrying the wood for his sacrifice and setting out for the mount with his father Abraham. Also, Christians have very understandably linked Jesus bearing his cross to Golgotha with His call to take up the cross and follow Him.
- V. 18 The place of crucifixion was a public area near the city for all to see and take warning from the fate of law-breakers. John especially highlights that Jesus is in the middle of two other prisoners because for the Jews "when three persons are present the most honored shall take his place in the middle." Also, it is to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, "He was numbered with the transgressors."

- V. 19-20 It was customary for one doomed to be crucified to have a tablet or placard stating the cause for his execution hung about him, or carried by another before him, and then affixed to his cross. Pilate deliberately states that Jesus is “the king of the Jews” as an act of revenge to provoke the Jewish leaders. However, his action becomes the climax of the whole series of events that culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus: Pilate, the judge and representative of the dominion that ruled the world, hereby declares that Jesus on His cross is the King of His people. It was written in Hebrew that the Jews might understand it, in Latin that the Romans might know it; in Greek, the common language of the world, that all nations might learn of it.
- V. 21-22 The indignation and rage of the chief priests over the inscription is understandable. They insist that it be rewritten to show that it was Jesus who claimed to be king. Ironically, Pilate, the weak and fearful ruler, has the last word. While he does anger the Jews, he finally becomes the impartial judge he should have been in Jesus’ trial. The verdict: Jesus is who He says He is, and His true identity is now on display for all to witness.

Meditate: Jesus’ crucifixion has fulfilled His promise that by being “lifted up”, He would draw all people to Himself. Have you been drawn closer to Him through meditating His suffering? Are you willing to take up your cross and follow Him?

April 20: John 19:23-27 New community in Christ

Notes:

- v. 23-24 Usually four soldiers were assigned the task of executing the crucifixion. These soldiers would have the privilege to divide the victim’s clothing. In contrast to other Gospels, John describes the act in details. He especially highlights the seamless garment that was worn next to the skin under a robe. Instead of tearing the garment into four parts, the soldiers cast lots to see who would get it, so that the scripture may be fulfilled (Psalm 22:18)
- v. 25-27 Comparable to the four soldiers, there are four women gathering under the cross. John is the only Gospel to report Jesus’ mother’s presence. These women are the witnesses to Jesus’ death. Also, only John mentions that Jesus speaks from the cross to His mother and His beloved disciple. John’s detailed presentation of this dialogue suggests that the crucifixion marks the beginning of a new community, in which we are intimately related to one another as the children of God. Our connectedness in the Spirit transcends traditional family bonds, flesh and blood relationships are now secondary. Here, at the foot of the cross, Jesus’ mother and the Beloved disciple represents the new community in Christ.

Meditate: Throughout the crucifixion scene, the words of Jesus from the cross reinforce His unwavering commitment to His mission and the intensity of His love for His people. What comfort in times of suffering to recall how faithful Jesus was to us, even in the midst of His terrible torments. The dialogue between Jesus, His mother and the beloved disciple reminds us that essential to Jesus’ mission was the establishment of the church. What is your commitment to this community in Christ?

April 21: John 19:28-37 It is finished.

Notes:

- v. 28-30 Jesus knows that the work that He has come from heaven to achieve is now accomplished. His cry for thirst is to fulfill the Scripture in Psalm 69:22. It is also a symbolical equivalent of the cry of desolation. He receives the wine vinegar which symbolizes the cup of suffering He has received in obedience. The sponge full of wine vinegar is hoisted to Jesus on hyssop, which was a small leafy plant that would not serve well as a stick for a wet sponge. A hyssop bunch was dipped in the blood of the Passover Lamb for sprinkling on the doorframe. (Exodus 12:22). Thus, John especially mentions it to highlight that Jesus is the Passover Lamb who sheds His blood for the deliverance of God's people. By bowing down His head and handing over His spirit to God, the Father will then send the Holy Spirit to guide and teach the community of faith.
- v. 31 The request by the Jews that the bodies of the crucified men should not remain on the crosses on Sabbath, and that their legs be broken, is comprehensible because the Romans usually left the crucified men to linger till their death, sometimes for several days, and then the vultures finished them off. If there was any reason for hastening the death of crucified men, their legs were smashed with an iron mallet, so causing great loss of blood and asphyxia. Jewish law laid it down that one that is hanged should not remain on a gibbet overnight, since a hanged man is accursed in God's sight and pollutes the land. (Deut 21:22, 23) It is important for the Jewish leaders to observe that law because it is both a sabbath and the day of Passover.
- V. 32-34 The soldiers who mocked Jesus earlier and dived for his clothes show up to carry their task. They break the legs of the criminals on both sides of Jesus. They do not break the legs of Jesus because He is already dead. It is stipulated in the Scripture that the bones of the Passover lamb cannot be broken (Exodus 12:46, Num 9:12, Ps. 34:20). A soldier then tries to guarantee Jesus' death by piercing Jesus' side with a spear. This too is a fulfillment of scripture in Zech 12:10.
- V. 35-37 An eyewitness (likely the Beloved disciple) solemnly testifies that he saw blood and water flow from Jesus' pierced side, so as to prove that Jesus truly suffered physical death. As the Passover lamb, Jesus is slain so that all may live by the Spirit.

Meditate: Jesus' final words, "it is finished" echo statements Jesus made throughout His ministry that He had come to complete the works entrusted to Him by the Father. The sacrifice is made. Sin is destroyed. The devil is defeated. God and man are united once more. So Jesus ends His life with a cry of triumph: It is finished.

Do you know God's plan in your life? How hard have you been trying to finish your God-assigned tasks?

April 22: John 19: 38-42 Two secret disciples of Jesus

Notes:

- v. 38-39 According to other Gospels, Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, who dissented from the policy and actions of the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus. Also, he was a wealthy man who followed Jesus and looked for the Kingdom of God. It was therefore an uncommonly courageous act for Joseph to dissociate himself from the Sanhedrin and to show his sympathy with Jesus, who

had been condemned and killed. However, Romans usually did not allow those who were crucified a decent burial. Exceptions could be made only as an act of grace by the authorities, and that gesture to relatives who so petitioned. Joseph had no right to make the request to take Jesus' body, but his position and his wealth might have commended him to Pilate. Nicodemus shows up with more than sixty pounds of spices-myrrh and aloes- for Jesus' burial. He will not normally have on hand the amount of spices here mentioned. There must have been an urgent collaboration with Joseph while Jesus is dying, and so Joseph procures the grave clothes and Nicodemus the spices. These two timorous believers are publicly and courageously drawn to the Christ after His exaltation upon the cross.

- V. 40 Joseph and Nicodemus therefore take the body of Jesus and bind it with the cloth wrappings and spices. The spices will have been spread the length of the wrappings, and these wound round the body of Jesus.
- V. 41-42 According to John, the place where Jesus died was the place of His burial and the scene of the manifestation of His resurrection. In the providential ordering of God, Jesus was not buried in the common criminals' grave, but in a tomb that was at hand, unused and therefore fit for the Holy One of God, and one that could be an unmistakable witness to the victory of the Lord of life over death.

Meditate: The effects of the life that Jesus poured out from the cross also take flesh in the actions of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both of whom had previously been less than shining examples of discipleship. Joseph was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews, and Nicodemus came to Jesus, but only in the cover of night. Now, however, the power of Jesus' death draws them both out into the open. Joseph takes the public step of asking Pilate permission to bury Jesus' body, and Nicodemus provides Him with an extraordinary amount of spices, more suited to the burial of a king. As these two men make public their emerging faith in Jesus, they demonstrate the power of the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ.

Does the meditation on Jesus' suffering and death encourage you to take a more courageous step of discipleship?

April 23: John 20:1-10 He is risen!!

Notes:

- v. 1-2 Mary goes to the tomb in the garden on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day in Christian tradition, but while it was still dark. It symbolizes that none of Jesus' disciples believe that Jesus is resurrected so they are still walking in spiritual darkness. Mary's report suggests the fear that either enemies or robbers had taken the body of Jesus. The robbing of tombs was sufficiently common for official action to be taken against it. A decree of the emperor Claudius ordered capital punishment for those destroying tombs, or removing bodies, or displacing the sealing or other stones.
- V. 3-7 Clearly the presence of the wrappings suggests the body has not been stolen as Mary assumed. What robber would unwrap the corpse and then leave the linen wrappings neatly folded in the corner of the tomb?
- V. 8-10 The beloved disciple believed in the resurrection of Jesus on the basis of the physical evidence of the empty tomb. He is the only person in the New

Testament who believed in the resurrection of Jesus apart from a resurrection appearance. However, both disciples did not fully understand the key events of the life of Jesus until after scripture and the Holy Spirit had enlightened them. Meditate: Do you believe in the resurrection of Christ? How does this belief change your attitude of life?