

March 27 2011 1John 1:1-4; John 19:24-28; 20:3-10

WERE YOU THERE? (WEEK 3)

JOHN- THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

I bet you all have at least one best friend you can count on. Some are fortunate to have more than one. But there is always one you can count on. You know, the one that if you broke down somewhere late at night they would come to your rescue. I have a couple of friends from being in the ministry, and some from churches we served, but the one that I believe I can count on is, you guessed it, Curt Rush. He has been with Carole a few times in the past when I have had my surgeries staying with her until they got the doctor's report. For at least one of them he drove from Mt. Carmel to Springfield to be us for an early morning surgery. I believe if I needed him he would be there in a split second. We talk at least once a week and not generally about golf. In fact while doing this sermon Curt called me. We even have lunch once in awhile bringing along our wives. He has filled in for me in the pulpit and last year he did hospital visits when two or our members were in critical condition and then called to let me know how things were going. Among others I have in this church, and my clergy friends, though we poke fun at each other I know if I needed him for something Curt would be there. I hope I would do the same.

In the beginning of his ministry Jesus walked along the sea side and began to call a variety of men. One such day he was strolling along the sea shore looking at those who just returned from fishing. One big and burley and kind of rugged man stood out to him. He was barking orders to his crew as well as singing and pitching in to get the job of cleaning the nets, getting the fish to shore and all other stuff fishermen do. Jesus called to him to stop repairing his nets and come follow him because he had different fish for him to catch. While Simon was tying up loose ends, telling his crew what to do, and placing

someone in charge, down the wharf Jesus strolled watching each boat and its crew, perhaps seeing their work ethics etc., until he came to a boat with the name “Zebedee’s and Sons” painted on it. He watched for a few moments as the boys worked side by side with their father. He noticed other crewmembers as well. He got the two sons attention and yelled, “Gentlemen. I have a mission for you. Since your dad has a crew already, come follow me and Simon. We have work to do for God’s kingdom.” Looking to Jesus, James and John kissed their father goodbye and joined Jesus on a journey that would not only change their lives, but the world. And many more were called by Jesus. However, the Scriptures state that many were called but only a few were chosen. Thus out of the “many” came the 12. And out of the 12 came the big three, James, John and Peter. And out of the big three came one known as the “beloved disciple.” Who knows how he got his name. But we find that phrase used to describe John in one of our Scriptures for today. It’s at the foot of the cross by John himself, in his gospel.

John 19:25-28 *“While the soldiers were looking after themselves, [25] Jesus' mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross. [26] Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." [27] Then to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother.”*

It’s kind of surprising to note that only one of the 11 that were left had the courage to end up at the foot of the cross. When the battle took place in the Garden after a brief scuffle, others fled the coup after Judas planted his kiss of death upon Jesus’ cheek. In a matter of a few moments they were gone as the soldiers concentrated on capturing Jesus letting the disciples run into the darkness of the night.

But at the trial 2 showed up, at least for awhile. They think John might have known a few of the people therefore that is how they got close to the place Jesus was brought. And

I wonder why they didn't pick on John as they did Peter. Maybe because his personality was different. Maybe he was the quiet one of the bunch. Maybe John as the movie "*The Passion of Christ*" shows, had gone to get Mary, Jesus' mother, to bring her to where her son was being put on trial thus at that moment leaving Peter alone to fend for himself while he and Mary blended into the crowd. And we know how that worked out. Maybe she asked John to stay with her along with the other ladies who were followers of Jesus. That picture on the screen is from that movie with the two Mary's and John, the beloved disciple.

Friendship! Friends are there for you. When Jesus looked down from the cross he saw John assisting his mother, bringing comfort to her, helping her and the other followers to cope with what was happening. And just about the last thing that Jesus did was to look at John and say, "take care of my mother for me. Let her be your mother. And mother, be there for John. treat him as a son." And with that, according to John's recollection, as recorded this morning John writes, "*Jesus, seeing all had been completed so that the Scripture record might also be complete, then he said, "I am thirsty."*"

One final act of love for his mother. One final act of asking a friend to take on another responsibility. We don't know anything else about John's family, and we know Jesus had other siblings, but right now, on this day, at this hour as far as Jesus was concerned, he trusted his friend to care for his mother like she was his very own.

We heard John say, "I'm not sure how I had the courage to stay there with his mother and watch him suffer so. I don't blame all the other disciples for staying away. It was a very dangerous time and there wasn't much we could do. Still- we didn't want him to die alone.....I think of the cross often....I know nothing I suffer on this earth can be worse than what he endured on the cross. Somehow it comforts me to know that he understands my pain. For whatever I will suffer in this life, he suffered more."

The next time we hear about John it's 3 days after Christ has died. John once again is the one we hear from, his own words about the most important story in Scripture: John 20:3-10 *Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. [4] They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter. [5] Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in. [6] Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, [7] and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself. [8] Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. [9]*

I could have entitled this sermon "WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES" for a few days earlier we find John at the foot of the cross trying to figure it all out. He too, perhaps struggles with why God had allowed all this to happen. And now 3 days later he beats Peter to the tomb and sees what Mary had said was true, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. He waits for Peter to get there, yes the tomb is empty and the clothes that were used to prepare Jesus for burial were laying there as if they held his body, but now it was gone. Peter begins to return to the Upper Room. Who knows what's on his mind. Maybe he is thinking who stole the body? Or maybe what am I going to tell the others? Or even, why didn't I stay with Jesus that night? But before John leaves, he peeks in one more time. In fact, according to his own testimony he says, *"Then the other disciple, (John), the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and **believed.**"*

He took one look and believed. Believed what one might ask? Did he believe someone stole his body? No! He believed that Jesus had risen. And maybe he remembered what the Centurion said after Jesus died. You remember those words, don't you? "Surely he was the Son of God." With those words rattling around in his mind, John says it's true,

Jesus was who he said he was, the Son of God who came to give us eternal life. He gave us hope, peace, taught us how to love and to forgive. Yes I believe. I believe he is the Savior that was to come. I believe he is MY Savior. Forgive my doubts, oh Lord, for I now believe. I saw with my own eyes the tomb was empty and you have risen as you have said.”

Later on when he began to preach he wrote letters too. And with each one I bet the excitement of his journey with Jesus came back as he remembered each healing, each encounter with the religious leaders, each miracle, and each joy they shared. In his first letter he writes: *“From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, and verified it with our own hands. [2] The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. [3] We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. [4] Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy wills double our joy!”*

Seeing believes! A trusted friend carrying on the ministry of the Master. He could say, “I was there. Yes, I saw it all. I was there in the Upper Room for our final meal when Jesus took the bread and wine and gave it new meaning. I was there in the garden when Jesus told us to pray while he prayed that he had the strength and courage to complete the task God had given him. They heard him say, “May your will be done, not mine.” I was there when the soldiers came with Judas. I watched with horror on as Judas said to Jesus, “Master” and then kissed Jesus on the cheek in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Oh that scoundrel, he deserved what he got. When the soldiers came with their arrest warrant we fought, me, Peter and the others, to free Jesus, until he commanded us to stop. And then

we ran away. I went to get his mother to bring her to Jesus. Yes, I was there when they put Jesus on trial. I was there when Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Why he even cursed saying he didn't know him at all. I heard the cock crow, and tears came from Peter's eyes as he realized what he had done. I was there when Pilate offered to let Jesus go in honor of a special pardon. I called out to release Jesus but was over shouted with words to release a thief and murderer named Barabbas. I was there as they beat him as they made their way through the crowd toward the hill called Calvary. I was there holding Mary up, giving her support as the soldiers whipped her son and told him to hustle. I was there as Jesus fell and got up, fell again, was pulled to his feet, fell again. I watched as they searched the crowd to get someone to carry the cross for Jesus. I stepped back, for I didn't want to do it. After all, I was assisting his mother. The soldiers picked a man from the crowd, a total stranger to do it. I was there as they drove those nails into his hands and feet and lifted him high for all to see. I saw the sign they put above his head, "Jesus, the king of the Jews." I listened as the religious leaders yelled to take down the sign for he was not their king. I was there when they all cried out for him to save himself and then all would believe. I heard one thief belittle him, while the other asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom. I remember Jesus' words, words of forgiveness and hope for that thief. "Today," Jesus said, "You will be with me in paradise." Wow! How could he? But he did. I was there as others poked fun and called Jesus the Messiah in gesture. I was there as the daylight began to get dark and storm clouds began to appear and rains came and I heard Jesus' last words asking forgiveness for others, that I should care for his mother, and that it was finished. I was there when he took his final breath, the soldiers put a spear in his side and the earth quaked. I was there when the Centurion walked to the cross and looked through the rain drops and said, "Truly, this was the son of God." and they took him down and laid him in his mother's arms for the last time. I was there when they laid him in the tomb and watched as they sealed the tomb and soldiers stood watch to make sure no one

stole his body. Yes, I was there those 6 hours one Friday. And I was there three days later when one of the ladies came to tell us the tomb was empty and I ran alongside Peter to see if it was true. I beat Peter there, and saw the stone rolled away. I watched Peter walk in, see that he was not there, and when he left I too went in saw the evidence that cannot be disputed. He was not there. He had risen as he said he would. And to top it off I was there in the Upper Room when the risen Lord appeared to us on. Yes, I saw him, touched him, and heard his voice. As a beloved friend I was there through it all.”

His story is for us to remember because he wants all who hear his story to listen with ears so intent that one would no longer doubt but believe that it was true. That Jesus was the son of God. That he rose from the grave. That he lives today. That’s the good news a good friend wants to share about his best friend and buddy, his Savior, Jesus the Christ. He wants to remind us as Jesus loved John he also loves us. He loved us so much that he stretched out his arms and cried to the Father in heaven “Forgive them Father.” Yes he loves us with a love that will not let us go on as we are, but offers us a chance to change, to repent, to come to the cross and believe.

John invites each hearer of his story to do as he did....believe... It was there....yes it was there at the cross when he was commissioned to care for Jesus’ mother.....bring comfort to her and to others until a new day arises.....The beloved disciple shares God’s love with the world.

Yes John was there and he believed. How about you?