

In the 18th chapter of the Gospel of John—Jesus is arrested, taken before the High Priest, then Pilate
Sentenced to death and crucified—a public execution
Everything fell apart for the disciples and followers of Jesus
How could this be? —Jesus was the Messiah
Peter panicked and denied knowing Jesus—3 times
They stood around, not knowing what to do
Everything that they had lived and worked for ended—it was over!
Not only had all of their hopes and dreams come crashing down
But they were afraid for their own lives
Would they be next?
As Jesus' disciples—their lives were now in danger
No wonder they scattered and hid
No wonder Peter didn't admit to knowing Jesus

The women who were followers of Jesus were present at the crucifixion
Matthew, Mark, and Luke all say that there were many women present
My guess is that they didn't attract the same attention as the disciples
John names the mother of Jesus and her sister, plus Mary Magdalene
He also says that he was there—calling himself “the disciple Jesus loved”
Jesus asks John to take Jesus' mother, Mary, as his own mother

After Jesus' death—it is Joseph of Arimathea who asks permission to take his body
John names Joseph as a “secret disciple” of Jesus
He was unwilling to be public because of his fear of the religious authorities
Nicodemus joined Joseph and they laid him in a tomb, wrapped in linen and spices
My sense is that Nicodemus is also a “secret disciple”
He came to visit Jesus at night early in John's Gospel
It is hard for us to comprehend how radical Jesus' teachings were
And how this conflict between Jesus and the “Jews” escalated
Making it likely that there were other “secret disciples”

I want to interrupt this conversation to think about the “Jews”—who are they?

For one thing Jesus and his followers are all Jews

The fact is that the Gospel of John is particularly negative about the Jews

Even to the degree that some have labeled the Jews as Christ killers as a result

It has been used to fuel anti-Semitism

However, as we look closer, it becomes clear that “the Jews” doesn't refer to ethnicity or religion

A broad category to which Jesus and John both belong

“The Jews” in John's Gospel are the religious and political authorities, especially around Jerusalem

The Gospel of John was written several decades after Jesus' death and resurrection

Over the years, the conflict among the religious and political authorities has increased regarding Jesus

Truthfully, there were conflicts between Jesus and the scribes, Pharisees, and priests of his day

But John is also writing in the context of the subsequent controversies

The bitterness of John's portrayal of “the Jews” has to do with the experience of Jewish Christians

They were often expelled from the synagogues

We pick up the story in the early hours of the morning on the first day of the week

Mary Magdalene finds the stone removed from the tomb and tells Peter and John, who run to see

At first they assume someone has taken the body
Angels tell them differently
Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene
The women run to tell the men

We expect everyone to be ecstatic that Jesus is alive—that he is resurrected
But they are stunned and confused—not sure what to make of it all

Over the next 7 weeks, Jesus appears to the disciples multiple times—just a few to all of them together
They are locked in a room out of fear—and Jesus just shows up
They don't believe him until they see the wounds in his hands and his side
Thomas isn't there and he won't believe them either until he sees for himself

But again—they seem confused—Jesus comes and goes now and doesn't stick around
What does all of this mean—what are they to do about it?
In the midst of their confusion, Peter says, "*I am going fishing.*" *John 21:3*
When confused—Peter returns to what he knows—fishing!
But it happened again—they caught nothing until Jesus shows up
They don't recognize Jesus—again this is more common—Jesus has changed
On the road to Emmaus—it wasn't until Jesus broke the bread that they knew
Jesus tells them to fish on the other side of the boat and they get a full catch
Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. John 21:12 NRSV
Again this verse speaks to their confusion

Everything has changed for the disciples and they aren't sure what to do
Think about it—when our hopes and dreams go up in smoke—we're lost and struggle
Sometimes we panic, other times we withdraw—our emotions take over
We find it hard to understand and even harder to find hope or peace
By the time the thing you have wait for so long finally appears—you've moved on
What? —now it happens when I'm not ready for it —why?
So it shouldn't surprise us that the disciples are confused and don't know how to proceed
Jesus says to feed his sheep—but how?
They get side tracked by what each other are doing
They are simply trying to make sense of it all and figure out way forward
Sound familiar?

In Acts 1, we encounter Jesus and the disciples again
So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6 NRSV
They are still wondering when the Messiah is going to be the Messiah as they understand it
Jesus tells them they have to wait for the Holy Spirit and then they will receive power
That must have still been confusing—especially upon leaving them for the last time
They replace Judas—doing what they know
Isn't that just like us—we return to the familiar

The confusion persists until the day of Pentecost—some 7 weeks after his death and resurrection
We pick up the story in Acts 2

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Acts 2:1-4 NRSV

People around them were confused—but the apostles had surprising clarity

 People thought they were drunk, but Peter said no, this is the Spirit

 Devout Jews from every nation heard in their own language

 Peter spoke with power and clarity

 People were persuaded and gathered together in community

 Peter and John healed a man on the temple steps

 The early church began to form

 Saul, a persecutor of the Jews, was blinded by the Light and began to follow Jesus

 Gentiles came to know Jesus

When Jesus left his Spirit on earth—the fullness of God became known

 We weren't limited to the physical presence with one man traveling around his region

 The Spirit transcends all of creation and can be known by all folks everywhere

 It is what changes everything

 In the Gospels—Peter stumbles and the disciples struggle at times

 But when filled with the Spirit, they are transformed and filled with God

 With the Presence of the Living Christ, there are no limitations

 Christ is, and can be, everywhere at once

This same Spirit is present today and empowers us to live full lives transformed by the Spirit

 It is here and everywhere around the world—not bound by time or place

 Christ's Spirit is intimate and personal, guiding each of us day by day

 This Spirit is enough—calling us to be faithful as we walk together

 In that, our world is transformed

 We are transformed