

# Weekly Devotional



July 25-29, 2011

# Prayers

**Monday:** Praise for VBS, Chinle, and West Virginia mission trips. Pray for the final preparations for the Ecuador mission trip, and for the Cargo of Dreams project.

**Tuesday:** Pray for people who suffer from mental illness, addictions, etc. Pray for the families who often end up being responsible for, or suffering along with these individuals.

**Wednesday:** Pray for people with cancer and debilitating and terminal illnesses

**Thursday:** Pray for people still trying to recover from earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, and other natural disasters (especially those in Africa forced to leave home in search of food).

**Friday:** Pray for those caught up in the whole slave trade and sex trafficking business. Pray for protection and success for those who try to bring freedom to these individuals, as well as justice to those involved.



# Monday

Read John 20:1-18



By the time Sunday came, Mary Magdalene was up early and on her way to the tomb where her beloved Jesus had been placed just two days before. Armed with spices, she was intent on completing the preservation of His body and giving Jesus the proper burial she felt He deserved. Mary—the faithful follower of Christ and His disciples as they constantly moved about from town to town; Mary—who had been set free from demon possession; Mary—the loyal, grieving believer who had been with her Lord, watching from a distance, as He suffered and hung on His cross.

This same Mary, heart now full, was at Jesus' tomb before the dawn of the third day. We can't even begin to imagine the depth of her emotions as her eyes scanned back and forth and took in the empty room. Who, on the Sabbath, rolled the stone away and then took His body? She must have gone through a thousand scenarios in her mind. How come His grave clothes were still there? When Mary enlists the help of Simon Peter and John, it is the disciple John who, taking in the scene before him, suddenly understands the truth of the Scriptures and Jesus' words.

But Mary, still outside, has no knowledge of this yet. She will have to have her own experience with the risen Christ. And so it is with each one of us. In deep sorrow still, she converses with two angels about the loss of Jesus' body and consequently mistakes Christ Himself to be the gardener. It only takes one word from the Master ("Mary") to bring spiritual understanding to her. I'm sure there are many theories as to why Christ chose Mary to be the first person to whom He appeared after His resurrection (and maybe we'll have to wait to find out the real one!), but she was wholly committed to Him. She was a dependable, trustworthy, devoted follower. And when Jesus entrusted her with His post-resurrection message to the disciples, she ran to pass it on.

**Thought for Today:** And one more thing—Mary was obedient without question and fulfilled the task Christ asked of her.

# Tuesday

Read Luke 24: 5-12, 34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5



Mention the name “Peter” and a “spur of the moment,” fearless and oftentimes reactive character comes to mind. A fisherman by trade, together with his brother Andrew, Peter never hesitated for a second to respond to the call when Christ invited him to become one of His followers. Throughout the gospels the writers record incidents which reveal an impulsive, “on the edge” personality, including walking on water (Matt. 14:22-33), cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant (John 18:10), and his denial of Christ—the One for whom he initially gave up everything. When Peter’s gut wrenching tears fall as the cock’s crow signified his betrayal, we see a totally torn man. Even though his actions always seemed to be one step ahead of his thoughts, Peter was beloved of Christ because of the condition of his heart. He had great faith and he had great passion. His life portrays the grace of God and the restoration He brings. There is no failure He cannot redeem. He is the God of second chances, and Peter’s life is a testimony to that.

On the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, it was Peter whose heart was stirred to jump up to go and look, while the other disciples did not receive Mary’s story of the empty tomb with believing ears. The Peter who steps off of our Bible pages after Jesus’ resurrection appearance is a changed man. He embraced Christ’s charge to “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15). After being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter became a bold, confident preacher and leader who performed many miracles (Acts 3:1-10), healed the sick (Acts 9:32-34), and even raised the dead (Acts 9:36-42). He authored two books, First Peter being written to encourage Christians who were experiencing extreme persecution and trials for their faith.

Ironically, Peter was eventually crucified for his faith – but not before he turned the world upside down by sharing the gospel wherever and whenever he could.

**Thought for Today:** “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18)



# Wednesday

Read John 20: 24-31

Not much is recorded in any of the four gospel accounts as to who Thomas was or how he came to be one of Jesus' disciples. Luke tells us in 6:12-16 that after a night of prayer Christ chose His twelve and Thomas was one of them. Other than also being called Didymus (from the Greek meaning Twin), he is most times just grouped together with the others when his name is mentioned in Scripture. What we do know him for, mostly, is his profession of unbelief after Jesus' resurrection. Not being present when Jesus first appeared to His disciples, he didn't believe their story and he earned himself the nickname "Doubting Thomas." It would be another week before Jesus would return and Thomas could see for himself the brutal scars that Jesus bore upon His body as a result of His crucifixion. In our culture today, Thomas gets a bad rap for his unbelief, but I wonder if he is one of the Twelve for our benefit. What if all the disciples had been perfect? What if none of them ever doubted or had questions? At least Thomas was honest enough to say out loud what he felt. It is hard to know the tone behind the words, "Unless I see . . . I will not believe," since none of us were actually in the room at the time. Perhaps there was a hint of pride; perhaps there was some jealousy that the others had seen and he had not. I can't help but think that there are many among us today who feel as Thomas did. To those of us who are in that position, Christ reaches out now in the same way He did to Thomas—in love—and He invites us to participate in life fully with Him.

Christ appeared a second time to the disciples when Thomas was present. Because of Jesus' great love for him, Thomas was not left on his own to wrestle with deep uncertainties. Christ desired that Thomas have his own experience of belief. And when he touched Jesus' wounds, Scripture records Thomas as being the first person to address Jesus as "My Lord and My God" (v. 28).

So Thomas might have had his doubts, but none that the vast love of Christ could not conquer.

**Thought for Today:** Christ accepts us just the way we are—with our questions, doubts or fears.

# Thursday

Read John 20: 19-21, John 21:1-14, Luke 24:36-53

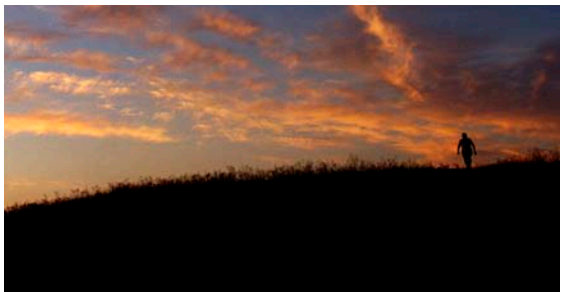
Who among us can ever fathom the emotion masked within the disciples on that first Resurrection Sunday? Even though Christ had invested in their lives through teaching, ministering, and prayer for three years, still at this time for these, His followers, there was undeniable sorrow and many questions about His death. From His earliest days with them, Jesus opened up the Scriptures to them and began teaching the things of God—sometimes through parables with characters and situations that would be familiar to them and with which they could identify. He even spoke of His own life, death and resurrection (Luke 18:31-34), the fulfillment of all prophecy, the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new—but in this area the disciples had no understanding.

So on this day, the disciples (minus Thomas) were huddled together behind locked doors. It was to a very frightened group that Jesus appeared and offered His “Peace be with you” greeting. When He opened their hearts and minds, the Scriptures came alive to them. His next appearance to the disciples was perhaps for the benefit of Thomas alone (John 20:24-28).

John records that Jesus appeared to seven of His disciples while they were out fishing. The event ended with a miraculous catch. But really it was just the beginning. The disciples had come full circle. When Jesus first called them to join Him in ministry, He found most of them on the shores of the Sea of Galilee—fishermen by trade. Matthew, in the final chapter of his gospel (Matt. 28:10), states, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.’”

This time they knew who He was. And as they had done before, they began their day with the Lord, a few fish, and a couple of loaves of bread.

**Thought for Today:** It's never too late to start over.



# Friday

## Read 1 Corinthians 15



Scripture relates many resurrection appearances by Jesus—to those already mentioned, to the two on the road to Emmaus, to the gathering of more than 500, to James, and to Paul; perhaps there are many more.

Before his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Saul was a persecutor of the very name of Christ (Acts 9:1-31). Once face to face with Jesus Himself, though, Paul (as his name was later changed), rose to become an unstoppable, powerful preacher of this news that had so transformed him—to both the Jew and Gentile. Aside from Christ Himself, Paul is probably the most prominent figure in our New Testament. His writings have inspired, chastened, encouraged, comforted and challenged readers through the centuries. Basic to Paul's belief is faith in Christ, belief in His death and resurrection, man's sin, God's forgiveness, God's grace, hope, and the assurance of eternal life with Him.

All of the characters we became acquainted with this week were significantly changed after their experience with the risen Christ. None kept the news to themselves. All shared it with someone. All had personal experiences. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

In 2011, we have the same Jesus, the same message, and the same power. Some things come and go. Some things never change. Truth has stood the test of time.

**Thought for Today:** He is not here. He has Risen!



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