

Jesus' Crucifixion – The Full Extent of Love

Luke 23:32-43, Mark 15:33-39

Opening Activity

Leader says, Today, we're entering Jesus' final hours on earth before he died. These passages can be hard for us to read but so important for us to read. For centuries, artists have depicted what they think those final hours of Jesus' life looked like and no two paintings look the same.

We're going to look at a painting called "The Descent from the Cross" by Rembrandt. Rembrandt is a well-known artist who, over the course of his life, painted hundreds of paintings based on stories from the Bible.

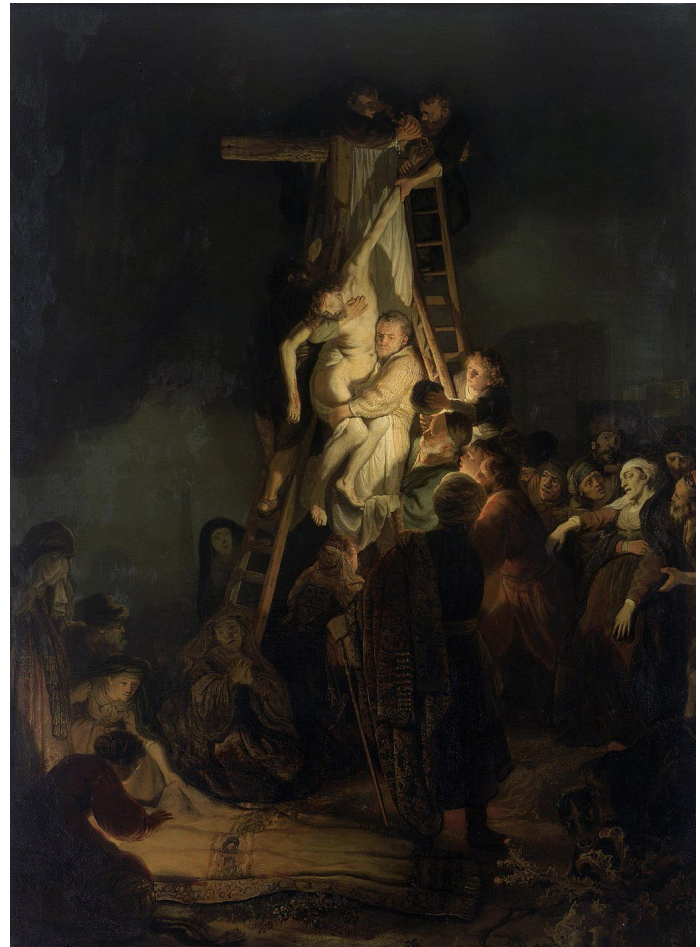
To set the stage for our time together, find a partner and spend some time really looking at this painting. Discuss these questions:

1. What's the first thing you notice about this painting?
2. What do you notice about the crowd?
3. Describe the painting.
4. Look closely at the faces of the people in the painting. In this painting, each person is depicted with a different facial expression, what are those expressions?
5. What would your facial expression be if you were painted into this picture?

Title: Descent from the Cross

Artist: Rembrandt

Date: 1634, Hermitage Museum,
St. Petersburg, Russia



Introduction

Leaders Says: The story of Jesus' crucifixion is one of those stories where, no matter how many times we read it or experience it, we should never get numb to it. This isn't one of those stories that we take lightly or casually read when we want to dive into the Bible on a Tuesday afternoon. It feels like this passage is reserved for very specific times.

Why does it feel this way? It could be that we don't like to see Jesus like this. We don't like to see him beaten, ridiculed, and destroyed because we know that it was our sin that put Him on that cross. But this story, as hard as it is to read, is such an important story and one that we truly need to meditate on regularly. This story shows us our salvation and how deeply we are truly loved by God.

To set the stage for today's story, let's give some context. Jesus had just finished praying in the garden and He's greeted by Judas who hands him over to the guards. Jesus begins His journey to the cross. The gospel writers don't discuss what was going through Jesus' mind in these times. We know He felt the pain that was being inflicted. He also felt the weight of the sin of the world as He was brutally tortured. Yet, Jesus endured it all. He endured it all because He loves us and wants to redeem us to Himself.

Bible Exploration

Leader Says, If you've been around the church at all, a lot of this probably sounds familiar so not a lot of context is needed before we dive into our passage for today. As we read, let's look for how Jesus shows love.

Read Luke 23:32-43 and Mark 15:33-39

When we look at these two accounts from Luke and Mark, we see a lot of emotions. But before we go any further, we need to realize the tension that we live in. Today, we can read this story knowing it does not end at the cross but at the empty tomb three days later. We know that Jesus will rise from the dead. The tension comes as we read about these final hours on the cross with all its heaviness and sadness. We cannot skip past this moment. It's a time to remember our sin which brought Jesus here.

At this point, Jesus isn't only experiencing the physical, human pain that comes along with being crucified but he is also experiencing the pain that we can never understand and thankfully will never experience: the weight of the sins of the world that have ever been committed and ever will be committed.

As his death gets closer, Jesus yells out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and breathes his last breath.

What comes next is something that we've read multiple times but maybe never fully understand. When Jesus dies, the earth begins to shake, and the temple curtain is torn in two. These supernatural events point to the impact of Jesus' death for us. With the curtain that acts as a barrier

gone, the everyday person can approach God directly (this would prove to be a huge shift for God's people in the New Testament). Jesus, the Son of God, showed us the importance of love by dying for us. Again, we know that this isn't the end of the story, but we can't skip ahead. We should stay in this moment for all it shows us about God's love for us even in our sin.

Application

Leader Says: What does this love mean for us? It means everything. We can read in God's Word when the death we deserved because of our sin was re-written. Jesus' death is everything the Old Testament points to and the center of our saving faith now. Without this, everything we believe falls apart. Because of God's gift of faith to us, Jesus' death changes everything about how we want to live our lives, how we interact with other people, how we grow, how we forgive. Because of this, we know that even as we fail, God will always forgive us. We love because God first showed us love in Jesus. Everything we do to flow out of that:

- Because Jesus died for me, I can love
- Because Jesus hung on the cross, speaking words of forgiveness to me, I can forgive that person who hurt me.
- Because Jesus hung on the cross, being more broken than we will ever be, the brokenness we experience will never be too much for Him to handle. In fact, it's through Jesus that our brokenness is forever and completely made whole.

None of us love perfectly. We mess up in relationships, we may not forgive easily. Maybe instead of opening up, we shut down and run. Trusting in our own love us fickle and faulty. We naturally only want to love those who love us or who are easy to love.

- Who in your life feels difficult to love?

Instead, because Jesus' love was so deep that it went to the cross for us, in faith we can reflect that love to others. We are always failing, but with the Holy Spirit, always striving to love better, in a Christ-like way. We want to reflect God's love in a way so that when people look at me, they see me living for a God who loves, who forgives, who shows up for his people. Our God saw our sin and brokenness, but graciously loved us enough to go to the cross on our behalf, despite it all.

Our goal in life should be to be like Jesus. When we look at these stories (and so many others in the New Testament), we see how Jesus models action for us. We will never resist temptation, provide comfort, pray or love perfectly. Yet we know how God desires for us to live out forgiveness, love, service and grace.

We're going to spend some time in small groups discussing questions based on the story for tonight then we'll come back together for our closing activity.

Small Group Discussion

1. How do you show love? How do you receive love?
2. Read the crucifixion account in the other gospels: Matthew 27:32-50, Mark 15: 27-39, Luke 23:32-46, and John 19:17-30. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

3. There's a good chance you've heard the Bible story tonight multiple times. But as you heard it today, what part sticks out to you?
4. As you think through the story of Good Friday and all the events that had to take place, what is the hardest part for you to hear?
5. Why is this story the center of everything in God's Word? Why is it central to our faith?
6. Why is it important for us to constantly come back to this story and hear it again? What does Jesus dying on the cross mean to you?
7. Share highs and lows and pray

Closing Activity

Leader Says: As we reflect on this hard story of Jesus' crucifixion, look for what God is trying to tell you through this story by journaling/reflecting upon these questions:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

After reflection time, we know that Jesus' death is only temporary. We know that he rises on the third day but for now, let's be thinking of what exactly it means that Jesus died for us. That he took all of our sin and hung with it on the cross. Let's pray.

Dear God,

We thank you for sending your son to this earth. We thank you that, while he was here on earth, he taught us everything. We don't deserve to be saved but you see us for who we truly are: your children and your creation. We pray that we always remember the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. We thank you that, through the cross, we are made whole. Remind us to show your love to those around us and remind us to always live lives that are honoring to you.

In Your name we pray,

Amen