



"This is the Story..."

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Week 44: Early in the Morning

We have daily scripture passage suggestions again for this week, but this time with a deeper dive into the first story, and simply suggestions of what to read and a reflection prompt for the rest of the week. This week begins with accounts of Jesus showing up to people after his resurrection, takes us through his ascension, and ends with the disciples beginning to figure out what will come next. Reading through this Easter week can help us begin to imagine how we make the leap from Jesus here on earth to Jesus with us today.

Intro Video: Video Coming Soon!

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God's provision, living out God's commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the shema, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God brought the people into the promised land. There they continued to miss the mark, and God sent judges to guide them.

God raised up prophets, but the people demanded a king. Kings continued to miss the mark, and the kingdom divided into the north and south. God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

As we begin the story of the New Testament, Rome is the power in charge and the people of God are waiting for a Messiah. This Messiah is announced, first with a surprising genealogy, then through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels, visited by shepherds, blessed by Simeon and Anna, and sought by magi. When Jesus's life was in danger, his parents fled with him to Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth. As a child in Nazareth, Jesus grew up in the wisdom of God. His cousin John went before him, preparing the way, and when Jesus was ready to begin his ministry, he came to John to be baptized and was proclaimed by God. Jesus called a community of people to follow him.

Then Jesus began to teach and heal and show people God's way of love. He preached fulfillment of the scriptures, walked on water, fed people, welcomed children, told stories, and showed us what was most important.

Jesus entered Jerusalem and was proclaimed as the Messiah. He angered people with his teachings about what was important to God and how we are supposed to live. He was arrested and killed. The whole earth trembled when Jesus died. His friends took care of his body, put him in a tomb, and watched over him.

Sunday Scripture: John 20:1-18

- **Tell the story:** Here we have arrived at the high point of our story! The ultimate story of God sticking with us even when we miss the mark. God's love is stronger than death! We have been following the life, teachings and death of Jesus, and now we also get to follow Jesus into resurrection! Here, we see the complete picture of life inside the blessing. Jesus died. But he rose from the dead. The women who had cared for his body in death now got to witness his body alive again.
 - Read John 20:1-18
 - Read pages 270 and 273 in the *Shine On* story Bible.
- **Prime the pump:**
 - **Things to notice:**
 - All the gospels have their own accounts of the empty tomb. Read and compare them in Matthew 28, Mark 16 and Luke 24. Remember - the different accounts give us different windows into the same story. Notice the way the story comes into focus as you read the same story from different perspectives.
 - Once again, the gospel writer contrasts the behavior of the male apostles with the behavior of the female disciples. Notice their differences in actions.
 - **Background information:**
 - Who was the disciple "Jesus loved"? This is probably referring to John. Interesting how John's gospel has him outrunning Peter and reaching the tomb first.
 - Read 20:9. Scholars aren't sure what scripture this is referring to. But there were many scriptures, and we don't have all of them.
 - **Conversation starters:**
 - What are the gaps in this story? What doesn't the Bible tell us about? Imagine it from Jesus' perspective. For example, suddenly he's alive, but wrapped in burial cloth. What was it like to wake up? And what was he wearing when he appeared to Mary? Imagine it or act it out in playful ways and see what discoveries you make. Find some holy humor.
 - Why didn't Mary recognize Jesus by sight or by his voice, but only when he spoke her name?

Monday Scripture: John 20:19-29

- **Tell the story:** The disciples were huddled in a locked room in fear. Jesus appeared with them and said, "Peace be with you." He let them touch his scars so that they could know it was really him.
- **Reflection:** Read John 20:21-23 again. What connections do you see between these verses and the story we've learned already this year (and the story you know is coming)?

Tuesday Scripture: Luke 24:13-35, *Shine On* pg 275

- **Tell the story:** Two disciples, Cleopas and another (who tradition suggests to be a woman) were walking to Emmaus. Jesus came and walked with him, but they didn't recognize him. They told him they were sad and confused about what was going on. Jesus talked with them, and they felt so comforted that they asked him to stay with them. At the table, he blessed and broke the bread, and they recognized him.
- **Reflection:** Again a story of not recognizing Jesus at first! This story is intriguing. Examine it for things that sound familiar to you. Imagine it. Notice all the charged language and all the emotions in the story.

Wednesday Scripture: Luke 24:36-49

- **Tell the story:** This story is similar to Monday's story. Jesus appeared among the disciples, and they thought he was a ghost. He showed them he wasn't by letting them touch him and eating food.
- **Reflection:** This story emphasizes the importance of Jesus' physical resurrection. This was a resurrection of body, not just of spirit. If we see Jesus' resurrection as a foreshadowing of our own, what does this mean for us?

Thursday Scripture: John 21:1-14, *Shine On* page 277

- **Tell the story:** Simon Peter and six other disciples were by the sea and went fishing, but caught nothing. Jesus told them to cast the net to the other side, and net filled with fish, John recognized Jesus. Simon Peter jumped in the water and swam to Jesus. They all came to the shore and ate breakfast with Jesus.
- **Reflection:** There's an impulsiveness and humanity to Simon Peter in this story. Read it and imagine the joy of this encounter with Jesus, and how wonderful it must have been to hear him say, "Come and have breakfast." And notice - what story does this remind you of?

Friday Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11, *Shine On* page 278

- **Tell the story:** This is the story we call the "ascension." Jesus called his disciples together. He told them he would always be with them, and that it was their job to continue his work and to share his good news with all the people of the world. We often call this the "Great Commission." He told them that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would receive power. And then Jesus ascended into heaven.
- **Reflection:** What a moment. Imagine it. We can't know exactly what Jesus ascending into heaven would have looked like, so use your imagination! Jesus placed a big responsibility on his disciples, and that call to be witnesses continues through the whole rest of the story.
 - Because we can't resist, here's a bit of background information. Read Acts 1:6. The disciples are naming a traditional Jewish expectation, that the Messiah would restore Israel's freedom. Jesus corrects them in his response, telling them that freedom would come in the presence of the Spirit rather than in political change, and that the work must continue with them.

Saturday Scripture: Acts 1:12-26

- **Tell the story:** The disciples, including the eleven remaining apostles, Mary of Nazareth, and some other women, gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. Because Judas had betrayed Jesus and died, they needed a new twelfth apostle. They discerned two people who would do well, prayed, and chose between them by lots - kind of like drawing straws. Matthias became the twelfth apostle.
- **Reflection:** This is an interesting discernment process! If you're intrigued, look at it more closely and see what you can learn from it!

Microsong: "Early in the Morning" (Listen: <https://youtu.be/6LlqB9zNDPk>)

Early in the morning Mary is crying. The tomb is empty, where is the body? Jesus meets her and speaks her name. Jesus appears to many of his close friends, breaks bread with them, shows them his scarred hands. While he blesses them he's carried up to heaven (after he asks them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift that God will give them, for the gift that God will give them, oh oh.)

Sing the big song: (Listen: <https://youtu.be/dKrQZfMKCOU>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.
Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and a flood and a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,
And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, oh ohhhh
A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.
God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.
Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them. Oh ohhh.
The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.
Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"
Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"
Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.
God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.
Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.
Corruption in the temple then God sends Samuel.
God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets. And when a bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart...
A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.
Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.
God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...
Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?
Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?
By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...
I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.
Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.
Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and celebration of Only God. God is One, Only God.
Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.
Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus
The angel says, "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says, "God looked at me, now I'm the luckiest person around."

Mary, now pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.
She has her baby, shepherds see angels declaring God's glory and peace among people.
The Spirit sends shepherds and elders and prophets to tell those who wait their Messiah has come.
Herod gets nervous, the Magi find Jesus. They hide their discovery and hurry back home...
Once again an angel comes to Joseph -- so they make good their escape, oooh.
Jesus in the temple, astonishing the crowd. Jesus with his parents. Jesus growing up.
Down by the Jordan with the prophet John, Jesus asks to be baptized. And the skies are opened. A dove descends. A voice from heaven says, "This is my son, the son I love. I'm pleased with him."
Jesus calls disciples to be with him in the work he's doing. Ohhh oohhh.
Jesus teaches the disciples "This is life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty. You're blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is pure. This is life inside the blessing."
Jesus walks on the water. Peter tries and begins to sink. Jesus grabs his hand and the wind dies down.
Jesus sees the crowds with compassion. So he teaches them for days and days. The people are hungry. There's baskets left over and no one left out.
People bring their children to Jesus. Jesus blesses them and says, "You must accept God's good government like a little child would or you won't get in at all" This is life inside the blessing.
Oooooo oooooo.
What's most important? Love God with everything and love your neighbor, whoever that may be.
Jesus tells Martha, "You're upset about many things; Just one thing's essential; it's what Mary's choosing here."
Save now, David's son rides on a donkey. He will judge nations, separate the sheep from goats. In the garden Jesus prays "Yes, father, if there's no other way." Jesus dies. The veil rips. . . "Surely this was God's kid."
Mary is crying, the tomb is empty. Jesus meets her and speaks her name. Jesus appears to many of his close friends, breaks bread with them, shows them his scarred hands. While he blesses them he's carried up to heaven after he asks them to wait in Jerusalem.
God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.

Go do your household project!