



Offering ourselves to God: Communion and Remembrance – Jacqui Rivas (7th November 2021)

Sermon link: <https://soundcloud.com/gracepointsa/offering-ourselves-to-god-by-jacqui-rivas-07-11-2021>

Scripture

John 11:17-36

Open your mind and heart as you read the passage of Scripture aloud and then again quietly to yourself. Listen for God's word to you.

Spend some time in worship.

All to Jesus I surrender: <https://youtu.be/7x2lpLSfq8>
In Christ Alone: <https://youtu.be/7kmPZywtN4Y>
Our Father (Live): https://youtu.be/ln9Ls_flqe0
Remembrance: <https://youtu.be/kH5cQcLS-Nc>

Observation

Burial took place soon after death in a hot country like Israel and, halfway through the first century, it was an extravagant affair, with the deceased being clothed in the finest garments and being buried with various expensive treasures. It continued like this until Gamaliel the second (the grandson of the Rabbi Gamaliel who taught Paul) requested to be buried in simple linen garment, thus breaking the increasingly expensive tradition.

There were many customs which were kept in a house of mourning until the burial took place. For example, no meat or wine was consumed; no study took place; no food was to be prepared there. Seven days were spent in mourning, again with set traditions, and this time was followed by a 30-day period of less intense mourning. It was the duty of everyone, and an essential part of the Jewish religion, to go to express sympathy during this mourning period. The name of the deceased would never be mentioned again without a blessing being added upon them.

So Jesus came. There was a common belief that the soul of the deceased remained for three days in the hope of entering the deceased's body again. Jesus arrived four days after Lazarus died, and so there was little hope of any form of resurrection in Jewish minds. There was no doubt at all that Lazarus was dead.

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True to character, Martha went to meet Him, whilst Mary sat at home with the visiting mourners. In semi-reproach, Martha spoke what was on her heart. She could be blaming Jesus for not coming straight away, but her words are immediately followed by her statement of faith. Whilst the Sadducees rejected any idea of life after death, there was a growing Jewish belief that there was life after death.

Jesus' response: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life...' confirms this thinking on several levels. Even though a person sins, or is insensitive to the needs of others, or is hopeless they can still be raised to life on earth by the resurrected Jesus and their hearts softened and renewed. And for those who physically die, who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, there is life everlasting. Belief in Jesus enables people to enter a new relationship with God and with life itself. Death is no longer something to be feared, for people are freed from fear in their belief.

Martha returned home to tell Mary of Jesus' arrival. Mary hurried out, followed by the other mourners. It was the custom for women to go to the tomb of the loved one, especially in the first week, to weep whenever they could. Jesus' response to Mary and Martha's grief revealed His empathy for human emotion. He did not weep at the loss of His friend, Lazarus, for He knew he would live again. The display of such emotion would have been astonishing for John's Greek readers who believed that God Himself (and so Jesus as the Son) could not feel emotion, as He was above such things.

Icebreaker:

What material possession/s have you lost that you still miss? Briefly share what happened.

Application

NB: Be sensitive to people's sharing this week. Allow time to stop and pray together throughout this session, but try to allow everyone to have the opportunity to share at least one or two responses.

- Name one or two people whom you have loved and lost. Who were they to you (mother, wife, husband, friend?) When did you lose them? (Perhaps there are some who have just disappeared out of your life, rather than dying?)
- As you remember those you love who have died what do you miss most about them?
- In a couple of sentences, how would you describe your most recent loss?
- Who has helped you most as you have adjusted to this loss? How has God helped you? How have other people helped you? How did any funeral service help you?

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- Jesus wept for others, not for Himself. How does the grief of others and your grief for them in their loss affect you? How do you support, comfort, empathise with those who are grieving?
- How can the group help you with the struggles you have mentioned during this session? Share one another's grief. Be sensitive to it.

Prayer

Pray for one another in regard to the issues that have been raised during your discussion time. Pray for one another in your individual and common loss, and ask Jesus to heal in His grace and to fill you with hope as healing begins. Pray too in regard to other needs of the group.

Service

Who do you know who is grieving the loss of a loved one at this time? How can you help them this week? A card, a message, a visit, a meal? Report back to the group about what you did and how Jesus used you in any healing that happened/

Bibliography

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Barclay, William. The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John; Volume 2. The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1981

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