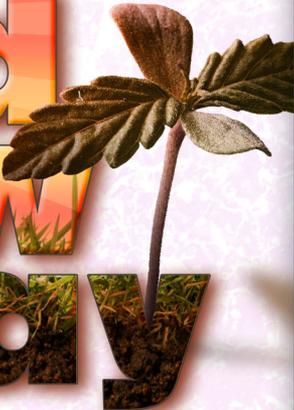


GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
April 20, 2014

**Brand
New
Day**



Discussion Guide

No Ghosts of the Past

John 20.11-18

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Would you describe yourself as a person who dwells in the past? Would you explain? If not, how would you describe yourself? Could you elaborate?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to set the scene for John 20 and explain who Mary Magdalene was.

- Read John 20.1-18 aloud slowly, seeking to experience and imagine the scene unfolding. Pause and read John 20.11-18 aloud slowly, seeking to be present with Mary and Jesus as the text describes.
- In what ways, if any, does it appear that Mary gets stuck?
- In what ways does Jesus address Mary's stuckness?
- Where have you seen people get stuck like Mary? What does this look like? What is the effect on their lives?
- What, if anything, can help these people get unstuck?
- In this text, Jesus' resurrection invites Mary to live in a transformed present rather than the past (verses 17-18). Do you find that it is easier to live in the past or the present? Could you elaborate?
- What is it like living in the past? Living in the present?
- Sit and be still for a moment. Listen to the words of Jesus inviting you to let go of what was and to grasp on to what is, a reality that is new and transformed (verse 17). What feelings, if any, does this evoke in you? Would you elaborate?
- Listen once more to Jesus' invitation to let go of the past and to grasp hold of the present (verse 17). How would you like to respond? In what ways, if any, can this group encourage you to respond to Jesus' invitation?

Context and Background

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was one of the first followers of Jesus, a follower who remained faithful to Jesus throughout his ministry, trial, and crucifixion, and was rewarded by being the first person to see the risen Jesus. Mary came from the village of Magdala on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. She encountered Jesus early in his ministry and experienced his healing touch (Luke 8.2). (Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary!) Mary is never mentioned in connection to a man which may imply that she was a woman of means who owned her own property. Whatever her social/marital status, she used her financial assets to support Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8.3; Mark 15.41). She seems to have traveled with Jesus throughout his Galilean ministry, at the very least accompanying him on his journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51) as all four Gospels portray Mary as being present at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27.56; Mark 15.40; Luke 23.49; John 19.25). All but John place her first in their lists of women caring for the needs of Jesus, indicating the importance of her role. Only Mary, the mother of Jesus, is placed before her by John in his Gospel and this is due to his emphasis on the assuming of care for Mary by the beloved disciple. Mary Magdalene is the first person in each Gospel to witness the risen Jesus and one of the women who inform the disciples of his resurrection (Matthew 28.1; Mark 16.1; Luke 24.10; John 20.11-18). Because of Mary's faithfulness and her experience with Jesus, she became an important figure in the early church, an example of a life to be imitated.

The Text

John 20.11-18: Let the past be the past

After Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus' body in a new tomb near the place where Jesus was crucified. The mention of the vast quantity of spices used in the preparation of Jesus' body give the indication that Jesus was treated to something of a royal burial, something reserved for people of great importance (John 19.38-42). Since the next day was the Sabbath, Sunday is the first day people visit the tomb of Jesus. According to Jewish custom, the tomb of Jesus would become a place of mourning for his followers for approximately a year. After this time, the tomb would be reopened and Jesus' bones would be gathered and placed into a ossuary (bone box) to preserve them for God's resurrection of the dead. It is likely that Mary Magdalene's arrival at the tomb before dawn on the first Sunday after Jesus' death is in keeping with the Jewish custom of mourning. Mark noted that the women who arrived on that Sunday wished to anoint Jesus' body. This may imply that the burial was not yet complete, another indication of the great attention given to Jesus' burial (Mark 16.1-3). However, when Mary (and the other women) arrived they discovered that the tomb had already been opened and Jesus' body was missing. The significance of this event is hard to overestimate. The removal of the body deprived the followers of Jesus of their place of mourning, and in their minds, deprived Jesus of his participation in the resurrection of God! Mary ran to report this great wrong (did she suspect that the Jewish leaders had added insult to injury?). She found Peter and John and related what she had found. These two men ran and discovered all to be as Mary had said.

With nothing left to do, Peter and John return to where they were staying (the upper room?) but Mary remained at the tomb weeping, her grief now compounded with the loss of Jesus' body. As she wept, she looked once more into the tomb only to be greeted by two heavenly beings clothed in white. These two angelic beings asked

Mary about the nature of her great grief, to which she replied matter-of-factly that Jesus' body was missing. That Mary encountered heavenly beings and remained unmoved speaks to the depth of her grief. She was blinded with grief. Mary turned away from the tomb only to realize that a man was standing near her, a man she assumed was the gardener. In desperation, she begged to know the location of Jesus' body, stating that she would personally retrieve it. (What would she do with it?) Perhaps blinded by her tears or by her incomplete turning toward the person by her (John 20.16), Mary failed to recognize that this man was none other than Jesus.

Jesus spoke Mary's name at which point she saw him clearly and cried out her name for him, "Teacher!" At this point, Mary's thinking, more than likely, focused on the joy of having Jesus back. Jesus was not dead but alive! Since he was alive things could go back to the way they used to be. He was once more her teacher and she clung to him refusing to let him go. What is interesting to note is that Jesus did not want Mary to cling to him. He commanded her to release him; that is, Jesus told Mary that things were not going back to the way they were. He was not going to go back and be her teacher once more. She was to let that go. This is a shocking statement that has caused much debate among biblical scholars. It seems that Jesus had his attention focused on the present and the future rather than on the past as Mary did, and was attempting to change her focus. Jesus encouraged Mary to let go of him as her teacher but to go and proclaim him as risen, the one who was ascending to the Father. She was to proclaim this to the disciples whom Jesus now called brothers; that is, the present Jesus encouraged Mary to grasp was a present that was brand new. To this point, Jesus had never called his disciples brothers. This new present is thus a present of deep intimacy, an intimacy even greater than that experienced during Jesus' earthly ministry. Mary obeyed Jesus and let go of her teacher and went forth to proclaim him as risen Lord. She let go of what was and grasped hold of the new present, a present marked with an intimacy with Christ that was deeper than ever before.

Application:

The resurrection is perhaps the most significant event in the Christian faith. It is the resurrection that propelled the first followers of Jesus forward and led them to adopt a new way of living (2 Corinthians 5.14-15; Romans 6.2; Galatians 2.20; 1 Corinthians 15.22; Colossians 3.1-4; 1 Peter 1.3). It was the resurrection of Jesus that the early followers of Jesus pointed their disciples to in order to explain how they should live. For them, the resurrection changed everything. For us, the resurrection changes very little. It has become a theological nicety which gives us comfort but has little staying or transforming power in our lives, but it was never meant to be so. The resurrection demonstrates that the followers of Jesus are freed from the past. We can let go of what lies behind us. We do not have to look backward and pine for those better times. Rather, because of the resurrection, the followers of Jesus may live in a transformed present and look forward to a new future, one in which the realities of God's movement are seen and experienced in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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