



Presbyterians *Read*



Easter Week

“God chooses what is weak in the world, what the world counts as foolishness, to put to shame the power and wisdom of the world. That is what Easter is all about. God is doing a new thing, and, as Jesus said earlier in the story, the first shall be last and the last first. Easter is a day to put everything upside down and inside out” (Wright, p. 143).

Theme: Kingdom People are Part of the Easter Story

Opening Psalm

To open your discussion each week, we recommend reading a psalm together. N.T. Wright uses the psalms from the Revised Common Lectionary as the basis for his Sunday devotions. This week’s psalm is Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24.

General Opening Questions

Depending on your group, you may want to start with a general opening question. Here are a few options that you can use throughout the study:

- What struck you about this week’s readings?
- Is there a specific passage from this week’s readings that caught your attention? Why?
- What did you find challenging about this week’s reading?
- Was there a theme in this week’s readings that stood out?

Overview of Theme

We recommend reading this overview together as a group. It will help contextualize the discussion questions and focus the conversation.

In this week’s readings, N.T. Wright emphasizes the completely unexpected nature of the resurrection. Although Jesus had told his followers that he would be “raised up” and “go ahead of them to Galilee” (Matt. 26:32), nobody was expecting his resurrection to happen the way that it did. As Wright explains, “the early Christians certainly weren’t expecting anything like Jesus’ resurrection. It wasn’t part of the game plan. ‘Resurrection’ was something that would happen to everyone at the end, not to one person in the middle of history . . . They were not twiddling their thumbs on Holy Saturday saying, ‘Well, that was very nasty, but of course he’ll be back tomorrow’” (145).

We are so familiar with the story of the resurrection that it is difficult to truly grasp the magnitude of this miracle. Despite our familiarity with the Easter story, it is and always has been “a strange, crazy and wild story” (142). Not only was it an unlikely event, but it was witnessed by unlikely people. The unlikeliness of the resurrection makes sense considering the vision of the kingdom of God Jesus preached about. It isn’t the powerful, or the well-respected, or the people who see themselves as perfect who are the first to recognize Jesus as king of heaven and earth. It is those who would normally be considered last that are the first to encounter the risen Christ.

Believing in the resurrection is a central part of Christian faith. As N.T. Wright explains, “Jesus’ resurrection not only showed that he was right. It established his kingdom, his type of kingdom once and for all” (148). Over the last several weeks we’ve been learning about the kingdom of God. The Easter message declares that it is now possible to live into this kingdom—a new way has been opened to us. We are now free to love, to forgive, to act justly and to be reconciled to one another and God. And, that is a reason to celebrate!

Opening Discussion Questions

In this week’s readings, N.T. Wright provides a comprehensive picture of the meaning of the Kingdom of God. As a group, take some time to review his Easter Tuesday reflection (pp. 147-150). Considering this reflection and all that we’ve read and discussed over the last several weeks, let us return to where we began with the three questions at the heart of this study:

- 1) What is the kingdom of God?
- 2) What did it mean for the hearers of Jesus’ day?
- 3) What does it mean for us today?

Reflect on these questions as a group. How has your understanding of the kingdom of God changed over the course of this study?

Key Scripture Verse: Matthew 6:25–34

- Read N.T. Wright’s translation of Matthew 6:25–34 (found below and on p. 153).
- Read or listen to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of Matthew 6:25–34, or another version of your choice.

Matthew 6:25–34

“So let me tell you: don’t worry about your life—what to eat, what to drink; don’t worry about your body—what to wear. There’s more to life than food! There’s more to the body than a suit of clothes! Have a good look at the birds in the sky. They don’t plant seeds, they don’t bring in the harvest, they don’t store things in barns—and your father in heaven feeds them! Think how different you are from them! Can any of you add fifteen inches to your height just by worrying about it?”

“And why worry about what to wear? Take a tip from the lilies in the countryside. They don’t work; they don’t weave; but, let me tell you, not even Solomon in all his finery was dressed as well as one of these. So if God gives that sort of clothing even to the grass in the field, which is here today and on the bonfire tomorrow, isn’t he going to clothe you too, you little-faith lot?”

“So don’t worry away with ‘What’ll we eat?’ and ‘What’ll we drink?’ and ‘What’ll we wear?’ Those are all the kinds of things Gentiles fuss about, and your heavenly father knows you need them all. Instead, make your top priority God’s kingdom and his way of life, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

“So don’t worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow can worry about itself. One day’s trouble at a time is quite enough.”

Biblical Reflection Discussion Prompts:

- 1) Wright reminds us that the Easter story does not end at the empty tomb, rather it continues in how we live as God's people. What does this passage from Matthew tell us about how we should be living as followers of the risen Jesus today?
- 2) As we discussed last week, there is still much darkness and suffering in the world and in our lives. This passage reminds us that God looks after us and provides for our needs. What is the role of God's care for us within the kingdom of God?
- 3) Matthew's gospel describes in detail a different way of being in the world. How will this teaching shape your life as the season of Easter celebration comes to an end and we move into ordinary time?

Closing Prayer

To close your discussion each week, we recommend saying the Lord's prayer together. For suggestions on using the Lord's prayer as a guide for intercessory prayer, see the Lenten Spiritual Practice guidelines.

