

Easter Life Group Experience

Participant Notes: This is a different kind of group experience than our normal routine. Your leader will take you through this time that will include some personal reflection. Lean into it. Participate. Embrace the moments of silence *and* sharing. We will be talking about the in-between time from Good Friday and the crucifixion to Easter Sunday morning. Our resurrection story will come from John 20. As we begin, let's consider that Saturday ... when everything seemed to go quiet.

Saturday's Silence

Scripture: Luke 23:55-56; 1 Peter 3:18—20; Psalm 88:3—6

The Scriptures do not give us a full play-by-play of Saturday ... but it does give us enough to understand something powerful. It is the space between what God promised and what we can see. It's the day when heaven seems silent, but God is up to His greatest work. The silence we experience on Saturday does not mean God is absent. His work is hidden in the moment ... what looks like the end is actually the turning point.

- 1) Have you ever had a "Saturday" season where God felt absent or silent?

The Encounter at the Garden

Scripture: John 20:1—18

While it is still dark, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early in the morning. It is dark outside and it is dark "inside ... spiritually speaking." Mary is not coming to the Garden Tomb with hope. She is coming with spices. She is not expecting resurrection. She is expecting to give care to a body. No one in the first century was saying, "Oh, wait until the third day, and He'll be back." Resurrection was not on the radar. When Mary arrives and sees the stone rolled away, her first thought is not, "He is risen." Her first thought is "They have taken Him." Even after encountering the angels and seeing the empty tomb, she still assumes death has the final word. And then she sees Jesus. Standing right there ... alive! Present. Real. And she does not recognize Him. She thinks He's the gardener. Isn't it interesting that the entire biblical story begins in a Garden? It was in a Garden where everything was lost. It was in a Garden where death entered the world. And now, Jesus stands in a garden. Alive. Not as the victim of death, but as the One who has overcome it. In this garden, the beginning of new creation has dawned. Jesus, being raised from the dead, is the first sign that God is making everything ... new.

- 2) How often is Jesus present, working, and moving on our behalf, and yet we don't recognize Him?

- 3) Jesus spoke to Mary by calling her by name. Resurrection became real to Mary when it became personal. Where have you come to understand the risen Jesus through personal encounter? Where has He “called you by name?”

Still Smell Death?

Scripture: John 20:1—18, continued

Mary brought spices with her to the tomb. It was part of the ritual of preparing the body when someone died. It was an act of preserving the body, but it was also to honor the body for what it once used to be. In the presence of resurrection, Mary is still holding onto to spices—tools used to deal with death. We often do the same in the presence of resurrection life ... hold on to death. Maybe it’s a relationship you have written off. Maybe your faith feels dry or distant ... maybe even disconnected. Maybe it is a habit or struggle that you’ve just learned to manage. Maybe it is a dream you buried. You have made peace with the idea that “this is just the way it is.” That is what death smells like. Resignation. Numbness. It is like a quiet acceptance of less than what God intended. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is still at work. Resurrection looks like healing ... like restoration ... like God is doing something entirely new.

- 4) Where have you carried “spices” into areas of your life where God is actually trying to bring new life? Is there anything in your life that you have considered it being “over” rather than expecting God to bring hope and restoration ... resurrection?

Take a moment here to pray:

“Jesus ... this feels dead. Over. Done. I don’t see a way forward. If you are here ... if you are in it ... please help me to recognize You.”

Go and Tell

Scripture: John 20: 1—18, continued (focus on vv. 17—18)

Mary hears her name and recognizes Jesus. The first thing that Jesus tells her is to “Go to my brothers and tell them ...” The resurrection was more than something to believe ... it was something to carry. Mary came carrying spices ... she departed carrying new life. She came as a mourner. She left as a messenger. She had encountered the risen Jesus, and everything changed. Mary’s message to the rest of the disciples was, “I have seen the Lord.” She didn’t have a sales pitch. No theological argument here. Just a witness. Jesus invites us to do the same. We don’t have to have all the answers. All we really need to say is “This is what I have seen.” “This is what Jesus is doing in my life.” “This is where I have experienced hope.” It’s difficult for people to argue with your story. When resurrection becomes real to you, it naturally moves through you and overflows to others.

- 5) Who in your life is walking their own “Saturday experience?” Who needs to hear a message of hope?

Closing Thoughts:

- Resurrection is new creation, not just resuscitation
- Jesus meets us in our grief; God’s silence is not His absence
- What looks like the end may actually be the turning point
- Recognition of Jesus is personal
- Easter people are sent people