

## **“No Fairy Tale Ending to This Story”**

**John 20:19-23**

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### **Communion Devotion**

Today's text takes us to a house somewhere in Jerusalem on Easter evening where several of Jesus' followers have gathered. You would think they would be having a party.

The tomb where Jesus had been buried on Friday was empty. Mary had seen the Lord and told them about that tender, personal encounter. Surely, it was time to celebrate.

However, no one was in a party mood, and I am not surprised. It's hard to celebrate when you feel guilty and are afraid.

About what did they feel guilty? Why were they afraid?

If Jesus was alive as Mary reported, would he have any more to do with them? They had certainly not been faithful and supportive when he needed them during his trial and crucifixion. In his darkest hour, they abandoned him. There had to be a lot of guilt in that room over how they acted.

There also had to be a lot of fear. How long would it be before the religious authorities come looking for them? These jealous leaders would not be content with crucifying Jesus; they would want to eradicate all his followers. That's why these disciples were huddled behind locked doors, unwilling to let anyone in or out.

No, the disciples were not in a partying mood. Their hearts were too heavy.

Why do you think John followed the resurrection appearance to Mary on Easter morning with this scene on Sunday evening? You can't deny the contrast. Perhaps John had this message in mind for his readers who were struggling to be faithful.

**There was no fairy tale ending to this story.** After the resurrection, all of Jesus' followers did not live happily ever after. Life was as tough, if not tougher for them after Jesus

rose from the dead. Just as Jesus met stiff resistance and had to make lots of sacrifices, so did his disciples. Many of them also died in their pursuit of justice and peace.

I think John was telling his readers Jesus didn't suffer and die so they could live cushy, comfortable lives. He suffered and died because building a better world for all people requires accepting bold challenges, taking risks, laying your life on the line and making great sacrifices.

Anyone who fights for the underdog and speaks truth to power when leaders don't want to hear it will face the same kind of resistance Jesus did. The pursuit of justice will bring the worst out of evil people.

Anyone who truly cares about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, visiting the lonely and being a friend to an outcast will have to give freely of their time, talents and resources. They cannot be selfish or stingy.

Anyone who attempts to stop the spread of evil through human trafficking, exploitation and greed will be threatened and intimidated. Evil is a meticulous planner and ruthless master.

Anyone who wants to be a peacemaker by building bridges of understanding, reconciliation and goodwill instead of walls of hatred and revenge will face insults and taunts. People who don't forgive don't take kindly to those who do.

Anyone who is passionate about teaching children and young people so they can develop into responsible, productive adults will lay their head on a pillow every night completely exhausted.

Anyone who makes a promise before family, friends and God to love another person for better or worse the rest of their life will grow weary with how many times this promise will be tested. Every promise made among the security of friends will be tested in hostile environments over and over and over.

Anyone who starts a business and strives to live by the Golden Rule will be tempted to let the gold rule.

Anyone who works for someone else and makes a commitment to be honest, reliable, trustworthy, dependable and industrious will be tempted to take short cuts.

Adopting Jesus' values and lifestyle will not be easy. It will require compassion, integrity, generosity, discipline, determination and sacrifices. This was why Jesus challenged people to take up their cross and follow him.

Jesus did not die so we can avoid suffering and making sacrifices. He died because he was faithful to the call of God upon his life to be a good role model, to heal wounds and broken hearts and call to repentance those responsible for inflicting these wounds.

That same call comes to us now. The work Jesus did has been passed down to us. So, how are we doing?

Are we more concerned about our own comfort than his work?

Are we more passionate about building our own kingdoms than advancing God's?

Would we rather succeed at any cost rather than being good role models?

Are we obsessed with hoarding what we cannot use in five lifetimes instead of sharing what we have with those struggling to make it through this one?

Are we more driven by the love of power than the power of love?

If so, we will not change the world around us. We will become a part of the problem.

If you believe trusting in and following Jesus means you will live happily ever after with no temptations, challenges or problems, you might want to reconsider. However, if you believe following Jesus will bring the best out in you, and enable God to use you to make the world better for all people, by all means trust him with all your heart.

When you do, the same Jesus who met the disciples in that locked room will come to you to give you guidance, direction, strength and courage. Even if you have passed up opportunities to follow Jesus or be faithful, he will forgive you as he did the disciples and give you another opportunity.

Why not unlock the door to your heart and let Jesus in to talk to you about this as the bread and cup are passed.