

MARY:

Have you ever had a mentor that you respected more than anyone else on earth? Someone that you could learn from and be with day in and day out- someone you trusted with your very life? Jesus was that kind of mentor for me and not just for me but for my sister Martha and my brother Lazarus too. We would do anything for Jesus and the disciples, we hosted them at our house which was an expensive undertaking. Can you imagine all the food that thirteen men can eat for dinner? But it was worth every penny, or so I thought- until Jesus totally let me down. You see, my brother Lazarus was sick, really sick, he was on his death bed and my sister Martha and I knew that if we could get ahold of Jesus and he came to our home in Bethany, that he could heal our brother. So we sent word to Jesus and told him, "The one you love is sick." The messenger came back to us and said that Jesus was deeply impacted by the message and that he would be by in a few days. A few days? A few days??!!! My brother is on his death bed, EVERY MINUTE COUNTS and it's not like Jesus was in the middle of something. He was just hanging out with his disciples, weren't we important to him? Didn't Jesus care about my brother Lazarus? Didn't he care about me and Martha? I just couldn't believe it.

When Jesus and the disciples finally made it to the outskirts of town it was FOUR DAYS after Lazarus' funeral. Where was Jesus while my brother took his last breath? Where was Jesus as we washed his dead body and prepared him for burial? Where was Jesus when we anointed his decaying body with perfume to hide the smell of death a little longer? Where was Jesus when we laid him in the tomb and went home with an emptiness in our hearts? How could he do this too us? When Martha heard Jesus was coming she went to meet him and was crazy enough to say that God would do anything that Jesus asked, even now.... But what could be done? And then Jesus had the nerve to tell my sister that Lazarus would rise and that Jesus himself was the resurrection and the life. Jesus can't be resurrection and life if he allows death to happen. It didn't make any sense. And then Martha gets home and tells me that Jesus is looking for me. He knows where to find me, he knows what he's done, but I can't help myself, so I ran from my home, from the comfort of home and the circle of friends that were consoling

me in my grief and despair and I ran as fast as I could . And then I fell at Jesus' feet because I just couldn't do it anymore. I didn't have the strength or energy to even stand, and to be honest, I couldn't look Jesus in the eyes. He was no longer my hero, my master, he let me down in my darkest hour so all I could do was tell him that IF he had been here, my brother would not have died. I wanted him to know how disappointed and broken I was. How betrayed I felt by his absence. And then the tears started and I wept, sobbing bitterly as my friends came and held me and wept too. Jesus watched me lying there crying with every last ounce of energy I had and he asked to go to the cemetery and see where Lazarus was buried. And then, for the first time, I saw Jesus cry as we walked together towards the place where my dead brother was laid.

Questions for conversation:

Have you ever felt betrayed by God like Mary did?

Have you ever felt like God didn't care about you or what you were going through?

Write God a letter about a time when you felt like God didn't care about you and open it next Easter Sunday...

APOSTLE PAUL:

There's nothing I wouldn't do for Jesus. I have given up my reputation, my livelihood, my comfort and security, I've been bitten by snakes, almost drowned in a shipwreck and beaten within an inch of my life on multiple occasions before being thrown in jail all because I love Christ and want to share Christ's story with the world. After the whole Damascus road thing, I spent 12 years of my life learning and studying and praying and connecting to Christ and then I spent almost 20 years traveling over 10,000 miles to tell the world about the love of Jesus.

When I got sick and the pain would not go away, I cried out to God for help, not just once but three times. What kind of love can I proclaim if I myself am crippled and three times I cry out for help, for this thorn in the flesh to be taken away from me and each time God says no. When was the last time God said no to you? How did that feel? Why wouldn't He help me? What good is a sick apostle? One who is in excruciating pain? And if God didn't want to heal me so I was at my best and strongest, then he needed to heal me because people thought my illness was a sign of my sin, my lack of faith, or it was punishment for not being obedient to God. My illness might have KEPT people from believing in the story of Jesus, what good is a Savior who can heal others but not his own apostles? This debilitating pain hurts me, slows me down, and damages my ministry, so where are you God? Why won't you just make this go away? Help me! How can I continue to serve a God who allows such suffering?.

Questions for discussion:

Like Paul's thorn in the flesh, think about a time when you asked God for something and God's answer was "No."

Look at a cross and think about a cross you have to bear in your own life that reveals your weakness and God's strength.

JESUS:

I knew that I was born to die for humanity. And yet, here I am in this garden; hearing the footsteps of the soldiers getting closer, knowing that they will whip me, spit on me, mock me and beat me. Knowing that blood will fall from my hands and feet from the nails that will pierce my flesh, knowing that they will stab me to make sure I'm dead, knowing that I will struggle for hours not to suffocate as I hang on a cross, naked and in shame and misery for the world to see. And when I think about that; God, I'm scared. I know it's why I came here but I don't want to be tortured, humiliated and persecuted. Is there any other way? Could this cup of suffering pass from me? Do I really have to do it? And if I do have to suffer and die a horrible and painful death, do I have to do it while feeling forsaken by you? Knowing that you are my Father and that we have done every moment of my ministry together has made all the difference, it has comforted and empowered me but I feel so terribly alone right now, Father. Where are you God? I'm scared and alone and don't want to die and my disciples are sleeping over there, totally unaware of what I'm going through, unaware of who I am and what is about to happen. Even Peter, who will betray me before the sun rises, has no idea how his betrayal will cut to my soul and make me question if they'll ever get it, if they'll ever see all that I have been saying and doing to love them and save them and serve them. God, is this the only way? Dad, I don't want to do this, help me. But, if there is no other way, if this has to be done, then let's get started.

Take a walk around your neighborhood alone and ponder:

Have you ever felt utterly alone and abandoned? Look around you at the empty streets, what does it mean to you that Christ had to feel utterly alone and abandoned to die for OUR sins? What would it feel like to die in agonizing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pain?

So often we rush through Good Friday because we don't like to dwell in darkness, struggle, sin, death, pain and unanswered questions. Take your time heading home tonight and between now and Good Friday meditate on the importance of Good Friday. Without it, we would have nothing to celebrate Easter Sunday...