

Series Theme: The Names of Jesus

Title: Jesus as Savior

Date delivered: April 9, 2017

Preacher: Revs. Douglas and Joyce Donigian

Memory Verse: Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 Timothy 1:15

Summary: Two people – Mary, the sister of Martha, and Cleopas, a believer but not a disciple of Jesus both have encounters with Jesus during the season of Passover which coincides with our Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday and ending with Easter.

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: John 12:1-11

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: John 12:12-19

A two-part retelling of the experiences of two people who encountered Jesus around the time we celebrate as Palm Sunday:

Mary – the younger sister of Martha and Lazarus. Their family ran an inn in Bethany, a place where Jesus and his disciples often stopped.

Cleopas – A follower of Jesus but not one of his disciples. He lived in Emmaus and often would go to hear Jesus when he and his disciples were in the area, but he did not follow Jesus as he traveled. Cleopas was a good friend of Lazarus.

Mary: Hi. My name is Mary. I'm the youngest of the family. Big brother Lazarus. Big sister Martha. And little me. Except I don't feel so little or so young any more. In fact I feel kinda old. Why do I feel old when I'm eighteen? I think it's because all I'm doing is worrying. Worrying about my family, worrying about my friends, one in particular.

I have to tell you about him, about Jesus. But I have to begin at the beginning. My brother Lazarus was baptized by John the Baptist some years ago. He would go out to see John whenever he came this far south. He was so impressed by John. He was so different from any of us. We run an inn here in Bethany. We work from dawn to dusk surrounded by people. Bargaining in the market, talking with our guests, this is how we were brought up. John didn't have any of that. He lived out in the desert. No people. No market. Most of the time no bed. He ate locusts and honey, wore animal skins for clothes.

Lazarus said he envied John. To be free of the daily grind. To get away from complaining guests. But we're lucky to live near Jerusalem with lots of travelers and a way for all three of us to make a living.

Two years ago John told Lazarus about his cousin, Jesus, who was preaching new things about God. John was very impressed by Jesus and his teaching. Lazarus immediately told John to ask Jesus to stay with us any time he was coming to Jerusalem. No charge. A place to sleep. Great food, thanks to Martha and me. Thanks to Martha, to hear her tell it.

Anyway, not two months later, this Jesus showed up, not alone, but with a dozen followers. They were all hungry so Martha went running to the market to get extra food.

Meanwhile Jesus began to preach out front. I scrunched down with his followers to listen. I was amazed. He told stories I couldn't forget. He had me laughing and then crying and wanting to hear more and more. Everyone felt exactly the same way.

When Martha got back, she wasn't in the best mood. I'd forgotten to start the fire and get water. So she glared at me. But Jesus was right in the middle of a story and I wanted to hear the end.

So Martha started the fire, making a lot more noise than usual, and then she came storming out. She walked right up to Jesus and asked him to tell me to get up and do some work.

Jesus smiled at her and then at me and said, ***"Martha. Martha. You are fretting about many things but Mary was doing something better, hearing the word of God."*** Martha was speechless. No one had ever talked that way to her before. Jesus stood up for me. From that moment on, he had my heart.

I got the water and Martha got over being mad at me. We laugh about it now. I looked forward to Jesus' visits. Every time was different. One time he healed a whole crowd of people. And he talked about having come to save the world. I believed he could save anybody he wanted to.

Then last month Lazarus got very sick. I think he caught it from that Egyptian who stayed with us, coughing all the time. Lazarus couldn't eat and he was burning up with fever. We sent for Jesus but when he came he was much too late. We had buried Lazarus four days earlier.

We were devastated. Lazarus had always been there for us. Without his help we couldn't run the inn. Jesus had been our one hope. Martha told him that he should have come before it was too late.

But then he said to Martha, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall***

never die. Do you believe this?” We said we believed. I don’t know if we really knew what we were saying about our belief.

But then we went to the grave where we had laid Lazarus’ body four days before. Some of our friends rolled away the stone and Lazarus came out, alive. We were amazed, overjoyed. Jesus was a savior. And I knew that only God could have this power.

Last week, when Jesus came for the Passover Festival in Jerusalem, we were bouncing with joy to see him. But then he scared me. He said he was going to die this very week. He said that to save the world, he had to die for our sin. He said he was going to be arrested and tortured and executed. I didn’t want to believe it. But someone with the power of God would never lie, would he?

I had to do something. Something besides crying like a baby. I felt I just had to do something. I felt I had to give him something to show him how much I loved him. But I had only one thing besides the clothes on my back. This was a jar of fragrant nard. My father had given it to me when I was just a little girl. After he died, we decided that jar of nard was to be used for my dowry so I could find a good husband. It was all I had.

Before Jesus and his friends finished eating, I took the jar and sat at Jesus’ feet, and poured the nard on his feet. Then I gently spread the oil over his feet with my hair. Lazarus and Martha looked shocked that I was giving away my dowry. It brought them to tears, but they didn’t stop me.

One of Jesus’ followers grumbled that I should have sold the oil and given them money to feed the poor. But Jesus stood up for me again. He said that it was the perfect funeral gift and that I had done a good thing.

That brings us up to today. Our friend, Cleopas, saw Jesus going into Jerusalem. Crowds of people were shouting and calling Jesus “son of David” and “Messiah.” Jesus had gotten a donkey somewhere and people were throwing palm branches on the ground in front of him and laying their cloaks down to make a path for him. I wish I could have been there to see all this. Hosannas! Alleluias. Everyone welcoming Jesus like they thought he was a king.

I wonder if Jesus will change his mind. Maybe the crowds won’t let him be killed. Can’t he be our Savior without having to die? I hope so. It helps me worry less. Oops. I have to go now. There are dinner guests to serve and Martha is calling me into the kitchen.

Cleopas: My name is Cleopas. I see you were just talking to Mary. I’ve known her family since they were born. My father, rest his soul, had an inn in Emmaus a lot like theirs. My wife and I are running it now. Lazarus has been like a brother to me and I guess I feel like Martha and Mary are my little sisters.

Mary probably told you that Lazarus gave us quite a scare last month. I heard he was sick and, when I could break away to see him, they were having his funeral. We knew this prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. We were hoping he would help. I've seen him cure diseases with just a word. By time he got here it was four days too late. But he did it nevertheless. Mary says they opened Lazarus' tomb and Jesus told him to come out. Lazarus said it was like waking up. But that wretched disease that he remembered was cured. Jesus brought him back to life after four days.

So I came over this morning to see how Lazarus was doing and get some oil at the market. It's always a half shekel cheaper in Bethany than in Emmaus. Lazarus looks great. Mary, though, is moping around because she thinks Jesus is going to be killed.

I don't believe it. How can someone be killed who can make the dead rise? It doesn't make sense. Besides, if anyone tried to kill Jesus there would be a riot. And I would personally hide him in my inn until everything calmed down.

Furthermore, Jesus has told us that he's come to save the world. How is he going to do that if he's dead?

Anyway, you should have seen what I just saw in Jerusalem. I was following Jesus into the city and, before he got there, people came running out to meet him. They were shouting and singing and cheering. They were calling him "Son of David" and "Savior" and throwing palm branches of the road. It was the best thing I've seen since the Romans started their taxes.

Our inn used to earn a nice income. We could afford meat three times a week. We bought fresh blankets for the inn every year. Once the taxes started, we were suddenly poor. In fact I think my father died before his time because it stressed him so much trying to make ends meet.

I hate the Romans. And our leaders are no better. All they're doing is lining their own pockets while people are selling their children as slaves. I'll starve before I sell any of my children.

So Jesus enters Jerusalem and he goes right to the temple. I'm still following in the crowd. He stops at the outer court where people are buying animals to be sacrificed. And then he turns over the money tables. I mean it. The money changers had all these neat stacks of coins and Jesus turned them over. What a mess. They were scrambling and fighting over what was whose. It did my heart good. I thought it couldn't happen to a better group of guys.

And nobody touched Jesus. They were afraid of all his followers. That's why I say they'll never kill him. Mary has it wrong. I mean the only way they could catch him is if

he lets them. When he knew they were coming, he'd have to purposely wait for them. Only if it was night so everyone was asleep and he told whoever was with him to stand aside.

And, even if they caught him, they couldn't kill him unless he let them. Understand? He would have to allow them to kill him. Why would someone, who could keep his life with just a word, allow bad, evil people kill him. Like I said, it doesn't make sense.

Here's what I think. He has the whole nation on his side. Rome is a thousand miles away. I think the people are going to make him king whether he wants to or not. When he has the power in his hands, he'll remember that he's here to save us all from evil. Just like God promised. Because he is the Messiah, the Savior we have all been praying for. He will make us free.

That's why I say Mary has to be wrong. Even if Jesus told her he was going to die, he won't go through with it. What did she say? That Jesus said his death would be a final sacrifice for everybody's sins? Doesn't he know how greedy and selfish and just plain mean people are? I might see someone dying for Lazarus and Martha and Mary. They're good people. But die for the tax collectors. Or die so even Romans can be forgiven for their sins. Never! Don't you see? It doesn't make any sense.

Pastor Doug: We have been looking at Palm Sunday through the eyes of Mary at the house where Jesus often stayed and Cleopas who was just outside Jesus' inner circle.

Stepping out of my character, I can affirm that Palm Sunday makes perfect sense, even though Cleopas couldn't see it. Jesus had to confront the powers that be with the truth. He did save the world by his death and resurrection and ascension into heaven. If we accept Jesus as the Son of God and we put our faith in Him, God will invite us into heaven after we die and send us help while we live. That is the salvation of Jesus Christ. May we all find rest in Him.

Let us pray. ***Loving father. As we remember Palm Sunday in Jerusalem, may we all accept Jesus as Savior into our hearts and find freedom from fear and death. Amen.***