

In John it says...

A SERVANT GIRL'S PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

So, what's in this daily devotional?...

A written version of all that the servant girl says, with quotes from John's account of Jesus life (John's Gospel that you can find towards the end of the Bible)... plus

A verse to ponder on... or learn... Why learn scripture?... Well it can be comforting to quote if you are having a tough time... and the enemy hates it (so I am told)... especially when we speak verses out loud, that's why I've used quite a literal translation... the English Standard Version (ESV). The numbers show the chapter and the verse number, so (2:5) is chapter 2, verse 5.

And a question as you journey through the day... try to keep the question with you during the day... you might find you remember other things that are relevant... or have more questions to share with a Christian friend... especially if you are a relatively new Christian... and if you have been following Jesus for years, you probably have more memories and reflections than you realise at first.

And how do I use it?...

There are 28 daily reflections (24 following the CD tracks and 4 section summary reflections), using it on your own, try to set a regular time when you can sit quietly and listen to the narrative, you might find it helpful to read at the same time, or afterwards... you also might listen to the opening music first... and at the end.

The reflections can also be used with a few friends or a church 'small group'. If the group meets once a week, people can either work through each day and then gather to discuss their insights... or each week focus on one reflection, listening to the narrative together and use the question as the basis for the discussion.

It's flexible... use it how it works for you... all that matters is that it helps you grow in your relationship with Jesus, son of the God, who created you and loves you with an everlasting love!

CD 1 – Seven great miracles

01 Music

02 At Cana – turning water into wine

Oh, people often ask me that. How did I come to meet him? It was high in the hills of Cana. It was spring time. The birds high in the sky, the warmth of the sun on my skin. And beneath my feet... wild flowers. Oh, not that I was there to notice any of that, for I was a servant girl, and in my household, there was a wedding!

But whoever heard of a wedding where they ran out of wine? Oh, my poor master, he was beside himself. And we servants, we didn't know what to do. But it was then... then that I heard her telling Him. She said, "They have no wine." And He replied, "Woman" (I think in your language you would say dear woman, for it is very respectful). He said, "**Woman, what does this have to do with me? My time has not yet come.**" (2: 4) Well, then she turned to we servants, and said, "Do whatever He tells you."

Well, what He told us was to fill the six stone water jars with water. (I don't know if you have them in your land, but every good Jewish family has them in our land. Each one would carry 20 or 30 of those pitchers of wine we'd been carrying.) So, we filled each and every one of them right to the brim, and when they were all filled He told us to draw off some of the water and take it to the Master of the Feast. (Master of the Ceremonies, I think you might say.)

Well! Would you believe it... all that water - it had turned into wine! And not just any old wine - the Master of the Feast said it was the finest of wines. When I heard that and saw all that He had done... I decided I was going to follow that man, and that's what I did.

Verse to ponder on... or learn...

"His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."" (2:5)

"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." (2:11)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Pause for a minute... give yourself time to reflect... what must it have been like for the servant girl?... how do you think you would have reacted? ... be honest with yourself, none of us are perfect!

You might want to spend a few minutes thinking of anything that stood out in particular... anything that puzzled or surprised you... anything that raised questions for you. I encourage you to use the space to write them down... there's space provided...

And now for the question for you to ponder today...

Are there times when Jesus has, by His spirit, asked you to do something very specific, like when he told the servants to "fill the stone jars with water"?

If there are, how did you respond?... Did you put your faith in Jesus?... Or did you turn the other way? Keeping a note of when we have witnessed, or perhaps been part of a miracle can help us grow our 'faith muscles', ready for next time He invites us to "fill the stone jars with water..."

3 – Walking to Capernaum – come and see

Oh, it was over 30 years ago... but I remember it all so clearly. Let me share it with you... what happened next.

The end of the wedding came and He led off out in front. The other men who had been at the wedding with Him... they were there following Him, and then there were some women. His mother was there... and some other women. Then, right at the back were those of us who had just joined. But soon enough his mother, Mary - she made us welcome. She told us about Him... she told us His name was Jesus and he came from Nazareth... Jesus of Nazareth.

Then she told us about the men with Him. There was Andrew and his brother Simon, but Jesus had given him a new name, Peter, which means the Rock. So, he was called Simon Peter after that. Oh, but some people still call him Simon, and others call him Peter, but you'll soon get the hang of it. And then there was Philip and Nathaniel, I remember they were there. Philip had said to Nathaniel, "We have found the one of whom the ancient prophets spoke." But Nathaniel he said, "Does anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see." (That's what I always say to people when they ask about Jesus, 'come and see'. I don't know what else there is to say, because how do you explain about Jesus?)

I can't remember all the others who were there, but there were James and John I'm sure. And Jesus led us right down to the shore. Then we walked around the shoreline, right round to Capernaum - it's a fishing town. Many of the men who were following Jesus, they had come from Capernaum. So soon enough we all had places to stay, and it wasn't long before I was feeling comfortable there... not just with the place... but with the people too.

I just started to feel settled when Jesus said we were off again. This time, we were going to Jerusalem, our capital city.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the lamb of God." The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." (1:36-37)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Give yourself a few minutes to mull over what the servant girl has told us... how does it make you feel?... how might you have reacted to Jesus words, 'come and see'?

Share your own story... how did you come to know Jesus?... maybe you don't know Him yet, but you are exploring. Either way share your story with a Christian if you can... and ask about their experience? Everyone has something different to say... we are all so unique!

And the question...

Have you ever noticed that once we feel comfortable about part of our life following Jesus... Jesus (by the power of His Spirit) brings us something new! Think of the times He has brought changes in your life... and how graciously, or otherwise, you have accepted them! Finally think about how those changes have brought you even more unexpected blessings... those are good memories to write down and keep.

04 Up to Jerusalem – with a leader of the Jews

I had never dreamt of going to Jerusalem. Oh, I knew it would be many days walk. I was sure we would go along the Jordan Valley, and then up some steep and treacherous paths towards Jerusalem itself. But do you know, by then I had already realized that as long as Jesus was with me, somehow, I'd be safe.

And I was safe. We did come to Jerusalem. Oh, but it did take many days walk, away from those lush green lands of Cana and the Galilee. Oh, now we were in a very different place. It was a dry and arid land. When I looked at Jerusalem set high on the hill and the city walls were surrounded with palm trees, and all around were olive groves. Oh, it was such a different place... and then Jesus took us right into the city.

I was expecting it would be thronging with people, for we had gone for the time of the Passover. And every good Jewish man should go to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. And those narrow city streets they were thronging with people!

But Jesus led us on.... He took us right to the temple itself.

I never knew a building could be so big - the walls just seemed to go on and on forever. I had it in my head ... I remember... I had it in my head that it would be quiet and holy in the temple, but when Jesus walked inside, it was more like a marketplace! There were oxen and sheep and pigeons, and all around the outside of courtyard there were men sitting at tables... and they were changing money... pouring out money.

Anyone who said that Jesus was just a gentle lamb... they should have seen Him that day. For He made a whip of chords, and He drove out the animals and He overturned the tables of the money changers. Oh, you should have seen it!

Later... much later... someone remembered that hundreds of years before it was written "**zeal for your father's house shall consume me.**" (2:17, referring to Psalm 69:9) It certainly did that day. But that wasn't the only thing that happened in Jerusalem...

Many people came to hear Jesus speak. Most of them were ordinary folk like you and me... but not all... For one was a man named Nicodemus, and Nicodemus, he was a ruler of we Jews. No one expected a ruler of we Jews to come and speak to Jesus.

Of course, we women would never have been near such a conversation. It just wouldn't have been the thing. But, we soon heard about it, and we heard what Jesus said. For Nicodemus asked what Jesus meant when He said that a man, or a woman, must be born again, or born from above in order to see the kingdom of God. And Jesus, He replied... "**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**" (3:6) Oh, there are many more things that Jesus said that night... and they are all recorded by John, so you can read them for yourselves in your own language.

Not all of them are easy to understand to begin with. But one that I treasure is this... that "**God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**" (3:16) I think that means life as God originally intended. And what a promise is that!

But I must go on, for I think it is time to share with you a very different conversation... and it happened in a very different place.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (3:16)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Do you sometimes keep your love for Jesus a secret, rather like Nicodemus? Are you afraid you will be ridiculed if people know you are 'a Christian'? If you live somewhere where Christians are persecuted, you might be right to keep that love a secret, but if you are in a place with religious freedom, what would help you step more fully into that freedom?

Pray for the courage that you need! Pray for it now, and tomorrow, and keep praying for it! After all, we have been sent by Jesus to spread the good news to all nations. (Matthew 28:19) It is the news that God loves us, and that Jesus came to give us life as God intended originally.

05 Samaria – by a well

Soon enough we left Jerusalem, and Jesus said He was going back to Galilee, to Cana. Well, I was so pleased, for that was the place I had come from... but then Jesus said he was going through Samaria. Well, my old master, he would never go through Samaria, not for fear of his body or his soul. The Samaritans and the Jews - they had been at odds for 300 years. Every self-respecting Jew I knew would go the long way around. Down to the river Jordan, along the valley, and up through the hills, but Jesus said He was going the short way.

Well, in the end, I decided to follow Jesus. Of course, I was with the other women, and a few of the men who always stayed behind to keep us safe, so I wasn't with Jesus when He had the conversation, but I heard about it. A conversation with a woman at a well. In fact, I heard her speak of it. She is getting old now. But she will tell you of it. Let her tell you of it now.

Ah, so you want to know about the day I met Jesus of Nazareth, do you? Well, I've told many others, I may as well tell you. Never you mind why I was at the well in the middle of the day on my own... all that matters is, I was there and so was He. I could tell at a glance He was a Jew. And I knew no self-respecting Jew would speak to a woman on her own... never mind a Samaritan woman like me. But speak He did... and asked me to draw water for Him.

Then He went on telling me how He would give me streams of life giving water... water that would mean I would never thirst again. After that, He told me of my family... of my husbands and the man I was with then! Well, how would you feel if a man you'd never met before suddenly told you your life story? I said to Him, **“Sir, I perceive you are a prophet.”** (4:19) And I decided to ask Him all that's at the heart of everything between Jews and Samaritans. Where is the rightful place to worship the true God? Is it on Mount Gerizim as we Samaritans believe? Or in Jerusalem as the Jews believe?

Well, He had an answer for me... not that it was the one I was expecting. For He said, the time is now coming, indeed is now come, when the father is searching for those who will worship him **“in spirit and truth.”** (4:23) ‘In spirit and truth?’ I thought. But the place of worship had always been so important!

Well, there was one other thing I knew... I said to Him, “the Messiah is coming and he will know these things.” And do you know what He said to me? He said, **“I who speak to you am he.”** (4:26) I who speak to you am he? I thought... the Messiah? The Christ?

Well, I could not stay any longer or ask anything else... for at that moment, the men folk who had been with Him (He had sent them into town to buy food), they came back. It was not seemly for me to stay there then. I left in such a hurry... I even left my water jar behind. But when I reached my town, I said to every person I saw, “Come, hear a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Messiah... the Christ?”

And do you know, many of them came back with me? But some... some believed just on what I said, my testimony. A fancy word, if you like, for what words had passed between Him and me. But most people came back and they sat and listened to Him... then they turned to me, and they said, **“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for now we have heard Him for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.”** (4:42)

So that's the day I met Him, Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour of the world.

It was indeed the day she met Him... and we stayed there two more days, for so many people wanted to listen to Jesus. But then... as always... He said we were off again.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"But the time is coming, indeed is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." (4:23)

"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for now we have heard Him for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." (4:42)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Going through Samaria was scary! Seriously scary! This was a big ask by Jesus, all the servant girl had ever learnt was that you didn't go through Samaria, you went the long way around! Everyone she knew always went the long way around!

Has Jesus called on you to follow Him to somewhere that is seriously scary? It needn't have been an actual geographic place, it might have been a conversation, even standing up and singing at a karaoke machine... somehow you knew Jesus wanted you to do it... and you knew it was your worst nightmare. He might even have given you more than one little adventure like that. Remember that scary situation... and the way it strengthened your relationship with Our Lord... I'm sure it did.

06 Back in Cana – healing a boy a day's journey away

We did go back to Cana... and this time He was welcomed with open arms.

Oh, news travelled so far... it even travelled right down to Capernaum. And there was a noble man there, or a man of royal birth I think you would say. A wealthy man. He came all the way from Capernaum, right the way back up to Cana, because his son was dying. His son was dying, and he came to plead with Jesus, that Jesus would heal his son.

Well, as far as I can remember the conversation was quite short. For Jesus said, all that you want is to see signs and wonders, but the man pleaded again for his son. And then Jesus said, "**Go; for your son is healed.**" (4:50a) And as soon as the man heard those words, he left. He didn't plead with Jesus at all anymore. He didn't argue or anything. He just turned round and left, and began the walk back to Capernaum.

Imagine our joy when we heard that as he was getting back towards Capernaum, his own servants had come out to meet him. They came to say that his son was healed. He asked the exact time that the fever had left his son, and they said it was the exact time when Jesus had said, 'Your son is healed'. Oh, what rejoicing there was among us that day. And that man, not only did he come to believe in Jesus, but his whole family did.

Oh, that was a great and wonderful day. And that was the second of the great miracles that they say was one of the signs that Jesus is the Son of God, the first being when He had turned the water into wine.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way." (5:50)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Think of how much we need to see signs and wonders in order to believe... and when we see them do we believe them... or do we do as the atheist in the car park? "God if I can just have a parking space, I promise I'll believe in you." Seconds later a car pulls out, and the atheist says, "Oh it's OK God someone's pulled out, I don't need you right now."

Don't rationalise a miracle with the benefit of hindsight... believe in them... celebrate them...make a note of them.... you'll start seeing more and more of those amazing signs of God's love and grace.

07 Jerusalem – Bethesda – with an invalid of 38 years

The third - that happened in that first year too... that first year we were following Him. It was back when we were in Jerusalem. It was another of the great festivals, and this time, this time Jesus went to a place called Bethesda.

It is on the far side of the temple. I think in your land you would call it Pools of Mercy, for it is said that sometimes the water is stirred up, and the first person to get into the water when the water is stirred up will be healed.

Well, when Jesus went there, he spoke to a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. I don't know how it is in your land and your time, but in our land and our time, many people do not live for 38 years, so to be healed after 38 years... well, no one would consider it. But Jesus spoke to the man and asked if he wanted to be healed.

The man said that there was never anyone there to help him into the water... someone else always got there first. And then Jesus said to the man, "**Get up. Take up your bed roll and walk.**" (5:8) And that's what the man did. He took up his bed roll and he stood up and he walked. He was healed... and he'd been an invalid 38 years. Oh, the rejoicing that day.

But it was also a day of troubles. For... it was the Sabbath day. I don't know if you understand the Sabbath day? All the nations around us, they treat every day the same, but we keep one day every week holy to the Lord our God, special. And we do no work on that day, and our rulers... they say what is work... and what isn't.

Well, they say that healing a man is work. And so, they said that Jesus had broken the Sabbath, and it is one of the worst possible things that you can do, to break the Sabbath. Oh, it upset so many people. But in a funny way, I don't know whether it wasn't a good thing, because... well, sometimes when the rulers of a land are upset about something and are talking about it, then the ordinary folk get to hear about it and get to talk about it... and so more and more folk, ordinary folk, came to hear Jesus and brought the people who were sick and invalid to have them healed.

It didn't matter whether we were in Jerusalem... or whether we were in Capernaum... but that's how the next miracle happened.

Verses to ponder on... or learn...

Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." (5:8)

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." (5:17)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Christians can sometimes be very critical of the rules that the Jews had developed, like healing a man being unacceptable on the sabbath. Spend a few moments considering whether there are ways in which we ourselves have developed our own 'rules' about how we do church or how we live our lives, that separate us from the true way of Christ?

The way we do things doesn't have to be fixed for ever. There are churches that meet on other days of the week rather than Sunday and there are Christian groups that don't even call themselves churches. If there are things that frustrate you, spend a few minutes thinking about how you can make things better.

Just imagine... as you walk down the aisle in your local supermarket you see a 'little old lady' reaching for her favourite jar of marmalade... she can't reach it... you can. Only she knows that she prayed for someone to be there to help... only she knows you just affirmed God's love for her.

SUMMARY PART 1 – In John it says... come and see

As we come to the end of the servant girl's reflections of her first year following Jesus try listening to the whole of the narrative to this point again, and just relax and enjoy it. Then consider where you are... are you up close to Jesus... maybe the new kid hanging on His every word... or are you at the back, curious but hoping He doesn't notice you... in fact hoping no one notices you! Maybe you've been following Jesus so long you are on autopilot... enjoying the walk, but you've forgotten why you joined Him and what you're there for. You might even be in danger of being so complacent you turn a different way... thankfully Jesus will keep His eye on you... He won't let you stray far.

I suspect at different times we move from place to place... the important thing is to be honest with ourselves about where we are... and to be secure in His everlasting and eternal love for us, whatever path we choose to take.

And...

Have a think about the words 'come and see'... Jesus said them to the first disciples (1:39), Philip says them to Nathanael (1:46)... and the woman at the well says them to all the people she sees (1:29). If you have ever said them to someone you are an evangelist... as the servant girl says, in some ways it is all you can say.

Think about the people you know... friends, work colleagues, neighbours, family, people at the gym or the toddler group... is there someone who seems to be listening every time you mention church, the fun time you had at the weekend away... or something about your faith... they probably listen as though they don't want you to realise they are interested! But you know it... and they know it.

Pray to the Holy Spirit for an opportunity to say 'come and see'... you might have to wait a while... and you might not be inviting the person to church exactly... all you need to do is say 'come and see' when the time is ripe... and just watch to see what Jesus does... He, by the power of His Spirit will do the hard work... all you have to do is wait for the opportunity to say three little words.

08 Across from Capernaum – feeding 5,000 people

We were in Capernaum, and by then Jesus had chosen twelve to be his closest followers. Twelve men - it wouldn't have been seemly for them to have been women, but twelve men were His closest followers. And we were all in Capernaum, but Jesus looked to the twelve and said, 'We have no time for me to teach you or even to eat together. Let us take a boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.'

Well, many of the men had been fishermen before, so what could be easier? They took the boat to the other side, and then Jesus walked up and it was springtime again, the time of Passover. So, the grass was fresh as Jesus walked up that hillside and found a place to sit... for in our land a rabbi always sits when he's going to say something important to his pupils.

Well, Jesus was sitting, and they were all listening to him, but then Jesus glanced round and saw... some of the people... they must have seen where they set off to in the boat, and they had come round on the shoreline. All the way round. Gathering more and more people from the towns and villages as they came. They do say there were 5,000 men, plus women and children too.

Well as they came round, Jesus looked to Philip and He said to him, "**Where are we to buy food, so for all these people?**" (6:5b) Well Philip he replied, 'Lord, even half a year's wages would not be enough to buy as much as a bite for all these people.' We realize now Our Lord was testing Philip, for a little while later, Andrew came to Him with a small boy. And the boy had a basket with him, and in it was five barley loaves, and two fish. Now, you may have heard what happened next... for many people have, even people who do not know Our Lord. But you may not have heard it as the boy would tell it.

For I heard him speak it once. Let him tell you what happened...

"I was the boy... the boy with the five barley loaves and the two fish. I was there when He looked up to heaven and gave thanks, and then He started to hand out the food... I don't know how... but there was food for all of us, even me. Food for everybody. Well, when everyone had finished their food and filled up their bellies, He said to the twelve who were with Him that they should gather up the leftovers, that nothing may be lost. Well, I helped gather the leftovers up too.

And well... if I had not seen it for myself I don't think I would have believed it, for there were 12 baskets of leftovers! But I had only taken five small loaves and two fish!

I wanted to know what He would do next... so I hid behind a rock. I thought maybe He'd want to celebrate, or just go with his friends, or just rest. But He didn't do any of those... He sent everyone away. All the 5,000 with the women and children... He sent back where they had come. The twelve who had been with Him... He sent them back in the boat to Capernaum.

But then, He went the other way... He went further and further into the mountains, away from all the people.

I kept well back... I was sure He did not know I was there. But then, He stopped. I stopped too. I could still see Him, and I could tell that He was talking. But... I was sure there was no one there. I couldn't hear what He was saying, but it looked like He was talking to someone, and then listening to someone. Then I realized... He was talking to God! My father, he always said if we wanted to talk to God we must go to the synagogue, or if it was really important to the temple in Jerusalem. But either way a priest would speak to God for us. But I was sure He was talking to God, well, direct!

Then I decided to have a go too... I'm not sure how I got the idea. But I decided to try talking to God - and listening to God - silently in my own heart. And I could do it!

I'm going to be quiet now, for two whole minutes, so you can be quiet in your own heart... talking to God and listening to God."

09 Music

10 End of feeding 5,000 people

"It was late when He moved, and I followed Him back... back to the place where we'd started. Then He went on... right through my village... right past my house, so I went home then. Oh, but I always remember that time... that time I spent alone with Him... well... in the mountains, with God."

Oh, what that boy saw... it was a pattern we saw so often. Jesus would be out and about among the people performing some great miracle, and then He'd be alone... quiet, on His own with God.

And so, it was that night, for though that feeding of the 5000 and more counted as one of the great miracles, there was another one that very night!

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"... Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." (6:15b)

And a question as you journey through the day...

The boy said there were twelve baskets of leftovers, if he had not seen it for himself, he wouldn't have believed it! Pause for a moment... what must it have been like... a young boy, maybe his voice breaking, but he wasn't yet a man. How much awe was there in his eyes?... how much wonder?... what was he seeing?...Wow!

How much awe and wonder is in your life? You are on the greatest adventure of your life... a life following the one and only Son of God... just think about it... revel in it... enjoy it!

And what about praying to God direct?

Find a time to sit quietly in a favourite place and see what happens when you try speaking to God and listening to God, quietly in your own heart.

11 Sea of Galilee – walking across the water

For, the disciples had taken the boat back to Capernaum... but on their way back, one of those great squalls that sometimes blows up in the Sea of Galilee had happened. I don't know if you know, but the Sea of Galilee is well known for it... a great squall will blow up and there's nothing anyone can do.

Well, so it was that night. As they were, oh, three or four miles out to sea... and they were experienced fishermen, many of them. But they say the fear that they had in that storm... it was nothing to the fear that they had when they looked out in the early hours of the next morning and there... silhouetted against that early morning light, they saw the figure of a man. A man walking towards them across the water. And then they realized... they realized it was Jesus walking on the water towards them! And as He came towards them He said, "**It is I; do not be afraid.**" (6:20) Oh, how many times He said... 'it is I, do not be afraid' to us... and again that night.

They say as soon as He got into the boat, they were back in Capernaum!

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"It is I; do not be afraid." (6:20)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Oh how many times do we need to hear those words... "It is I, do not be afraid"? And yet still the fear monster seems to get the better of us... sometimes!

Imagine yourself on that boat for a moment... the experienced sailors were afraid... what if you were a land lubbering tax collector until Jesus caught your eye... you knew they should have walked round not taken the boat... but the others insisted. And you are in that boat... and the waves are getting higher... then suddenly you hear those words... "It is I, do not be afraid." Let God's peace and calm rule again in your heart.

Have a think about times the fear monster gets you... maybe talk with Christian friends about how they manage to remember those words of comfort from Jesus when things are getting tough.

12 Capernaum – I am the Bread of Life

Oh yes, and then it was another day... and not a day for Jesus to rest... another day when Jesus was speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum. Oh, people had heard of Him feeding so many the day before that even more people came. And this time, they heard Jesus say, "**I am the bread of life,**" (6:35 part) ... and, 'I am the water of life.' He was saying whoever believed in Him would never hunger and would never thirst. But then He said that anyone who followed His ways would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

Well, they didn't understand what that meant... well, they asked the leaders - the leaders of the synagogue in Capernaum. And they said He meant it literally... 'eating His flesh and drinking His blood'. That was too much for many people... they turned away from Jesus that day.

In fact, so many people turned away that Jesus even went to the twelve and asked if they wanted to go. It was Simon Peter who answered for them... he said, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.**" (6:68-69). Well I think that's how all of us felt... those of us who stayed. Those of us who stayed with Jesus... well once you realize He is the Son of God... where else is there to go?

And so, we stayed with Jesus... and we continued traveling with Him.

We were traveling mainly in Galilee... and sometimes people would say to Him, 'Oh, if you want to be taken seriously as a prophet, you must go to Jerusalem.' But Jesus always said, "**My time has not yet fully come.**" (7:8b). Time and again He said it... 'my time has not yet fully come'.

Soon enough, it was time for the Feast of the Tabernacles that year. And again, this time His own brothers were saying to Him, "Go to the Feast of the Tabernacles. Be seen in Jerusalem."

But, again, He said, 'his time had not yet fully come'. So, He didn't go with them, when many went in the great caravans traveling together as we do in our land. Instead, Jesus went later... He went on His own. He went quietly and privately. And then... then He appeared in the Temple, and He spoke with such authority that the people were astounded. But no one would speak out in favour of Jesus... for the rulers of we Jews had all said that if people did that they would be put out of the synagogue.

Oh, that might sound to you like they couldn't go to the synagogue on the Sabbath morning. Oh, but no, it means so much more. The loss of the livelihood... and not just that person's livelihood, their whole family's livelihood. Oh, it was a costly thing to say you followed Jesus! So instead, people whispered about him. Some said he could not be a prophet because prophets did not come from Galilee... well, that's not true! And others said He could not be the Messiah because the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. Well if they'd stopped to find out... they'd have found out that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Oh, but it didn't really matter... for none of it stopped Jesus doing what Jesus did.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (6:68-69).

And a question as you journey through the day...

He's your hero, you've given up everything to follow him and now everyone is turning against him. He's no longer the popular crowd puller who can do no wrong. The opposition is winning the propaganda stakes. What has gone wrong? How would you have felt? Would you have stayed? I hope you would. And I encourage you to think of the temptations that draw you away from Jesus. You may have already experienced these, if you are a mature Christian I'm sure you will have done. When you know the temptations that call to you they are easier to avoid! Ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware of temptations when they arise and for strength to resist them.

13 Jerusalem – giving sight to a man born blind

And so, we come to the day when the next miracle happened... it happened one day as Jesus walked down the stone steps from the Temple in Jerusalem. And there ahead of Him... there was a man who had been born blind. Oh, I heard this man tell what had happened... and as best I can, I will tell it for you... just as he told it to me.

"Oh, I had often wondered who was it who had sinned... me or my parents that I was born blind? For in our land, it is always said that if someone is born maimed in some way... then their parents or they must've sinned. But as He walked down those steps... I heard Him saying... 'it is neither this man nor his parents that sinned'. Then I heard what He said next... **"... that the works of God might be displayed in him."** (9:3b).

"The works of God displayed in one such as I!... but I was fit for nothing... nothing except to be a blind beggar."

"Then I heard Him spit... He spat on the ground. Well, even I know you cannot do that on the Sabbath... not just outside the temple. But I had no time to think of that for He said, **"...I am the light of the world."** (9:5b) And then there was a faint scratching noise. Someone told me later He had made a paste with His spittle on the earth. And then it is strange... but I did not move back - I stayed sitting where I was. And as I sat there... I felt Him put something warm and sticky on my eyes. Then... then He said to me, **"Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam."** (9:7 part) The Pool of Siloam! But it is on the south side of Jerusalem, I thought. But that is where he said I must go, so that is where I went, all the way to the pool of Siloam."

Oh, that man went to the pool of Siloam... and you should've seen the rejoicing when he washed his eyes... and he could see. Miracle of miracles! A man born blind... he had never seen the light of day - and yet he could see! Oh, there was great rejoicing that day. But as you may have realized, there was also great trouble. For again... it was the Sabbath Day - the day that we keep holy to the Lord our God. And that was the day that Jesus had healed that man.

This time people weren't just talking about Him. This time they were throwing stones at Him. There was violence... I couldn't believe the violence, I remember it now. They were throwing stones at Him.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"... that the works of God might be displayed in him." (9:3b)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Imagine... how does it feel? Someone is saying the works of God might be displayed in you!

Now He's putting something on your eyes... talking about being the light of the world (whatever that means to a man born blind) and He's telling you to go to the pool at Siloam. He's done something to you and now He's telling you to do something. Will you do it?... the Bible doesn't tell us if the man knew what would happen if he obeyed... or whether he simply did obey.

If you follow Jesus, you do things His way... obedience is part of the deal... we don't know what's coming next... but we try to be obedient.

Think for a while about those times you have been obedient... even if it hasn't been convenient. And think about how many times afterwards you have thought... "Wow, if I hadn't done that, this wouldn't have happened... and that wouldn't have happened." Soon enough you see a miracle unfolding... one of those miracles that only you and God know about.

14 Jerusalem – I am the Good Shepherd

It was about the time Jesus was being treated so badly that He spoke about being the Good Shepherd... and the Gate... the Gate for the sheep. Oh, much has been written about this by John. And I encourage you to read it... oh, and much more of the other things that I have spoken of. But it's in this part where Jesus said that He was the Good Shepherd and that the Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name, that He leads them, and they follow because "**...they know His voice.**" (10:4b) And he said, "I tell you the truth. I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through me will be saved. And he or she... **“... will come in and out and find pasture.”** (10:9b)

Oh, those were the words of comfort that He was speaking when it seemed as though all those in authority in Jerusalem were turning against Him... so much so that we went far, far from Jerusalem. We went to a place on the other side of the River Jordan. And it was there that we stayed until the time of the seventh great miracle.

Verses to ponder on... or learn...

"If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." (10:9)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (10:11)

And a question as you journey through the day...

It's not a question today as much as a suggestion... ignore the preaching you've heard... and the commentaries... and all the other stuff that's written about this passage... much of it is conflicting! The only agreement is that we aren't hearing about white fluffy lambs that have no trouble finding pasture and water as they bounce around in the daffodils.

Instead read the passage... immerse yourself in it... try to read a few different translations (Biblegateway.com is a good place to start).

We aren't sheep 2,000 years ago in Palestine... but there are wolves around us. Jesus makes us promises... soak yourself in those promises... pray to the Holy Spirit that He will give you a heart that is open to what Jesus is saying to you at this time in your life. He is the one who lays down His life for you.

15 Bethany – calling Lazarus from the tomb

It was when we were far away from Jerusalem on the other side of the Jordan that word first came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was sick. Now when Jesus first heard this He said, **“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”** (11:4) And then, as best I can remember, nothing happened for a day or two. And then Jesus went to some of the disciples and said, **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, and I go to awaken him.”** (11:11)

Well then the disciples said, ‘But Lord, if he's fallen asleep he'll wake in his own good time. Leave him to wake.’

But then Jesus spoke more plainly and said, **“our friend Lazarus has died and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, that you may believe. But let us go.”** (11: 14-15) And with that of course Jesus left... the disciples left... and we women followed behind.

It was a long journey back. And many of the disciples believed that Jesus was going to his death. Thomas said, ‘Let us go with Him that we may die too.’

You see Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha - they were great friends of Jesus. All three of them lived in Bethany. Bethany is very close to Jerusalem, less than an hour's walk you would say. So whenever we were in Jerusalem, we would usually visit Bethany and see Lazarus and Mary and Martha. So, going back to Bethany meant we were so close to Jerusalem, that everyone thought it was dangerous. But that's where we went.

Before we had even reached Bethany, Martha came out to meet Jesus. As she came out to meet Jesus she said, **“Lord, Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.”** (11:21-22)

And then Jesus spoke to her, saying that he was the Resurrection and the Life and that whoever believed in Him, though he perished, or she perished, would have eternal life. Then Jesus asked Martha whether she believed.

And she said, **“Yes Lord. I believe you are the Christ, who is coming into the world.”** (11:27)

Well, when they had finished their conversation, which John has recorded, Martha went and got Mary. Mary fell at Jesus' feet saying, ‘Lord, Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.’

It was clear then that Jesus was both deeply moved and greatly troubled. And He asked then where they had laid the body. It was in a place as they often are in our land... in a tomb cut into the rock. They took Jesus there... there was a stone rolled over the entrance to seal the tomb. Well in our land, even after four days, and it was four days, the body in the tomb will start to decompose... even at the coolest time of year. But Jesus said that He wanted the stone to be rolled away.

Well Martha, ever the practical woman, she said, ‘Lord, Lord, there'll be an odour.’

And Jesus replied, **“Did I not say that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”** (11:40)

Well, what else could they do? They rolled the stone away... and by then, there were many, many people there - for there were the mourners who had come to comfort Mary and Martha. And by then, not only Jesus and the disciples... but we women and the other ones who were following, we were there too. Well, Jesus looked up to heaven and He said, **“Father, I thank you that you have**

heard me. (11:41b) I thank you that you always hear me, but I have said this on account of those who are standing nearby.”

Then He turned. He turned towards the open tomb and said in a loud voice, “**Lazarus, come out.**” (11: 43) And the man who had been dead four days, he came out. He walked out of the tomb. His hands, his head, his feet, they were still wrapped in linen cloths. But Jesus said, “**Unbind him and let him go.**” (11:44) Unbind him and let him go... and that is what they did... they unbound him and let him go.

And that was the seventh of all those great and glorious signs that we saw in those two years.

All of them are recorded by John, and I encourage you to read each and every one of them for yourselves. For, as John has said at the end of his writing, he has chosen those so that you may read them and believe in Jesus, that He is the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, you too will come to eternal life.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” (11:40).

And a question as you journey through the day...

It's too awesome to get your head around... dead for 4 days... and now the man is walking again!

And what about those words... “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” (11:40). Think about it... ‘if you believed’... we have to be doing the believing in order to see the glory. It's not that God might show us some glory and then we might drop our cynicism and believe in Him. We have to do the believing first... even if everyone around says we are daft – or worse.

And enjoy this day... He is the Lord!

SUMMARY PART 2 – In John it says... He performed signs and wonders

It's the end of another year, we've heard the servant girl talk about the seven great signs or wonders that John has chosen to include... it says "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (20:31), that means life as God originally intended.

Sit for a while... if you can, listen to all the narrative... just relax and enjoy it as the miracles get more and more amazing building to a wonderful climax, then have a conversation in your imagination with the servant girl.

Ask her all the questions you have buzzing in your head... the things that puzzle you... the things you find a bit odd. Listen for her answers. You might want to make a note of those questions. It may be that the answers take a long time coming... some of them may only come at the end of your life... as Christians we have to accept that we won't know all the answers.

This is the end of two years seeing signs and wonders... what happens next is very different... spend as much time as you can asking the servant girl your questions... imagining her answers.

And...

If you haven't done so yet read the whole of John's account – chapter 1 to the end of chapter 12.

CD 2 – Holy Week, arrest, trial, death and resurrection

01 Opening Music

02 Bethany – Jesus anointed

It was after he had raised Lazarus from the dead that things got really difficult... Oh, many saw what had happened and believed, but not all. Some went to the Pharisees and told them, and when they heard they were afraid. Oh, there are many reasons why they might have been afraid... but I have not time to tell you them all now. All that matters is that they were afraid... so afraid that they began plotting to kill Him!

So, Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews. Instead, He went to a place called Ephraim well away from Jerusalem. That's where we stayed until the Passover that year. At the time it seemed incredible... the third Passover since I had been following Him. I remember marvelling at how much had happened... it had certainly never been dull!

It was six days before Passover when we went back to Bethany to the home of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. As usual Martha did all the practical work, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened. But, this time, she didn't just listen, she caused quite a stir!

What she did was to anoint Jesus feet with perfume, pure nard! Oh, the smell of the perfume was almost overpowering. There was so much of it, it must have cost a year's wages. Worse than that she wiped His feet! Even I wouldn't have done something as menial as that. Washing a person's feet is the task of a non-Jewish slave - a foreigner - not a servant and certainly not a host!

But I haven't told you the worst of it yet... she let down her hair and wiped His feet with her hair. Why, it's unthinkable... a good Jewish woman... she just doesn't let down her hair in public. It isn't done!

Oh, I do understand now that it was all done through love and true humility... but not everyone who heard about it thought that!

You should've heard what Judas said, Judas Iscariot, he said the perfume should have been sold and the money used for the poor, though in truth I think now he probably wanted the money for himself... for he proved to be a traitor and a thief. But Jesus said something else, He said, "**Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.**" (12:7-8) Oh, if only we had known how soon that would be.

But anointing His feet was only the beginning of that remarkable week.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." (12:7-8)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Think about Mary... maybe imagine you are Mary... the model pupil who sits at Jesus feet, listening to Jesus every word (Luke 10:38-42). Imagine the thoughts of those watching you – "What is she

doing now?... she's acting like a harlot... a whore... a prostitute... she's touching His feet... worse she's letting down her hair in public... wiping His Holy feet with her hair! Anointing Him!"

Sometimes we need to sit and remember just how powerful Jesus is... He is Saviour of the World... He is Majesty... He is King of Kings... He is God's only Son. Yet He invites us to be His friend and He offers to walk with us. Rest for a moment and think about that.

How do you honour Him?... How could you honour Him more?... Would you do the unthinkable and let down your hair?... Well, would you?

03 Riding into Jerusalem – Hosanna they cried

It was the third time we had been to the Passover, but this time was different, now He was famous... or infamous! Certainly everyone was talking about Him. And this time He didn't walk into the city... this time He rode in on a donkey's colt! To think of it! Our Jesus riding in! Only the most powerful and wealthy people ride in our land and our times. Yet there was Jesus: the man our rulers said was a rebel... a troublemaker.

Yet it was all just as it had been written by the prophet Zechariah centuries ago:

**“Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!” (12:15)**

Not that we remembered those words at the time, though of course the Pharisees and all our rulers would! They know the Scriptures! But for most of us... it was only after... after He went to glory that we realised just how much of His life was written in the words of the ancient prophets.

At the time most of us just struggled to keep up... literally. Crowds of people came out to meet Him. They cut down branches from Palm trees and made a great procession crying out **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (12:13)**

[MUSIC]

It seemed like the whole world had come to meet Him. And it really was the whole world... not just the Jews because that was when some Greeks came asking to speak to Jesus. Oh, we always say Greeks, for every land around us speaks Greek. So it doesn't mean they actually came from Greece. What it means is they weren't Jews... and I think that's the important part.

Looking back... it seems that was the real turning point... it was as though it was the signal to Jesus that the end really was near.

He said, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (12:23)** Then He talked about a grain of wheat having to fall to the earth in order to bear much fruit... of course we all understood that. How else does the farmer harvest the wheat each year other than by using the seed from the year before? Perhaps you see it in your land too?

He talked of other things then, about loving selfish earthly lives more than life serving him. Living a life that follows Jesus more closely, a life still on earth but one where we follow His will not our own. A life of sacrificing our will to His.

I still ponder those words now. Oh, how they haunt me when I know I've been selfish... self-centred... following my will rather than God's.

There is more that He said then... John has written it all, it is too much for me now. He talked about His soul being troubled... asking if He could be saved from this hour. Words about how one day He would be lifted up from the earth and how He would draw all people to himself. And it is when He spoke about the light, He said, **“The light is among you for a little while longer.” (12:35)** Yet we didn't realise... didn't understand... I think He was trying to prepare us for what was to come. He said, **“While you have the light... believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light.” (12:35-36)** and He said, **“Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in Him who sent me.” (12:44)**

He was telling us about Our Heavenly Father... not that we ever thought of God in such an intimate way before then. The things He said to us were so radical then.

And He said, **“And whoever sees me sees Him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness...”** (12:46)

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (12:13)

And a question as you journey through the day...

How fickle is that crowd? Last time the servant girl was in Jerusalem she told us about the crowd throwing stones at Jesus, so that He no longer walked openly among the Jews... yet here He is being hailed as a hero... welcomed as a king!

I once heard a sermon where the Christian life was likened to that of a dolphin... most of the time we are under water, in amongst the melee of life... however dolphins come out of the water for air. For Christians ‘coming up for air’ means making a conscious effort to turn back to Jesus. Some people make a set time often in the middle of the day when they spend a few minutes praying... or reading a Bible verse... or Christian poetry... or simply being quiet in His presence. There are any number of things you can do... the important thing is to find something that helps you turn back to Jesus

When you find what works for you, make sure you do it! Make it part of your routine... maybe set an alarm to help remember.

We need to stay focused on our Lord... not get caught up in the fickle crowd.

4 At supper – washing the disciple's feet!

Soon enough it was the Thursday evening, the time of the Passover supper... this time He caused even more of a stir! This time He washed the disciples' feet!

That's right... while they had supper together Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and then went to each of the disciples washing their feet. Dear Simon Peter tried to stop him... but Our Lord said that He must if Simon Peter was to have any part of Him.

I think I have explained before... it was a shocking thing for a Jew to touch another person's feet. No respectable Jew would do it! But then, Jesus wasn't respectable... He was Jesus! He didn't care what people thought of Him. He cared about doing the will of His father.

He washed the feet of all of them... all twelve, then He said, **"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."** (13:14-15)

His washing the disciples' feet was shocking enough, but what happened next at that same supper was even more remarkable.

He said to the disciples... the twelve who followed Him most closely... the twelve who He himself had chosen, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."** (13:21)

It's hard to imagine how shocked they must've been... of course we women heard about it soon enough. And about the disciples question, **"Lord, who is it?"** And His answer, **"It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread..."** (13:25-26) and how He gave the bread to Judas, Judas Iscariot, and said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'

Judas always carried the money bag... so they all thought he'd gone to buy something for the feast or give money to the poor. No one realised the truth... no one saw the darkness that was coming.

After Judas had gone out, Jesus spoke again of being glorified and of God being glorified in Him.

And it was about that time that Jesus said some words that have come to mean so much to so many. He said, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you... By this all people will know that you are my disciples."** (13:34-35)

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." (13:14-15)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Now it is Jesus who is doing the unthinkable... washing His disciples' feet... but He's the Rabbi... the teacher. His pupils should be doing things for Him... but here again we see Jesus doing something unthinkable. Something that seems to turn the world upside down... He doesn't comply with the norm... He complies with His Father's will.

Pause and ask yourself how comfortable you are stepping away from our social norms and customs for the sake of Jesus? Will you accept being seen as a bit different... different in a positive way, not a weirdo way... but still different... showing kindness... compassion... having time to listen... stuff like that... it stands out.

05 At supper – gifts for the disciples

There is much more that Our Lord said that evening... far too much for me to tell you. Thankfully John has written much so you can study it... and I encourage you to if you can.

One thing that is often told of that evening is the few words spoken between Simon Peter and Our Lord... the time when Simon Peter said, 'I will lay down my life for you.' But Jesus had replied, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow till you have denied me three times.**" (13:38b)

(The sad truth is when trouble came most of us scattered... ran the other way. Most of us didn't even follow... at least Peter did that.)

But more of that another time. For now let's think on things that Jesus said that night. One of the things that I have often pondered is that He said, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**" (14:6) ... I've been pondering those words these last 30 years.

One thing seems clear... we must follow His way - His way of living and being, even if that means washing someone's dirty feet, praying for our enemies, or inviting someone from 'the wrong side of the street' to share a meal... and so much more!

Surely, we must live as much as we can in the way that He did... and there are so many examples of the way He lived. Much is written by Matthew, Luke and Mark as well as John... and do read the other accounts first as I think John has written his account on the basis that we have already read the other accounts.

But how can we do the things that He did and live the way He lived?

Well, He made three gifts or promises - He said them all that night when He was speaking to the disciples. I find them a help... perhaps they will help you too.

The first thing He said is, "**If you ask me for anything in my name I will do it.**" (14:13) Wow! What a wonderful promise! Some people... people not from our culture think it means they can pray for anything, no matter how ridiculous or selfish and add Jesus name and it will be granted. But no, it's much more about praying in His way... praying for the things He would pray for. And thankfully as I say, with all that is written He gave us so many examples in His life... even in years to come people will be able to hear about the way He lived, perhaps even read it for themselves!

The second gift that He gave that evening was when He said, "**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.**" (14:16) He meant The Spirit of Truth - The Holy Spirit.

Yes, the Holy Spirit has been with us right from the start of creation, but in these 30 years since Our Lord went away... oh, how we have seen the Spirit at work in our lives. Ask any 'Follower of the Way' (that's how we are called nowadays). We all see the Spirit at work in our lives or the lives of people around us... encouraging, strengthening, guiding and comforting... and being our advocate when we get things wrong.

To me explaining how the Spirit works is one of the hardest things to put into words. But it's when I see or hear ordinary people, people like you and me, doing extraordinary things for our Lord... things I would never have imagined... that's the power of the Holy Spirit!

Now, let us come to the third promise or gift He gave us that night, for He also said, "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.**" (14:27a) And He said, "**Let not your hearts be troubled, neither**

let them be afraid.” (14:27b) And when I think of all that happened in the next few days, never mind these 30 years since, He said... ‘let not your heart be troubled’. We have to remind ourselves of those words so often. So much has passed in the world that is so troubling. Yet He gave us His peace... the peace that passes all understanding. And what He gives... He does not take back.

So, we encourage one another... and pray for one another... that whatever happens in our lives, we will guard and keep that most precious gift of peace!

Verses to ponder on... or learn...

“If you ask me for anything in my name I will do it.” (14:13)

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” (14:16)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” (14:27a) And He said, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (14:27b)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Three verses today... three promises from Jesus to those who follow Him. For me these verses are vital for anyone who wants to be a real follower of Jesus... for anyone who is willing to act as Jesus hands and feet today.

Do you believe the promises contained in those verses? Try to make time today to keep reading those three verses.... keep coming back to them... let them speak to you.

06 At supper – guidance for the disciples

So, if we remember the gifts He gave us, and we do those things... the things He did the way He would do them... then I think we need to know what Jesus said next. For He said, "**I am the true vine, and my father is the vine dresser.**" (15:1) I wonder, do you have vines in your country? We have so many in our land... we see them so often. The vine growing up from the ground... the branches growing out to the sides and the fruit hanging from the branches.

He spoke about those branches... how the branches that bear fruit need to be pruned and how once they are pruned they bear more fruit. Well, everyone living in these parts knows if the branch grows too far out... it will become worn out. I thought about this recently especially about what He said about abiding in Him. He said, "**Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**" (15:5)

And He said, "**If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**" (15:7) And if you wonder what He means about abiding in Him, He said, "**... if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.**" (15:10a)

Oh, such promises he made to us! Though I must admit I sometimes find His commandments a challenge. It sounds so easy, "**...that you love one another as I have loved you...**" (15:12) Yet He loved us all so perfectly... and His love never fails.

There is one other thing that He said at that time that I find a great encouragement. He said it to the ones who had been closest to Him. He said, "**No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends.**" (15:15a) He said servants didn't know what their master was doing, but that... "**all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you.**" (15:15b) More than all that He said, "**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.**" (15:16) Back to the vine! And remember that applies to you too... if you believe in Him... ultimately it's because He chose you. He has called you.

The things He said next that evening weren't about truth or vines... they were about hatred and persecution, about how He was hated and we would be hated, about how because He was hated, His Father was hated.

He said if He had not come and spoken and done all the things that He did people wouldn't been guilty. But He had come, He did speak, and so many saw it. Yet still they turned away, so He said, "**... but now they have no excuse for their sin.**" (15:22)

He spoke again then about the helper coming... and how, He, Jesus, was telling them what would happen, so that when such things did happen they would remember He had said it would.

I don't think any of the disciples understood... not even Simon Peter, James or John... it's only looking back that we begin to understand. Now we know how what people did to Him, now we've seen our own brothers and sisters hated and persecuted.

So often in these 30 years since we have said to one another... 'He told us it would happen'... and we remind one another that He also said, "**I have said all these things to keep you from falling away.**" (16:1)

He spoke again about going away, talked about the Helper coming after He had gone... He said the Helper (or the Holy Spirit) would, "**...convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement...**" (15:8) And it's true! Speak to anyone who follows our Lord and they know... they know what it is to be convicted. It's not nice... but by His grace we are never condemned. And, if you

want to know more about the Holy Spirit, there is much that John has written... but I cannot share it all with you now.

Perhaps He said these things more than once because they were hard for the disciples to understand... He knew what was coming... they had no idea. Oh I know people say, 'It was all there in the Scriptures...' but we didn't think of that at the time.

Even now we have to remind one another and keep reminding one another. Those who don't live in Jerusalem they meet with other believers... Followers of the Way... and they encourage one another. I hope you do too! Even those like Paul who go out spreading the good news to the ends of the Earth... even they have people to support them... and remind them of all that He said.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (15:5)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Abiding.....it means 'to rest in'.

Imagine you are resting in the biggest, softest, safest place you can think of.

Now stop imagining it.....start believing it!

What fruit are you bearing in your life? What fruit would you like to see more of in your life?

07 At supper – Jesus prays

And then there was the last thing... perhaps the most important thing He said that evening.

He didn't just warn the disciples what was going to happen and tell them what they must do... He also prayed for them!

Yes, He prayed for them... and not only that... He prayed for everyone who would come to know Him through them, people like you! Why some of you are so young you couldn't even have been born when He was alive... yet, He, Jesus, the Son of God, prayed for you.

Let me share with you some of the words He spoke as He prayed to His Father... to our Father. He said, **"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."** (17:9) Later He said, **"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."** (17:15)

And hear this, He said, **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word."** (17:20) You see? He prayed for each of you... if you believe in him.... and He prayed for everyone who will come to know Him.

So that means if you tell someone about Him... if you share what He's done in your life... and that helps another person to know Him. He, Our Lord and Saviour, has already prayed for that person.

Oh, how wonderful is that! He thought of everything!

He said much more than those few sentences... it is something else I encourage you to read and ponder. But for now, let's go on to what happened later that same evening.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word." (17:20)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Again I almost listed all three of the verses... just look back and consider their power. Jesus spoke them for you and me just as much as He spoke them for Simon Peter, James and John. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus prayed for you during his ministry on this earth?

As you journey through this day try to read the full passage... think about what He has given you in those few words... and ask yourself if you fully step into the power and confidence those words should bring.

SUMMARY PART 3 – In John it says... He washed his followers' feet!

As at the end of Part 2, I encourage you to try to find time to relax and listen to the whole section... there's certainly plenty happening as the servant girl talks of the few days before the Jewish Passover festival. Make a note of your questions... if you are a relatively new Christian talking to one or two more mature Christians would probably be a good idea. This section is so important if we want to truly follow Jesus.

If you have been following Jesus for years take time to do a little audit... be honest with yourself... do you still live in the power and strength of Jesus name and the promises He has given you?

And if you're a relatively new follower think about what you might need to happen in your life in order for you to live more fully in the power and strength of Jesus name. Pray to the Holy Spirit asking for whatever it is you need.

08 Music

09 The garden of Gethsemane – arrested... and denied!

What happened after that? Now that's the part most people know the best... His betrayal... arrest... trial... death and the amazing things that followed! And all done in three short days.

I will share it with you as best I can... though much is pieced together... for only He was present for all of it.

He was in the garden of Gethsemane with the disciples - they often went there - and they had gone there after supper that night.

Judas... the one who betrayed him... he knew where to find them. They say there was no surprise in Jesus. Judas went there with soldiers and officers from the chief priest. Jesus said, "**Whom do you seek?**" **They answered him "Jesus of Nazareth."** **Jesus said to them, "I am he."** (18:7)

He said it twice... there was no drama... well, not until Simon Peter drew a short sword and struck the High Priest's servant cutting off his right ear. Can you imagine?!

But Jesus just said to Peter, "**Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the father has given me?**" (18:11)

(To think - He knew what was to come).

The soldiers arrested and bound him... the King of all Kings bound by common Roman soldiers. Of course we didn't think of Him in that way in those days... but still that any should lay hands on our Jesus!

He was taken to Annas the high priest... they say it was his son-in-law Caiaphas who had "**advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.**" (18:14)

Two of the disciples followed. One was known to the High Priest so he was able to enter. The other was Simon Peter. The servant girl keeping watch at the door... she was asked to let Simon Peter in, as she did so, she said, "**You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?**" And **He said, "I am not."** (18:17)

It's true: Simon Peter denied Jesus. Just a few hours earlier he had said, "**I will lay down my life for you**" (13:37b) and there he was denying he was a disciple... he said it in front of witnesses... but worse was to come.

As Simon Peter stood in the courtyard, warming himself by a charcoal fire... twice more people accused him of being a follower of Jesus. And again, he denied it. As he denied it the third time the rooster crowed... it was all as Jesus had predicted!

But at least two of the disciples had gone there... most of them didn't even do that. But then, Jesus had asked for all those with Him to be allowed to go free... and if they had all been arrested, well, who would've been left to carry on the work?

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"Whom do you seek?" They answered him "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." (18:4)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Another unexpected twist and turn... Jesus hailed as the conquering hero a few short days ago... and now He's being arrested.

Imagine that scene if you can... Jesus knows what's coming... and He's perfectly calm... 'who do you seek... I am He.' But what about Simon Peter?... impetuous or what?... drawing a sword... cutting off someone's ear.

The problem is we too can be just a tiny bit over enthusiastic... we too can head off in a frenzy of activity... oh, yes we are well intentioned... the problem is we aren't following Jesus. Are you doing what He wants you to do today or following your own agenda? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to "seek Him first".

10 At the Praetorium – questioned by Pilate

Whilst all this was happening outside, the High Priest Annas was questioning Jesus inside. Jesus responded saying that all He had said had been in public... in the synagogue or in the Temple. Other than that, He didn't answer questions, so Annas sent Him to Caiaphas, who was another High Priest.

And all that happened in the night. Early in the morning Jesus was taken from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium - that's the name of the residence of the Roman Governor. From what I've heard, the Roman Governor, a man called Pontius Pilate - He didn't want anything to do with Jesus, even told Jesus accusers, "**Take him yourselves and judge Him by your own law.**" (18:31a). But the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to die and they told Pilate, "**it is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.**" (18:31b). Somehow, they must have made out that Jesus was some kind of threat to all the might of the Roman Empire!

Pilate couldn't ignore that... however improbable it sounded. Though, he would've have heard of this itinerant preacher or prophet from Galilee... and no doubt he heard about Jesus entry to Jerusalem just a few days earlier, to crowds crying out, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'.

He took Jesus inside and started to question him. Apparently, Pilate asked him twice if He was 'King of the Jews'... Jesus replied, "**My kingdom is not of this world.**" (18:36a) I wonder what Pilate must have made of that!

Soon enough Pilate was back outside telling the Jewish leaders, "**I find no guilt in him,**" (18:38b) But he, Pilate, knowing it was the time of our Passover celebration remembered the custom. The Roman Governor always released one Jewish criminal who was held in custody before the Passover... so Pilate said, "**So do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?**" (18:39) And oh, I can hardly bring myself to say it... the crowd cried out 'No'! Worse still they asked instead for Barabbas.

Barabbas! They exchanged my Lord for a thief... a common criminal.

From then on it got worse and worse... Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers mocked Him. They made a crown of thorns. Can you imagine how painful that would be? They put him in a purple robe... the colour reserved for Emperors... all the symbols of royalty... they even cried out "**Hail, King of the Jews!**" (19:3 part) as His skin must've screamed in pain from the flogging.

Soon enough, Pilate took him outside again, He said, "**Behold the man.**" (19:5b) but the chief priest stirred up the crowd so they shouted out, "**Crucify him, crucify him.**" (19:6b) Looking back it's so clear Pilate didn't want to - he said... "**I find no guilt in him.**" (18:38b)

Oh there is more recorded of all that Pilate said... and the way Jesus, our Lord didn't defend himself. But the chief priests made out Jesus was an enemy of Rome... a threat to Caesar. That was too much... Pilate sentenced Him to death... the most base, humiliating kind of death. The kind of death that would never be allowed for a citizen of Rome no matter what the offence! Jesus would be whipped with a lead tipped whip, followed by crucifixion!

VerSES to ponder on... or learn...

"I find no guilt in him," (18:38b)

"Behold the man." (19:5b)

And a question as you journey through the day...

Two short verses today... Pilate couldn't find any guilt in him... it was all getting very political and dangerous. Yet Jesus remains calm... He is in control.

When we open our lives to Jesus we let Him be in control. How much of your life do you surrender to Jesus? How could you surrender more of your life to Jesus? Surrender... it's another of those unfashionable words... but if you're following Jesus it's part of the deal.

11 Golgotha – crucified!

Yes crucifixion! They made him carry his own cross... we were in the crowd following... threading our way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem. He could hardly walk, His body torn and bleeding.

And then we were out... out of the city walls... at the place they call Golgotha. Some call it Calvary, in your language I think it is called the Place of the Skull.

And there He was, His hands nailed to a wooden cross... His body hanging. He was left to die.

He wasn't alone... there were two others that day: a common criminal on either side... Jesus between them.

Pilate wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (19:19). The chief priests... they didn't like that, they wanted it changing to read, **“This man said, I am King of the Jews.”** (19:21b) And do you know what Pilate replied? He said, **“What I have written, I have written.”** (10:22) And so it stayed... Praise God!

All this I saw... we women were there... especially the ones who had been with Him from the early days. His mother was there and Mary from Magdala. Of course, most of the disciples stayed away... if they had been seen with Him, supporting him, they would have been arrested and crucified too.

Yet, in the midst of all that pain and suffering He even had time to think of His mother. Always so respectful, He looked at her and said, **“Woman, behold your son!”** (19:26b) And He indicated the disciple that He loved most. How he came to be there I cannot say, all that matters is that he was... and from that day on that disciple cared for Mother Mary.

By then the end was very close... few words left to be said. Again He fulfilled ancient Scriptures as He spoke the words, **“I thirst.”** (19:28b) They put some sour wine on a sponge... lifted it to His lips with a branch of hyssop. **When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed His head and gave up His spirit.** (19:30)

VerSES to ponder on... or learn... and something to take in.

When Jesus said “It is finished” he was in control. He said “It is finished” not “I am finished”. He is in control! In control!

And a question as you journey through the day...

Are all aspects of your life under the control of Jesus? Are there areas that you haven't handed over to him? Even when things are not going well in your life do you still believe that Jesus is in control?

12 Golgotha – prophesies fulfilled

Now all this happened on a Friday... the day we Jews prepare for the Sabbath. And this wasn't just any Sabbath... it was the feast of the Passover! One of the most important feasts of our year.

No one wanted the three men hanging on their crosses over the Sabbath, so Pilate, the Roman Governor, he was asked if their legs could be broken. The Romans sometimes allowed it... that way the person would die faster. I'm sorry but that's the way it is. **"But when they came to Jesus, they saw He was already dead... they did not break His legs... instead one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear... and at once there came out blood and water..."** (19:33-34) If anyone doubted He was fully human they knew it then!

Oh, and the ancient Scriptures... they say, **"Not one of his bones will be broken"** (19:36b) and they also say, **"they will look on him whom they have pierced."** (19:37b)

So much of what happened fulfilled the ancient prophecies. Oh, ask any learned scholar and they will tell you more than I can ever do. But one thing I remember... the soldiers dividing up his clothes. Four soldiers... four piles of His garments. But they didn't know what to do with His cloak... they couldn't split it four ways... it was seamless, one piece from top to bottom. Instead they cast lots.

Dividing His clothes... casting lots... soon enough we remembered those words from King David... Psalm 22 I think you might call it.... where it says:

**"they divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."** (19:24b quoting Psalm 22:18)

And to think those words were written 1,000 years before Our Lord was even born!

But to me that day... all I cared about was that He was dead. I was beside myself with grief. Thankfully, others had thoughts for giving Him a decent burial.

It was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich and powerful disciple of our Lord, but one who had only ever come in secret for fear of what people would say. It was he who went to Pilate and asked to take Jesus' body away.

He brought the burial spices... myrrh and aloes... enough for a king! And they prepared Jesus body wrapping it in linen cloths with the spices, as is our way. Then they laid him in a tomb... a brand-new tomb, one for a rich man with a stone that fitted neatly over the entrance.

Nothing more could be done... it was the Sabbath... even preparing the bodies of the dead stopped for the Sabbath... and especially when it was the Passover. There was nothing more to do except grieve.

No one really talks about how it was for us that next day. I think we were all lost. None of us ever thought... didn't really think He would die. I know He had told us so... but we hadn't understood and that first day I think we still didn't. The prophet Zechariah had said, **"Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..."** (Zechariah 13:7) I think that was true.

Yet things would soon change again... at supper on the Thursday night He had said our sorrow would turn to Joy... and turn to Joy it did!... it happened early on the third day.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

But when they came to Jesus, they saw He was already dead... they did not break His legs... instead one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear... and at once there came out blood and water..." (19:33-34)

And a thought to ponder through the day...

Imagine that you are standing at the foot of the cross and watch.....

13 The third day – sorrow turns to joy

It was Mary of Magdala, always so devoted to Our Lord, she went to the tomb before first light... found the stone had been rolled away... a great heavy stone... and one that had been sealed by the Romans so they say. I think some of the other women were there too, but it was Mary who went to Simon Peter and another disciple. She said, **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”** (20:2b)

So, they, Peter and the other disciple, ran to the tomb... and the Lord’s body had gone. All that was left were the clothes He had been buried in! And praise the Lord that the two disciples saw it... both men... for the evidence of we women or even one man alone would not be accepted in our courts of law, but two men could not be ignored!

And when the disciples had seen that the body had gone, they left. So, it was Mary of Magdala who was there alone... weeping outside the tomb.

Then she looked inside the tomb again... and what she saw were two angels. One was sitting where His feet had laid, the other where His head had laid. She told us later one of the angels spoke and said, **“Woman why are you weeping?”** She replied to them, **“They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him.”** (20:13)

Then she turned around, and I will tell it you as best I can... She saw a man behind her and thought He was the gardener. He also asked, **“Woman, why are you weeping?”** (20:15) She replied to Him asking if He had moved the body... and then He spoke to her by name. He called her **“Mary”** (20:16a) As soon as she heard Him speak her name she knew it was Jesus!

So many times He had called her by name... so many times she had responded to His voice.

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni! (which means teacher) (20:16b). And He said to her, **“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”** (20:17)

And that’s what she did, she said, **“I have seen the Lord”** (20:18 part) And she used those amazing words... ‘my God and your God... my Father and your Father.’ Sometimes I wonder if people will realise in years to come just how special those words were... God was now Our Father, as well as Jesus’ Father!

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

“Mary” (20:16a)

And a thought to ponder as you journey through the day...

Now eavesdrop! As you listen, put your name in place of Mary’s.

14 In rooms and on the beach - appearances and more appearances!

Soon enough the disciples saw Him too - it happened that very evening. The disciples were locked in a room together for fear of our rulers. The doors were locked, yet Jesus stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you”** (20:19b) then **“he showed them his hands and his side.”** (20:20a)

They all took such comfort from seeing Him, and so did the rest of us when we heard! It confirmed all that Mary had said. More than that, Jesus said some amazing words, He said again, **“Peace be with you”** (20:21a) Then He said... **“As the father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** (20:21b) Then He breathed on them and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”** (20:22b-23).

Peace and forgiveness... I think those were the things that struck me first. He was giving us His peace, the peace that passes all understanding, and He was telling us... or at least encouraging us to forgive. He had spoken of forgiveness before... but then, just after He had died such a cruel death... His words again were ‘forgive’.

Even if some of us had doubted Mary of Magdala... most believed after this. But not Thomas! He wasn’t with the other disciples when our Lord appeared, so when they said, **“We have seen the Lord”** (20:25a) Thomas replied, **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hands into his side, I will never believe.”** (20:25b)

You see Thomas was one who had to see it for himself... and so he did!

It was eight days later. Again they were locked in a room together, again our Lord appeared, again He said **“Peace be with you.”** (20:26b) and this time He told Thomas to put his hands into His wounds. He said, **“Do not disbelieve, but believe.”** (20:27b)

And Jesus said something else, something I hope will comfort to people like you... people who didn’t live with Him and see Him as we did. He said, **“Have you believed, because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** (20:29)

Oh, and there are many other accounts of the times that He was seen... but... we are coming near I think to the end of all I think I can share with you.

Yet there is one more thing I should like to tell... When He appeared again to seven of the disciples and something very special happened. It gives me great comfort every time I feel I have failed Jesus... and I hope it may you.

Simon Peter and six of the other disciples had gone out fishing one night... as they returned early next morning they saw a figure on the beach. When they recognised Him, Simon Peter flung himself out of the boat and waded to the shore.

Jesus had made a charcoal fire... He cooked fish for their breakfast. Then He asked Simon Peter, the one who had stood by another charcoal fire and denied knowing Jesus three times, Jesus said to him, **“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”** (21:15b) Three times Jesus asked him, (each time He used different words for love, for we have more words for love in our language than yours). And three times Simon Peter said, **“Yes lord, you know I love you”**... **“You know I love you”**... **“Lord you know everything. You know I love you.”** (21:17b)

That's when Jesus said to him, "**Feed my lambs**" (21:17b) ... "**tend my sheep**" (21:16b). Even after Simon Peter denied Him three times, Jesus still loved him, forgave him, and gave him the job of looking after us!

So, I think I have come to the end of all that I can tell you... Of course, there are many, many more things that Jesus did, but I have focused on the ones that John has written. And if you have not already done so, again I encourage you to read his words for yourself. Because... well... John was one of the disciples - he was one who saw everything.

A verse to ponder on... or learn...

"Have you believed, because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (20:29)

And a question as you journey through the day...

We are those who have not seen, yet have believed. What things do you do to keep that faith alive?

SUMMARY PART 4 – In John it says... He gave his life for you...

It's time for a big pause... if you can do listen to all four parts simply relaxing and imagining all that is happening. As before I encourage you to write down your questions and reactions... maybe in your imagination ask the servant girl, or talk to a couple of Christian friends.

Then think about those words 'He gave His life for you....'

CONCLUSION

I hope you found this 28 day adventure with Jesus helpful. My prayer is that you will walk more boldly in the power of His Spirit bringing more of His love and His light into the world.

Peace be with you.

Christine-Anne Searancke

August 2018

15 Closing music