

Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of April 20, 2025 - Easter Sunday
“Everything [In] Between: Grief & Hope”



Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS: In the Direction of Hope

I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden;
I will be there soon.
I’m not the fastest runner,
Lord knows that,
but these legs are moving.
I suppose I could blame my weary spirit for the
slow speed.
I could blame the grief I’ve shoved into my
pockets and
laid around my neck.
I could blame my own hesitation to hope,
a hesitation that clings like mud.
But I don’t know that Jesus cares about my
speed.
So tell God when you see them—
I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden.
I will be there soon.

OPENING PRAYER: *Prayer for illumination*

God of Alleluias and empty tombs,
God of garden plots and good news,
it is Easter.
It is finally Easter.

In a world full of grief and heartache,
in a world full of violence and oppression,
in a world full of loss and separation,
we long for this day
because Easter sings a different song.
Easter sings a song of hope.
Easter sings a song of new life.
Easter sings a song of love that makes you want
to jump out of your chair
and run barefoot to the tomb.
Easter smells of fresh flowers and baked bread.
It sounds like trumpets and laughter.
It feels like a crowded table and a warm hug.
Yes, Easter sings a different song.
So in a world full of grief,
help us to cling to Easter’s hope.
In a world full of grief,
help us hear this story of good news.
In a world full of grief,
we’re ready to jump out of our chairs
and run barefoot to the tomb.
With hope we pray,
with hope we listen,
amen.

Be the Word Scripture Lesson: Luke 24:1-12

24 Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared.² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they went in, they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ They didn’t know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing.⁵ The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?⁶ He isn’t

here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee,⁷that the Human One^[a] must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”⁸ Then they remembered his words.⁹ When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others.¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.¹¹ Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn’t believe the women.¹² But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

L: The word of God for all people.

P: *Thanks be to God.*

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a deep breath. *How is it with your soul?*
2. HE IS RISEN! Happy Easter! How are you feeling post-Easter Sunday?
3. Have things in your life changed, or remained pretty much the same? What active decisions are you making THIS Easter-tide to be open to transformation? How are you choosing to live as EASTER PEOPLE?

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

Focal Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

Theme Connections:

Grief is a healthy response to Jesus’ death and a valid way to enter worship on Easter morning. And yet, the women at the empty tomb are given hope amidst their mourning. The other disciples don’t believe the women’s message, but Peter, living in the in-between of grief and hope, runs to the tomb to see for himself. Grieving doesn’t have to make us hopeless. Hope can compel us to take action when we are deep in grief.

Commentary on Luke 24:1-12 | by Rev. Jeff Chu

Grief is liminal, not terminal

What makes an ember of hope flare up into a revivifying fire?

Sometimes it’s a memory.

Then they remembered his words, Luke says of the women who had brought burial spices to Jesus’ tomb. It took outside help, in the form of two angels, and it wasn’t instantaneous. First there was terror, because it’s not every day that otherworldly visitors come calling. But then they received a gentle word: Remember.

Sometimes it’s a testimony.

The spark of the women’s story gave Peter just enough hope to get up, run to the tomb, and seek more for himself.

Sometimes neither memory nor testimony will feel sufficient. The cold cloak of grief may still be too thick, as it was for Jesus’ other friends. To them, the women’s story was λήρος (Ieros). My Bible translates that Greek word as “an idle tale,” but I think that lacks oomph. Really, it might be better rendered “nonsense” or “the mutterings of the delirious.”

The other apostles’ incredulity feels so relatable to me, especially in the context of our contemporary lives. In a world beset by so much sorrow, so much suffering, and so much heartbreak, a glimmer of good news can have such a hard time breaking my gloom. A glimpse of beauty, a flash of loveliness, can feel like foolishness amidst so much bad news.

This isn’t to say, of course, that it’s wrong to sit with grief. Our grief deserves our attention, because

mourning is a bittersweet memento of love. We need not rank our griefs either. Even when it comes to the pettiest, tiniest things, we need to grieve so that we can make room for the better.

There's the key, though: our grief cannot become our everything. With memory, testimony, and time, we can recognize that grief is liminal, not terminal. And it need not crowd out other truths: that we have loved and been loved. That we are not alone. That there is still hope in the land of the living.

1. Read Luke 23:44-56, which recounts the death and burial of Jesus. The women who had journeyed with Jesus from Galilee have stayed with him until the very end. During the crucifixion, they stayed at a distance, witnessing everything. They watched as Joseph of Arimathea removed Jesus' battered body from the cross and wrapped it in linen cloth. They saw Jesus' body laid in the tomb. They devoted time and resources toward preparing the spices and ointments. On the Sabbath, they rested. And now, on "the first day of the week," they journey back to the tomb to anoint the body (Luke 24:1).
 - Imagine the grief and trauma they carry with them to the tomb. What do you imagine they are thinking and feeling?
2. In their commentary on Luke, Levine and Witherington III note that tombs (as opposed to graves) sometimes contained valuable objects, and the nails used on the cross were considered to have magical powers. Therefore, when the women see the stone removed, their first thought is likely that a robbery has taken place.⁴⁴
 - Knowing this, how would you feel to see the stone rolled away?
 - Would it feel like another punch to the gut in the midst of unimaginable pain?
3. The two men in dazzling clothes invite the women to remember. They recount Jesus' teachings and reference his time in Galilee.
 - What is the role of memory in grief?
 - Can the act of remembering ultimately lead us to hope?
4. When the women recount what they've seen and heard to the male disciples, they dismiss it as if it were an "idle tale." Sometimes grief can cloud our judgment. It can lead us to resist the truth, or cause us to not trust people.
 - Has grief ever led you to feel paralyzed, isolated, or distrustful of others?
 - Conversely, are there times when grief has led you into deeper trust and connection with others?
5. When Peter hears the women's news, he gets up, runs to the tomb, and sees the linen cloths on the ground. He returns home, amazed.
 - Have you ever received news that felt too good to be true? What did you do in response?
6. Consider Rev. Jeff Chu's closing words: "There's the key, though: our grief cannot become our everything. With memory, testimony, and time, we can recognize that grief is liminal, not terminal. And it need not crowd out other truths: that we have loved and been loved. That we are not alone. That there is still hope in the land of the living."
 - What additional truths would you add to his list?
 - What else should grief not "crowd out"?

Be transformed: [Faith in Action]



Artist statement | STEVE PRINCE

Read Luke 24:1-12. Read the Artist statement by Steve Prince.

For me, to not know Christ is to live a life thirsty for truth, meaning, understanding, and purpose. We search and search and it feels like we cannot find the thing that we were hoping for. It is not until we surrender and trust in faith that we are able to find peace. We must open the door of our hearts to allow the Holy Spirit to enter and to do the work. Many will see us and not believe that the peace we exude is real, looking at us with skeptical eyes. Many will come thirsty, wondering from whence cometh our help, and some will know, and they shall rejoice for we have seen the light. Our daily prayer is that God will have us thirst no more and fill our cup.

Prompts for contemplation

- Look at the three women. What expressions do you see? How do their eyes, faces, and postures impact the mood of the image?
- Focus on the middle woman. What do you think the house in her body symbolizes?
- Notice the flow of energy and movement in the image. What direction does it seem to be moving in, and how does it impact the feeling or message of the artwork?
- What does the man's position in the image suggest about his role in the scene? How does he relate to the figures and the action surrounding him?

What transformations and changes do you feel as we enter deeper into the Eastertide as Easter People?

Prayers & Concerns / Announcements:

Joys & Celebrations:

- Celebrating the birth of Chanel Iki (parents: Eric & Crystal, big sister, Camille; Grandparents: Donna & Darrell)
- Ken Sasaki's Birthday

For Healing and Wholeness:

- Diane Ueda-Banda

- Audrey Goto
- Sayaka Shigeta's MOM
- Fred Oshiro
- Masako Akiyama
- Florence Uchida
- Alvena Fukuhara*
- Victoria DelaTorre*
- Austin Maeda
- Nancy Matsushima

- Mary Tamura
- Harriet Tateyama*
- Brian Okumura (Sandy Ueyuenten's brother)
- Glenn & Millie Shimizu
- Larry Takumi
- Yoshi Yamasaki
- Pastor Sid Wilson (Walteria UMC)
- Claretta Foster
- Rev. Mike Hiranuma
- Jack Honda
- Tam Kobayashi
- Kaitlyn (and Kim) Sabedra (Jason's friend)

Life Transitions/Moved to Transitional Care:

- Chic Miyake
- Ruth Hirata
- Bess Kawamura
- Sumi Horii
- Jack Hamada
- Ryonos
- Emma Horiuchi
- Doris Kato

And Know that He is God: Affirmation of faith

In the dark before dawn,
we believe that God is alive.

In the midst of our grief,
we believe the Spirit is at work.

In the chaos of our broken world,
we believe that love is on the loose.

For no stone could keep God at bay,
and no violence could keep God's love from us.

So today we sing,
Alleluia!

For somewhere in between our belief and doubt,
hope lives.

Christ has died,
and Christ has also risen.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Further reading & research:

Read Pgs 650-655 in *The Gospel of Luke*, by Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

(Note: This section examines Luke's version of the resurrection story. Validating the women's shock and disbelief to find the tomb empty, they state: "Had Jesus been explicit on the details of his death, the crucifixion would have been less of a shock. Had Jesus been explicit on the details of his resurrection moment, the women would not have prepared the spices" (652).)

- Rev Harry Fujimoto
- Florence Uchida
- Faith Tanaka
- Sue Hasegawa

Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord:

- Amy Hashimoto (almost 101 years old!)
- Baby Joel and Mom Cameron - prayers for their grieving family (God-family of Susan Slade)
- Hannah Yamamoto (February 12, 2025) - Charter Member
- **Prayers for the World**
- Our government
- Earthquakes (Myanmar/Burma, Tonga)
- Fire recovery victims
- Immigrants: Migrants, Refugees, Asylees
- Wadi Fouquin (demolition of homes)
- People in Gaza, Ukraine, Africa; places of war and unrest

Listen *"Jeff Chu—Grief as a Biblical Practice," The Bible for Normal People (podcast). Episode 202. April 18, 2022.*

thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-202-jeff-chu-grief-as-a-biblical-practice-reissue/
(Note: This podcast episode features one of our guest writers for this series, Rev. Jeff Chu, and explores how grief and death are integral parts of the healing journey and the Christian story. During the conversation, Jeff Chu admits: "Jesus' death and resurrection, that model and pattern has become so important to me. When everything in me wants to avoid the hard things and the sadness and the grief, I recognize that it's only through death that we have resurrection.")

Watch *"Resurrection of the Son of God Preview," by N.T. Wright. Published on Vimeo. May 17, 2017. vimeo.com/217829344*

(Note: In this short clip (a preview for his longer online course, "The Resurrection of the Son of God,"), Professor N.T. Wright declares: "If God's world of justice and mercy and beauty has already been inaugurated, then those who believe in Jesus' resurrection must be . . . people who do justice and mercy in the present, people who, together with other brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, work for God's healing love in creation; people who do beauty; people who celebrate art, because art and music . . . are ways in which we can pierce through the imagination, which gets stuck in the old creation, and can help people to imagine . . . that there might actually be a new creation in which the bullies and the wicked empires of the world are not in charge, and in which Jesus is in charge. . .")

Parallel Gospels for Resurrection Day:

<https://www.jesuswalk.com/resurrection/resurrection-parallels.htm>