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## The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and May 6  
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### April 1, Easter Sunday: Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–8; John 20:1–18

Matthew's final chapter contains three sections. The *first* (vv.1–10) describes events at the open tomb on Easter Sunday morning. The *second* (vv.11–15) concludes Matthews' unique report about those who were guarding the tomb; see also 27:62–66. The *third* (vv. 16–20) serves as the *grand finale* to Matthew's entire narrative. In these five closing verses, Jesus meets with the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, tells them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, gives them the *Great Commission* (not the *Great Suggestion*), and assures them that He will remain with them until the close of the age.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus fulfills the message embedded in His name, which is *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us" (Matt. 1:22). He will remain in their midst as forgiving Savior, servant Lord, and divine Teacher. Jesus' death and resurrection are not merely the climax of Matthew's narrative; they constitute a new beginning to world history.

**V. 1:** Although Mark 16:1 states that women went to the tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body, Matthew states that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to see Jesus' tomb as the day was dawning. They would not have been permitted to go close to the tomb by the soldiers who were guarding it.

**V. 2:** As they draw near to the tomb, an earthquake occurs. An angel descended from heaven has rolled back the stone that had been sealing the entrance and is sitting on it; see Exodus 3:2–6; Acts 7:30. The great earthquake denotes the presence and action of God as at the Exodus and Sinai events. Remarkable signs took place in the heavens *above* at Jesus' birth; signs in the earth *beneath* take place at Jesus' resurrection.

When Satan tempted Jesus (4:1–11), he suggested that He win a following by performing stunts, for example, by throwing Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple and expecting His Father to rescue Him before He struck the stone slabs below. However, Jesus refused to use divine power to avoid the way of the cross and righteousness and service. But now Jesus' Father uses an angel to reveal the wonder of an event in which He vindicates His Son's ministry!

**V. 3:** The appearance of the angelic being is described. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was as white as snow. The angel's appearance reflects the glowing presence of Jesus in the Transfiguration event (17:1–8).

In Mark's narrative (16:1–8), the "young man" serves primarily as a proclaimer of a profound truth, sitting on the right hand within the tomb, and making known the Good News of the First Easter. Matthew portrays the angel as an apocalyptic figure with a shattering presence who hurls the tomb's stone door aside and declares the beginning of a New Age in cosmic history!

**V. 4:** Those guarding the tomb are terrified. They collapse like dead men! Hence, the dead and defenseless One comes to life and brings new life to His people while the supposedly mighty of the earth collapse as if lifeless!

**Vv. 5 – 7:** The angel speaks to the women just as an angel of the Lord had spoken to Joseph after Mary conceived (1:20–25). They have come to see a tomb, a house of death, to pay their last respects to a dead Friend— perhaps to keep a vigil and chant a dirge. However, the angel proclaims to them a message about new life: "I know that you were looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, as He said"; see 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19.

Jesus was crucified by powerful enemies who were shocked and frightened by His claim that He had heard His Father's voice calling Him to a radical way of life as Servant Messiah—calling Him to identify with outcasts and to share the burdens of the oppressed. He was crucified by religious and political leaders, who mocked Him when He displayed silence and seeming weakness. God did not desert His son; He delivered the ultimate divine verdict by raising Him from the dead!

The angel tells the women to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection with His disciples and instructs them to go to Galilee where they will see Him. Indeed, the Good Shepherd is to begin gathering His flock!

**V. 8:** The women leave the vicinity of the open tomb with fear and great joy—and begin running to the disciples to tell them what they have experienced and been told.

**V. 9:** The risen Jesus meets some women near the tomb, and greets them. They come to Him, grasp His feet, and worship Him. They have experienced the presence of the Risen Lord and heard His words!

**V. 10:** Jesus tells the women not to be afraid. They are to go and tell Jesus' "brothers" (the disciples!) to go to Galilee, where they will see Jesus! Their spiritual eyes will finally be opened when they meet with the Risen Lord face to face!

In **28:11 – 15**, the "problem" of the empty tomb is reported to the Jewish leaders, who in turn try to keep the matter quiet by resorting to bribery. They concoct a false story instead of believing in Jesus' triumph over death (28:11–15). The tomb is certainly empty! According to those guarding the tomb, Jesus' body has been stolen; according to Jesus' brothers and sisters, Jesus has risen from the dead.

In **28:16 – 20**, Jesus meets His disciples (*brothers*) in Galilee. Although some worship Him, others have doubts about Him (28:16–17). Jesus points to His kingly authority and sends His disciples forth to draw people from around the world into His community. His disciples are to teach all nations and to baptize

them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are to teach His new followers to *observe* (not just *believe*) all that He has commanded them (28:16–20).

In Matthew's *opening narrative*, Jesus is referred to as *Emmanuel*, "God with us" (1:23). In Matthew's *closing narrative*, Jesus assures His disciples that *He will be with them* to the close of the age (28:20).

### **Alternative Reading: John 20:1–18**

**Vv. 1 – 2:** Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, finds the stone door rolled away, runs to the disciples, and tells them that Jesus' body has been taken from the tomb, and "we do not know where they have laid Him." It is important to note that only men could give testimony in a Jewish court of law. The witness of women was considered invalid and unreliable. Even so, every Gospel begins its Easter story with the visit of women, or a woman, to Jesus' tomb. It is unlikely that the early church would have invented this detail.

Furthermore, the disciples—far from being overjoyed at Mary's message—are non-plussed! Peter and the other disciples do not say, "So, the Lord was right! He is risen from the dead!" For the disciples, the empty tomb constitutes a mystery that has to be explained, despite the Lord's promise of His resurrection (2:19–22; 14:18–19, 28; 16:16).

**Vv. 3 – 4:** Peter and "the other disciple" run toward the tomb. Most likely, the other disciple is John, the witness of 19:35 and 21:24. According to tradition, John lived until the end of the first century. He was most likely younger than Peter—and fitter. We can well imagine the thoughts that are running through their heads as they sprint to the garden. "Where is the body? Who has taken it—and why? Will we be able to get the body back?" No, the Gospel reports no such emotions. Obviously, we are meant to concentrate on the climax of the story.

**Vv. 5-7:** Although "the other disciple" arrives first, he does not enter the tomb. He only peers in to see the burial cloths still there. Peter then arrives (panting heavily, no doubt). True to form, Peter acts quickly and goes straight in. All the body wrappings are there, including the head cloth neatly rolled up by itself. The point is clear. Jesus' body has not been snatched by grave robbers or anyone else acting in a hurry. There are no signs of a hurried break-in or a quick getaway. Only Jesus' body is missing.

**Vv. 8–10:** Now the other disciple goes in, sees for himself, and believes that Jesus is risen from the dead. It is important to note that it is said of only the second disciple that he believed. That makes good sense in that this disciple was not only a witness of the crucifixion (19:26, 35) and empty tomb (20:8), but also the witness behind the whole of the Gospel that bears his name.

**Vs. 9** is rather strange at first sight. It means the following: These two disciples had to see in order to believe. Later, they were given more perfect sight and understanding. They came to understand the Scripture that had foretold that all this had to take place. The whole of John's Easter story proclaims the same message. The first believers had to see in order to believe. But now, for us, *believing is seeing*.

**Vv. 11 – 13:** Mary Magdalene has not been with the two disciples and has not shared their faith. Now she is back at the empty tomb, still lost in her sorrow. The tomb has still not spoken its Easter message to her. Even the sudden appearance of two angels brings her no joy. She repeats the same message that she spoke to Peter and John. Only this time she speaks for herself alone: "I do not know . . ." There is no loneliness like the loneliness of grief.

**Vv. 14 – 16:** Mary is so lost in her world of sadness that she cannot see Who it is that is standing close by. We might note again how the evangelist piles up his references to the ignorance of the first Easter witnesses. Easter joy is created only after a realization of the truth demolishes lack of knowledge and understanding. Mary does not know the glorious truth that Jesus is risen (see also vv. 2, 9, and 13 for this “not knowing”) until He speaks to her.

Her questions are rather strange (v. 15). Surely the Lord knows why she is crying, and for whom she is looking! She does not recognize the voice of the Man behind her as the voice of her Lord and Master—until He speaks her name. The Good Shepherd calls His lamb by name, and immediately the clouds of sorrow disappear. Mary now knows that this is not the gardener, but Jesus! There is both love and respect in the one word, in Hebrew, with which she addresses Jesus.

He is still the same Teacher she has always known. And yet she now knows that she can never look at Him with the same eyes as before His resurrection. He is now her Lord in a new and wonderful sense.

**Vv. 17 – 18:** Even if Mary understands that there is now a change in her relationship to Jesus, she does not yet fully understand how great this change is. She has apparently fallen to her knees and begun to cling to Jesus. Jesus says to her, “Stop holding me.” But why not touch Jesus any longer? The explanation is even stranger: “I have not yet ascended to the Father.” These words make sense only if we spell out their positive meaning.

Mary will only be able to touch the Lord properly after He has ascended to His heavenly Father. Here we are reminded of what Jesus said in 12:32: “I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to Myself.” His ascension to the Father has begun with His being lifted up on the cross; see 3:14 and 8:28. Now the old human contacts that were possible between two human beings are a thing of the past. The only contact that matters now is the seeing and touching of faith. Whether Mary understands all this as yet, we do not know. But at least she now has Easter joy and certainty—and with this joy she reports again to the disciples. How different is her second message from her first report (v. 3)!

### **Alternative Reading: Mark 16:1–8; John 20:1–18**

The post-resurrection appearances reported in the four Gospels are as follows:

In **Mark**, the messenger in the tomb instructs the women to tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them again in *Galilee* (16:1–8). They will “see” Jesus in Galilee. The word “see” implies more than physical sight; it implies that the disciples will finally understand Who Jesus really is, and what His Kingdom is all about.

In **Matthew**, Jesus appears to the women near *Jerusalem* and to the disciples in Galilee (chapter 28). In **Luke**, Jesus appears to two disciples on the way to Emmaus (24:13–35), then to Peter (11:34), and then to the 11 disciples and their companions in *Jerusalem* (24:36–49). Luke reports no meetings in *Galilee*.

**John** reports Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18) and the disciples (20:19–29) in *Jerusalem*. (Mary Magdalene served as His apostle to the disciples!) Finally, Jesus appears to the disciples in Galilee (chapter 21).

### **Mark 16:1–8**

Soon after sunrise on Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (and Joses, 15:40), and Salome go to the tomb to complete the embalming process. (If the Gospel writers had made up the narratives relating to Jesus' resurrection, they would have had *men* go to the tomb first, as men had more credibility in that culture.) But the tomb is empty! It is the women's privilege to hear the first Easter sermon ever preached (Mark 16:6–7):

Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; He is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.

Jesus is alive! His followers will *see* Him again—and soon! In Galilee! The reference to Peter picks up Jesus' prediction in 14:28. Mark makes no mention of the risen Jesus being seen in Jerusalem. He will be seen in Galilee.

Note carefully: The disciples will *see* Jesus after His resurrection in Galilee.

In Mark, Jesus predicts His coming passion three times (8:31; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). However, each time the disciples fail to understand the implications of Jesus' words (8:32; 9:32–34; 10:35–40). It is significant that, in Mark's narrative, Jesus' three passion predications are bracketed by two incidents in which Jesus gives sight to the blind.

Before predicting His passion for the first time, Jesus opens the eyes of a blind man (8:22–26) in the vicinity of Bethsaida, but touches his eyes twice when doing so. Although the man does not see clearly after Jesus' first touch, he does see clearly after Jesus' second touch.

Jesus heals a second blind man, Bartimaeus, on the way out of Jericho (10:46–52). Although Bartimaeus is blind, he can "see" in his heart, and calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" In Mark's Gospel, this blind man is the first person to address Jesus in this manner.

The disciples also need Jesus' "second touch." They will see clearly who Jesus is and understand what His mission is all about only when they "see" the risen Jesus in Galilee!

The question for us, God's people today is, "How clearly do we see who Jesus is, and how well do we understand the manner of life to which He calls us?"

### **John 20:1–18**

Jesus' resurrection is established in 20:1–10. When Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and sees that the stone has been rolled away, she runs to Peter and "the other disciple" and shares with them her "take" on what has taken place—someone has taken Jesus' body from the tomb. When the disciples, in turn, go to the tomb, the presence of the linen wrappings convinces them that a resurrection has taken place. After all, if the body had been stolen, the thieves would have taken the wrappings as well as the body.

In 20:11–18, Jesus Himself announces His resurrection to Mary Magdalene. Although she hopes that her pre-crucifixion relationship with Jesus will be resumed, Jesus declares that He will not continue to live among His people as He did prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus must withdraw His presence from *one place* so that He might be present in *every place*. Jesus must take His *visible* leave of her so that He might remain *invisibly* with *her* and *His people everywhere*.

Although Jesus is about to withdraw His *visible* presence, He will not withdraw His *physical* presence. And in His ascension, Jesus will not *withdraw* His physical presence; He will *transform* it.

## **April 8, The Second Sunday of Easter: John 20:19–31**

Jesus' continuing presence among His people is stressed in 20:19–23 and 20:26–29. When Jesus appears among His followers, He does not “come” from anywhere. He is among them constantly, although invisibly. On several occasions, the risen Jesus reveals His presence in a visible way. His greeting on each occasion is, “Peace be with you” (20:21, 26).

John's account compresses Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Spirit (20:22). (According to John 7:39, the Holy Spirit will *appear* and *begin His work* only *after* Jesus' coronation and resurrection.) “He breathed on them,” reflects Genesis 2:7. Although Jesus says He will eventually send the Spirit to His disciples, He also says that He himself will come to them (14:28) and that He and the Father will make their home with them (14:23); see also Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:9–10; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17. When the Spirit comes, His mission will be to continue Jesus' mission (16:14). He will teach and accomplish what Jesus would have taught and accomplished had Jesus not “gone away.”

The series of titles begun in chapter one reaches its grand finale in 20:28, “Lord and God.” Finally, John defines his purpose in writing his account—to inspire people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and believing, to have life in His name (20:30–31).

Although the Gospel possibly did end initially at 20:31, chapter 21 describes the resources available to the post-resurrection community—the continuing presence of Jesus who dines with His brothers and sisters and defines their mission and responsibilities. The fact that these shepherds and fishermen gather a huge haul of fish points to the fact that the Messianic Age has indeed broken in (see Ezekiel 47:1–12; note v. 9) and that success will crown their witness.

Finally, the risen Lord feeds them with bread and fish, an act symbolizing His continuing presence among His disciples, and His bonding with them (e.g., His feeding them through the Eucharist). *Three times* Jesus asks Peter, who had denied Him *three times*, “Do you love me?” (21:15–17). He tells the disciples that some will have to experience martyrdom (21:18–19) and that His reappearing will not take place as soon as some might wish (21:20–23).

## **April 15, The Third Sunday of Easter: Luke 24:36b–48**

In Luke 23:50–53, we read of Joseph of Arimathea obtaining permission from Pilate to remove Jesus' body from the cross and providing Him with decent burial in a new tomb. The women from Galilee watch these proceedings and then return home to prepare the needed spices and oils to embalm Jesus' body after the Sabbath is over (23:55–6).

When the women return to Jesus' tomb on the Sunday morning, they find it open—but there is no body of Jesus! Two men in dazzling garments appear and tell them that Jesus has returned to life—even as He said He would during His ministry in Galilee. The women leave the tomb and tell the amazing news to the eleven disciples and others. Apparently, their message is met with disbelief.

However, Peter rushes to the tomb to check things out for himself (24:1–12). Jesus appears to two disciples on the way to Emmaus (24:13–35); one is named Cleopas, the other is not named. These two disciples do not recognize Jesus. They had been looking forward to a Messiah who would rescue them *from* suffering; they have to learn that they have a Messiah who rescues and redeems them *through* suffering. Jesus explains to them their own “big story” from Moses and the Prophets, and then accepts their invitation to dine with them in Emmaus— but only after they “urged Him strongly.” During the course of the meal, their eyes are opened and Jesus disappears. The two disciples rush back to Jerusalem, where they report their experience to the eleven and others with them.

When Jesus suddenly appears in their midst, He does not rebuke them for their unbelief. He addresses them with, “Peace be with you,” and does things to assure them that they are indeed seeing their Lord—risen and alive. Jesus eats with them and invites them to examine the wounds in His body (24:35b–43). Jesus again makes use of the Law and the Prophets (i.e., the Hebrew scriptures of that time) and the Psalms to help those present understand the implications of the events of the past few days (24:44–49).

Jesus then leads the group to Bethany on the Mount of Olives, blesses them, and withdraws His visible presence. The group honors Jesus, returns to Jerusalem with great joy, and praises God continually in the Temple (24:50–53). Luke refers to Jesus’ ascension as taking place on Easter Sunday evening. In his “Volume 2” (Acts; note 1:1–11), Luke refers to Jesus ascending 40 days after His resurrection. As God dwelt among His people for 40 years after He rescued them from Egypt, so Jesus dwelt among His disciples for 40 days after rescuing them from the powers of sin, death, and the demonic. However, it is important to understand that when Jesus ascended, He did not *withdraw* His presence; He *transformed* it. We, His brothers and sisters, do not wait for Him to “*come again*”; rather, we wait for Him to *reappear*.

Furthermore, as (according to Jewish rabbis) God revealed His presence at the top of Mt. Sinai 50 days after leading His people out of Egypt (the focal point of the Pentecost festival), so the Holy Spirit revealed the continuing presence of Jesus 50 days after He completed the “Second Exodus” rescue event of His people.

## **April 22, The Fourth Sunday of Easter: John 10:11–18**

In Ezekiel 34, God declares to the exiles in Babylon that He will no longer let earthly kings rule His people; He Himself will be their King, their *Good Shepherd*. Ezekiel 34:25–31, 36:8–38, and 37:15–28 describe conditions that the people hoped would prevail in the Promised Land when God finally established His Kingship over the nations of the world. In John 10, Jesus declares Himself to be the Good Shepherd, the divine King—thus indicating that the ideal conditions of the End Time have found their fulfillment through faith in Him, and fellowship with Him.

### ***The Preceding Verses (10:1–10)***

**10:1–3a:** Jesus defines who is and who is not the shepherd by defining who has access to the sheepfold. The shepherd’s identity is endorsed when the gatekeeper grants him access to the sheep.

**10:3b–5:** These verses focus on the positive relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, and on the negative relationship between a stranger and the sheep.

**10:6–10:** The figure of speech that Jesus draws upon is found in Ezekiel 34:1–10 and 34:11–31. Ezekiel referred to the kings of Judah as bad shepherds who endanger the flock, and God has to intervene and tend His sheep until they can be entrusted to the care of a true descendant of David. Although Jesus' words point to the Pharisees as those who endanger the flock, they do not see this. They think of themselves as shepherds, not as a thief or a stranger. Jesus is the *gate* who provides access to God for the flock and provides them with life. Those who come through this gate will have life. (In John, Jesus is the *water of life*, the *bread of life*, and the *gate of life*.)

Jesus calls His sheep not merely to believe in Him but also to follow Him. The implications are big indeed, for Jesus walked the way of a Servant-without-limit throughout His ministry. The following points referred to in 10:11–18 help people today understand the implications of Jesus' references to Himself as the Good Shepherd.

In the western world, shepherds walk *behind* their flock, as do also their sheepdogs. However, in the world of the Middle East, the shepherd walks *ahead of* the flock and blows a whistle or makes a noise that the sheep recognize and follow. When two or three shepherds wish to spend time talking with each other, their respective flocks mix together. When the shepherds go their own way once again, they simply make the traditional call or sound, and the flock divides with each sheep following its own shepherd.

In 10:11, Jesus refers to Himself as *the* Good Shepherd (*the*, not *a*). The term *shepherd* denotes king and kingship. Here, note the references to *shepherd* in Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23:1-8, and Ezekiel 34, where the term *shepherd* means king. Jesus is the Good Shepherd in two ways.

1. **10:12–13:** Jesus is willing to lay down His life for His sheep (1 Peter 2:25). The Pharisees are hirelings who shear the sheep but have no sense of loyalty toward them (Matthew 23:4, 14; 10:16ff). When confronted by dangers to himself and his flock (perhaps in the form of an attacking wolf), the hireling flees! Jesus, the faithful Shepherd (like David of old), remains with and protects His flock (1 Samuel 17:34–35; Zechariah 11:7).

2. **10:14–15:** Jesus knows His sheep. His intimate knowledge of His flock, which involves limitless divine love, is His reason for laying down His life for them.

**10:16:** Jesus' love goes out beyond Israel to the Gentiles. Although Jesus came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, His apostles and followers will go beyond these limits. They will proclaim Jesus' messianic message of salvation to all nations—to Gentiles as well as Jews.

**10:17–18:** Jesus' glorification will make this worldwide mission possible. His glorification springs from a death that no one forces on Him—a death that leads to His resurrection. Not only does Jesus have the power to lay down His life; He also has the power to take it up again. Little wonder then that Jesus' Father loves Him! Jesus' resurrection is an event in which His Father endorses and validates His Son's Messianic servant ministry.

Jesus' words cause a division among His hearers. Some say that He is demon-possessed and is out of His mind (10:19–20). Later in John 10, we read of Jesus' opponents seeking to stone Him to death (v. 14) and plotting to arrest Him (v. 39).

What are the implications of membership in Jesus' Messianic flock?

- We, Jesus' sheep, own nothing! Not the ground on which we stand, and not the body in which we live. We are merely managers of what belongs to God.
- We do nothing to persuade God to love us. We do everything in response to God's limitless forgiving love for us.
- We are to walk through life Jesus' way—using life to glorify God by serving others, with no concerns for geographical borders, national flags, or skin color.

Still today, many find it challenging to understand and embrace Jesus' big message—a message that we, His sheep, need to hear, read, and heed constantly.

## **April 29, The Fifth Sunday of Easter: John 15:1–8**

**John 13–17** contains Jesus' Final Discourses in the Upper Room on the evening prior to His crucifixion.

**John 15:1–16:4** contains the closest parallels to the speeches recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)—speeches that Jesus offered during His public ministry. John 15:18–16:4 focuses on the hatred of the world for Jesus' followers. "Vine and branches" is a metaphor that expresses the intimate love between Jesus and His followers. In the Old Testament, Israel is frequently referred to as God's choice vine, or God's vineyard—one that God has nurtured with great care.

However, that vine or vineyard produced only bitter fruit (Hosea 10:1; Isaiah 5:1–7; Ezekiel 17:5–10). Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain several parables that refer to the Kingdom of Heaven or to God as a vineyard (Matthew 20:1–8, 21:33–41). In John, the Person and servant manner of Jesus is the equivalent of the Kingdom of Heaven and of God. Jesus is the True Vine! Those bonded to Him in faith are branches on that True Vine and produce God-pleasing fruit as directed and empowered by the True Vine. The concept of Jesus as the True Vine echoes Jesus as divine wisdom, for wisdom is also compared to a vine (Sirach 24:17–18). Hence, to walk through life in step with the Servant Jesus is to embrace and demonstrate God's eternal wisdom.

**15:1:** Jesus carries out a teaching, servant ministry that replaces Jewish institutions and feasts. He shows Himself as the vine of the New Israel. In union with Him, Jesus' brothers and sisters, the New Israel, are to bear fruit that is pleasing to the vinedresser, God.

**15:2:** In the Old Testament, God often threatened to prune or even uproot the unproductive vine. While the vine of the New Israel will not fail, there will be unproductive branches that God will remove and burn. He will also prune productive branches to enable them to bear more divine, servant fruit.

**15:3:** Jesus' brothers and sisters do nothing to *earn* or *merit* cleansing. They do all things because they *have been cleansed* by the word Jesus speaks to them. *Obedience does not effect, or bring about, salvation; rather, it reflects a salvation that God has brought about.*

**15:4:** If we (*branches*) are to abide in Jesus (*the vine*), we are to read, hear, ponder, and heed Jesus' words minute by minute, hour by hour, and day by day. A weekly or occasional "church outing" will

produce little biblical knowledge and little of the servant-style life. Just as a vine constantly pours life into the branches attached to it, so Jesus' branches are to look to, and listen to, Jesus constantly so that they might produce the servant-fruit that He desires.

**15:5:** Whatever servant-fruit we produce is not *our* doing, but *Jesus'* doing through us. To Him alone be the glory!

**15:6:** Jesus says powerful and important things to those who do not look to Him as the source of life. He will cut them off from His community and destroy them. Jesus does not speak merely sweet words; He also speaks challenging words. The fruit that a true branch is to produce is not determined by human opinion but by Jesus' teaching.

**15:7:** Those who ponder the latter part of this verse must bear in mind the parameters expressed in the first half of the verse. "Whatever we wish" must be based on the call to abide in Jesus and to have His words abide in us. Our program for life is not determined by personal whim but by Jesus' will.

**15:8:** Abiding in Jesus the Vine and bearing the fruit that He desires may not win us *human applause* but it will win us *divine approval*. That alone glorifies God and that alone matters!

Jesus' words in the Upper Room were spoken in the context of a meal. Although the first three Gospels link this meal to a Passover observance, John's Gospel does not. Even so, Jesus' disciples today would do well to give thought to the following. When Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) celebrated the Eucharist, he pointed first to the sacred elements on the altar and said, "Behold, the body of Christ." He then pointed to the worshipers present and said, "And you are the body of Christ." Next, he invited the worshipers, "Come, eat what you are." And finally he exhorted them, "Go forth to become what you eat."

## **May 6, The Sixth Sunday of Easter: John 15:9–17**

This passage is a continuation of the one surveyed in the previous section. The themes of divine indwelling, asking in Jesus' name, keeping Jesus' commandments (better, *one commandment*, 13:15; 15:12), and abiding in love are touched on in **15:7–10**.

**15:9:** Jesus has loved us as His Father has loved Him. The Father's love inspired and guided Jesus throughout His ministry. It empowered Him to walk the way of a servant in all that He thought, said, and did—even to the point of giving away life on a cross. Jesus' love for us is not merely about telling us to feel good. It is about inviting, directing, and empowering us to love and serve Him by loving and serving those around us in all that we think, say, and do. Discipleship is not about a part-time occupation; it is about a full-time commitment.

**15:10:** Jesus' manner of life kept Him within His Father's loving embrace. Walking through life in the compassionate, servant way of Jesus keeps us within His loving embrace. It is not enough to see Christianity as merely a matter of *believing*. We are to see it as a matter of lifelong, nonstop *following*. To express it in more colloquial terms: Believing in Jesus has to do with more than being *dry-cleaned from sin*; it has to do with being *discipled for life*.

**15:11:** Jesus' central desire is that the joy He experienced in life may dwell also within us. True joy is to be found only in believing in and following Him. It is never found in *getting and enjoying* the things of the world. It is found only in *giving* love and compassion.

**15:12:** This verse constitutes the "key signature" for the symphony of life! Jesus urges us to get beyond memorizing a collection of commandments to finding life by giving it away in the service of others.

**15:13:** Jesus practiced what He taught. Jesus' brothers and sisters are to practice what He taught and lived.

**15:14–15:** The significance of Jesus' words in these verses is profound. Jesus refers to those who do what He commands as His friends. Abraham, the Old Testament ideal, was a friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). The New Testament ideal is to be a friend of Jesus.

In the world of Jesus' day, those appointed into high office by a king or a Roman emperor became members of an elite group known as "The King's Friends," or "Caesar's Friends"; see John 19:12. The reason Pilate finally succumbed to the desires of the Jewish leaders was that they told him bluntly that if he did not have Jesus crucified, they would see to it that he was removed from office and from membership in the "Caesar's Friends" club. Pilate was an *imperial* procurator appointed into office by the emperor, not a *senatorial* procurator appointed by the Roman senate.

Although Jesus had called His disciples *servants*, what He has revealed to them raises them to the rank of *friends*. Their knowledge of God surpasses and outshines that of any previous Israelite figure.

**15:16–17:** The disciples played no part in achieving this status; *Jesus chose them!* Their response to this manifestation of God's love should be their love toward fellow disciples—and to the world at large.