

Monday, April 2 – Read John 20:11-18. The first person to see Jesus after he rose from the dead was his devoted follower Mary of Magdala. All of the gospels reported incidents in which people initially failed to recognize Jesus. But when Jesus called Mary by name, she immediately had a deep sense of personal recognition. This was her Lord, and he was alive! Mary thought she was going to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial. Why not weep? Expressing grief over a loss is healthy. Yet two messengers ("in white," not the color of sorrow) and a man she couldn't identify asked her, "Why are you crying?" Has God ever helped you see a seemingly painful or negative experience in a different light? What are you facing now that needs the touch of God's life and hope? Mary knew Jesus' voice. She had sat at Jesus' feet, listening to what he said. How can you know the "sound" of Jesus' voice? What will keep your relationship with Jesus personal, a link between your heart and his, rather than just an academic exercise?

Tuesday, April 3 – Read Luke 24:13-35. To human eyes, the crucifixion had ended everything. The two disciples "had hoped" Jesus was the promised redeemer (but apparently, their words implied, he wasn't). Jesus, again unrecognized at first, explained to them how the Scriptures pointed to him. When he, although a guest took the host role, broke the bread and blessed it, they recognized him. Think of the strands of promise Jesus may have woven into his talk: Israel's shepherd, the coming King of glory and righteousness, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Man of sorrows. Have you ever had a sense that the Holy Spirit had opened your eyes to see Jesus in the Bible? How can you deepen your grasp of the Bible in the next year? It seems likely that Cleopas, who was there, told Luke this story. Unrecognized, Jesus asked, "What are you discussing...?" They shared their dashed hopes, confusion and the ray of hope the "empty tomb" reports evoked. Does this testimony ring true to you? How does the first-hand flavor of the resurrection stories help you trust their integrity?

Wednesday, April 4 – Read John 20:19-23. The resurrection accounts are strikingly honest. John frankly recorded that, even after the women reported the resurrection, the disciples "were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders." But their fear didn't last. The risen Jesus twice offered them "shalom" (peace), an expansive word whose meaning took in all aspects of human well-being. Jesus' resurrection not only changed him (e.g. he could appear in a room despite the locked doors)—it changed everything. John wrote that Jesus breathed on the disciples (recalling Genesis 2:7, where God's breath made man a living being), and gave them the Holy Spirit. In what ways can you allow the risen Jesus to "breathe" new life into you? Jesus' words about forgiving sins at times lead to debates about which church or person hold that power. But Jesus didn't give humans the right to take God's place. He said the message his disciples share offers forgiveness to all, which they either accept or reject (see John 3:18-19). How can Jesus' message give you forgiveness, power and joy?

Thursday, April 5 – Read 1 John 20:24-29. In John's gospel Thomas showed dogged, gloomy loyalty in 11:16, and was puzzled by Jesus' words in 14:5. Pastor Bruce Milne wrote, "We can...conjecture a loyal but somewhat unimaginative person who will act only on what he is sure of." Seeing Jesus moved him to faith. Jesus also blessed all (like us) who believe the witness of others without "seeing." Jesus' invitation (verse 27) echoed Thomas' stated conditions for belief (verse 25) almost exactly. Sometimes we wonder if God hears us or cares about us. How can Jesus' attention to the details of Thomas' concerns strengthen your trust that Jesus hears and cares about your needs and concerns? It may be unfair that we label Thomas only "the doubter." His doubts met, he spoke the climactic words of faith in John's gospel: "My Lord and my God." What does it say about Jesus' impact that his followers immediately spoke of him, and prayed to him, as "God" (see, e.g. Acts 9:20, Titus 2:13)? Can you join in Thomas' statement of faith?

Friday, April 6 – Read John 21:15-19. In Matthew 26:33, Peter had boldly told Jesus, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." Then he forcefully denied knowing Jesus three times (John 18:15-27). The risen Jesus gave Peter the opportunity (which he took) to affirm his love and loyalty three times before the other disciples. It was no glib affirmation, but a life course with a martyr's death at its end. Jesus was the good Shepherd (John 10:7-16). To follow him, to join in his mission, meant to accept his repeated call to feed his sheep. In what ways is God calling you and equipping you to take part in the work of "feeding" others, physically or spiritually? What rewards and challenges might you face in answering that call? Verse 18 says "Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?'" What made it important for Peter to "undo" his triple denial of Jesus? What can make it painful to face issues that keep you from following God fully? What makes it worth working through that pain with God (and a wise counselor, when necessary)?

Saturday, April 7. Read Matthew 28:16-20. The risen Jesus commissioned his followers to serve him by serving others: make disciples, baptize and teach. Having all authority from God, Jesus sent us to all nations, to teach all that he commanded. But we never go alone—he promised to be with us always. The message of Matthew's final passage is also found in Luke 24:36-49, Acts 1:3-8, and John 21:1-14. Then and now, in Brunner's words, "the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." In Isaiah 43:10, the prophet quoted God as saying, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" Today, on the authority of the risen Jesus, this is your commission if you choose to accept it. Will you be a living witness to the risen Lord, sharing what you know of his love and life? As your life with Jesus unfolds, what do you want to ask of Jesus?