

**First Fifteen: April 18-22**  
**Focus Scripture: John 20:19-31**

**Monday: Mark 16:1-8**

**Going Deeper:** Mark 16:1-8 is the original ending, as odd as it may seem... *“Overcome with terror and dread, they fled the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”* (Mk 16:8 - CEB) As abrupt as this ending is, it is quite understandable, or is it ironic? These followers of Jesus, who are the first to witness and hear of the resurrection and who are told to not be afraid but go and tell the others what you have heard and seen instead remain silent. Mark’s ending is what some have called “the unfinished ending” because it places the responsibility of sharing the message of who Jesus is and how Jesus’ message has impacted and changed our lives into our hands. Could it be possible that was Mark’s intent, for you and me to finish, or add to the Good News that is Jesus by sharing our own story? I believe this very well may be true. The temptation continues even today, will we remain silent due to fear and rejection, or will we tell the story of what we believe and more importantly how our lives have been changed through our faith in resurrection, Jesus’ as well as our own. Easter was just yesterday; I hope your hearts were lifted in worship and now that we have celebrated how will you carry this forward into a new week? What is one thing you can take away from your Easter celebration you can put into practice today?

**Prayer:** Lord of Life yesterday was a glorious day, but today is a new day with new opportunities to discover how your love and the wonder of the message of hope found in the message of Easter has changed my life. Help me to speak up and share how my faith has made my life better. Help me explore more deeply how Jesus’ resurrection is revealed in me as you help me overcome the obstacles and challenges of this day... and every other from now on. Amen.

**Tuesday: Luke 24:13-24**

**Going Deeper:** As you read this story we know as “The walk to Emmaus” where do you find yourself entering into it. What aspects of their conversation do you feel drawn to move closer to hear what they are saying more clearly? Just as now, life goes on beyond Easter. Life pulls us forward even when we sometimes stubbornly want to remain still to linger with our grief, or sorrow, or surprise. These followers were still processing all that had happened. Their hopes, dreams and understanding of what God was up to had been shattered by Jesus’ crucifixion. This was not what they had expected, after all Jesus was *“a prophet mighty in deed and word,”* (Luke 24:19b – NRSV) they had expected him to liberate their nation, and instead he as our savior provides liberation of our heart, mind and understanding to see ourselves and others differently. Luke tells us *“Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”* (Luke 24:16) I wonder if this is not also something we can relate to, when we are sure of what we want, or desire and hope for, when things don’t come together as we want them to, are we not also blinded and unable to see how what has happened may indeed be even better than we had hoped

for? In these moments we may find our own resurrection if we are willing to be open to see it.

**Prayer:** Open my eyes my Lord of Life. Help me see your movement and blessing in all things, both what I consider good and those times and places that I do not. Help me understand and see clearly your resurrection came out of our human fear, and unwillingness to trust the love of God to do something new, and unexpected. Help us to trust you and your desires for our lives and your world our loving God. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Luke 24:24-35**

**Going Deeper:** Jesus tells these followers they are foolish and slow of heart to believe. These words may have been hard to hear, but they lead to an important question. Where does our faith come from? I wonder if we think of faith as flowing from our hearts, or do we not consider faith as something we think about, its roots being grounded within our thought processes. I do not think it is either one or the other, instead I believe faith is more than one or the other, it is both an internal awareness that grows in our “heart” as an experience; and faith is also very much something we ponder and think about allowing it to open our minds eyes to see and understand God’s movements more clearly. If we do not allow for both, a heartwarming experience which leads to or creates a mind opening or thought process altering discovery we may find ourselves stuck, and on the outside of what God is doing... because we have chosen to close our eyes and mind to all of God’s possibilities! What do you need to allow yourself to see, or become more open to within the message of Jesus’ suffering as the way he entered into his glory? (Luke 24:26) The way of understanding, as well as experiencing God’s love and healing grace is found through suffering, which I have also come to understand as surrendering, trusting the way or path of salvation was and continues to be found through those places where I am not in control.

**Prayer:** God of mercy, tenderness, and wonder... I do not want to be slow of heart or foolish. I want to be full, full to overflowing with hope, joy, and the abundance you seek to share with me. Open my heart and my mind, expanding them both through my faith in you. Amen.

### **Thursday: Luke 24:36-49**

**Going Deeper:** *“While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.”* (Luke 24:41a – NRSV) This descriptive phrasing is fascinating; it was one of those lines that makes you stop and reread it questioning what I am really hearing. I think the Message spells it out well for us *“They still couldn’t believe what they were seeing. It was too much; it seemed too good to be true.”* Is it too good to be true? Many people wonder if this is so, given what they have done or left undone. These verses about the resurrection and the message of Easter itself are stories of our faith that we often handle and consider with great care and deep respect because of this very question... Is it really too good to be true. But I also hear a playfulness in Jesus’ response in this same verse. Right after this acknowledgement of the wonder and utterly amazing news that Jesus is alive and resurrection has indeed happened, in the midst of their fear, joy and

disbelief Jesus wonders if they have anything to eat? There are numerous ideas about why he did this that seek to discover a theological reason, but I wonder if Jesus simply wanted to cut the tension in the room. And in doing so he reminded them that he was still their friend, he was still the One who had broken the bread with them and washed their feet just a few days ago. Sure, things had changed, but who he was and his love for them had not. Nothing could change that, not running away, not even their denials and hiding out... God's love for us will always break through our walls of fear and self-doubt if we will allow it to happen.

**Prayer:** All loving and All mighty God your love for me is not too good to be true! Thank you, my Lord and my God. Help me this day move beyond self-doubt and live into my faith and trust in the work of your ongoing resurrection within me. Amen.

**Friday: Romans 6:1-11**

**Going Deeper:** This teaching from Paul in Romans 6 is central to what Easter and Jesus' resurrection mean for us, but there is some basic terminology we must understand to fully grasp what he is saying. First of all, what does he mean by sin? Paul is not talking about individual behaviors. Sin as Paul understood it was grounded in a self-serving, self-centered egocentric way of living. Sin for Paul is seeking to live outside of community, serving only ourselves and our needs, which is contrary to Jesus' life and teaching which calls us to live in community and with an attitude of sharing with others from, or out of the abundance of God's blessings. Paul understood Easter, the death and resurrection of Jesus as pivotal to our faith in God and how our faith then reshapes our lives, attitudes, and choices. The central message that arises from these verses is the communal reality of the resurrection and the implications of Easter itself! If Jesus rises alone then the work of God ends in him, but Paul tells us God's work of love and grace continue to grow and thrive in and through us as we understand the calling we have been given, as well as the gift of love that redefines our lives through Easter. One last thing about this teaching we must understand, this new awareness, or understanding while it is instantaneous, it is ours the moment we take hold of God's love and grace, it is also ongoing and grows and expands as we move deeper into God's love for us which enables us to see ourselves more clearly and share more fully the abundance of this message of hope and resurrection with others as we seek to create community.

**Prayer:** My Lord Jesus, just a week ago we paused to remember the horror of your crucifixion, and yet it was not the end but merely a gateway into a new beginning for us all. As I finish my week help me to also remember your death and rising is an invitation to me to surrender my life and all I hold dear into your hands allowing my faith that reaches beyond my fears to find the new life, and the resurrection you offer me. Amen.