

**“A lot Can Happen in Three Days”**  
**John 20:1-18**

They say timing is everything. Just ask the outfielder as he dives for the ball or the guy down on one knee with ring in hand before his girlfriend or the person selling their house in Georgina in the Spring of 2017. Timing is everything. Just ask Jesus.

If you have been with us here at the KesPres for the past week you have seen a roller coaster of emotions and experiences. Last Sunday we exited the “Roman Road” to join the throng on the Hosanna Road. Although it appeared choreographed this was by no means a planned entrance but a spontaneous outburst of praise and worship. Here was Jesus entering the Holy City of Jerusalem – not as a valiant warrior or a powerful politician but a humble King riding on a donkey. His timing was astute. One of the holiest of religious holidays (like the Stanley Cup playoffs in Toronto) was about to begin here was Jesus, for the first time, the center of attention. It is called “The Triumphal Entry” within the church but as we soon see it does not end well. From Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem (of which the disciples adamantly protested and we now know why) he was arrested on trumped up charges. It is now Friday. Much of the known world is busy, unaware of what is going on other than what people are hearing on the street. Most are oblivious of Jesus. They’ve heard his name, maybe even spoke his name when they stubbed their toe in the middle of the night or were cut off by a young energetic driver on his way to the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, on the other hand, were fully aware of what was going on – at least the big story. The details? Well most of them were unaware – not because they didn’t care but because they didn’t know, literally didn’t know. They were not unaware like the general crowd but willingly absent. If you recall, during Jesus’ arrest in the garden and the hours that followed the disciples fled or to be honest, hid. You can’t blame them, really. Chances are we would do the same. If you feared for your own life and the life of your family most choose flight over fight. So during the most tumultuous three days of Jesus’ life he was alone, very much alone.

Now understand we are dealing with a very different time than today. All we have is a written record, penned a few decades after the actual events. There were no cell phone videos to record all the details but John, in a very matter of a fact way, tells us what others reported, what others saw and his own recollection of those three days. Yes, a lot can happen in three days. On May 31, 1991 I was a recent graduate of Atlantic Baptist College, unsure of what I was going to do with the rest of my life. On June 1, 1991 at St. James Presbyterian Church in Truro I watched the most beautiful woman in the world walk down the aisle towards me and we exchanged marriage vows. On June 2, 1991 I was now a married man – no longer alone and having someone in my life of whom I would spend the rest of my life. All within 3 days. A lot can happen in three days. Don’t believe me? Just ask Jesus. Friday is described by all three gospel writers with great care. John is no exception. John spends some time

telling his readers of not simply Jesus' situation but his very movements. Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and is arrested. He is taken to the High Priest and then off to Pilate. (No one apparently wants to make a decision about this "Jesus-fella" because his popularity is increasing and there is fear within the church and the political establishment that Jesus could infiltrate both and make changes that neither wanted to see. In the end, on Friday, Pilate makes the decision but not before "washing his hands" of it and blaming the religious establishment for their cowardness. What readers might think will happen (a slap on the wrist and the promise of Jesus to simply disappear into the crowd) does not happen. Instead Jesus receives a sentence that should alarm even the hardest of hearts: He is sentenced to death, but not just any death, but death on a cross. Tradition claims it was the Romans who invented this cruel death – hung on two beams only a few feet off the ground until the prisoner suffocates to death. Jesus would endure a beating, a whipping, taunting and humiliation (that would have killed most) even prior to being nailed to a tree. And all this on Friday. Friday would be the day Jesus died and the day that is designated by many countries (including ours) as Good Friday. To many it is simply a holiday. To many even the name of the day has been lost. Friday, for many, is the beginning of the weekend. It is a "traveling day" to the cottage, packing day for the flight, the day before the real fun begins. But for Jesus, it is the day that marks his death. Friday was the day Jesus' dead body was removed from the cross and thanks to the deed of a generous benefactor Jesus would not be placed in an unknown grave with others who could not afford a proper burial. Instead, because of the gift of a man we know very little about, a man named Joseph, Jesus' body was anointed with oil as was customary with Jewish tradition by Joseph and Nicodemus (the man who came to Jesus at night) and then bound him in cloths and buried in a borrowed tomb. It's still Friday.

Saturday is not mentioned in any of the gospels. And other than one short confusing verse elsewhere and one line in our statement of faith we say together most Communion Saturdays, the second day remains basically unknown. But in the midst of a not so familiar book of the Bible to many (The Epistles of Peter) we see a passage that at first appears to be a lesson on "suffering for doing good" which seems very appropriate for the time in which it was written and the people to whom it was written. The early church knew suffering. And until the arrival of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, Christian death on a cross or an amphitheatre was common place. The easy thing would be to hate your persecutor, despise your enemy or "repay insult for insult" but this was not what you were supposed to do. And before readers could retort, Peter puts before us all the example of Jesus. "For Christ also suffered," Peter reminds us "and did not repay evil with evil" and then this, "After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits." (2 Peter 3:19) Paul claims elsewhere that Jesus "descended into the lower parts of the earth" which helps us better

understand a small part of the Apostle's Creed that we say together at most Communion: "(Jesus) suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; and descended into hell or he descended to the dead." Now depending who you read the understanding of both verses and the section of the Apostle's Creed can differ. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of either Sheol (OT) or Hell (NT) or a place absent of God and most significantly "a place where no one praises God." So some say, following Jesus death, Jesus journeys to Hades, to the City of Death, and rips its gates off the hinges. He liberates Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, John the Baptist, and the rest of the Old Testament faithful, ransoming them from the power of Sheol (Psalm 49:15; 86:13; 89:48) Augustine, for example, believed Christ literally descended into hell. But in his letter to Evodius, he admits several uncertainties over the meaning of 1 Peter 3:19." John Calvin went so far as to describe the descent as symbolic, pointing to Christ's suffering at Gethsemane and the cross. I find the greatest help coming from Philip Clayton who says, "When I recite this in the church (he descended into hell) I think there is no place where the encompassing love of God can't be present." (Philip Clayton) And maybe that's the real lesson, especially as we move to the third day, Sunday, or many to be the high point of these three days.

I most enjoy John's retelling of Sunday. In John there are no pre-dawn earthquakes, no soldiers fainting dead away. Like all four of the gospels, we also have absolutely no description of the moment Jesus emerged from the tomb (apparently no one witnessed that and so no evangelist embellishes otherwise). Instead John purposely keeps this whole story on the level of ordinary expectations precisely so that when those typical expectations are shattered by the new thing God has done, our amazement and awe will be the greater (on the third day). (Source: Scott Hoezee) Sunday is the big event, it's the big day but that shouldn't surprise us some. I saw a sweet Facebook™ post from a colleague who was visiting his mother in the nursing home. The conversation, he said when something like this: Me: How are you doing? Mom: Two have gone in here on this floor. Me: I know, you'll miss them. Mom: There's always a third. They go in threes. Me: You're not going. Mom: We'll see. (Source: Keith McKee) In our story the third day is not about death, like the first two. On the third day, when Jesus was as good as dead (not "mostly dead) but dead something happened in that tomb that no one even tries to explain because it is simply too hard to believe. On the third day tears turned to laughter,

Jesus met Mary just outside the tomb but Mary didn't know it was Jesus because who comes back to life. Jesus asked Mary, "Why are you crying." You can't blame Mary for her tears. "Mary wept because death had done to Jesus' body what death does to each person's body: renders it vulnerable to decay, decomposition, as well as totally defenseless against the whims of those who might be minded to abuse a corpse. Jesus twice asked his logical question out of a deep well of both

compassion and empathy. (But) Mary Magdalene on Easter morning is an emblem of the whole human condition. Mary is at once every single one of us and the whole lot of us taken together. And so it is precisely into that situation of dereliction that Easter must burst forth. Listen: Easter does not happen here in this room or in any similarly bright, airy, and decked-out-in-white church sanctuary. Easter doesn't happen around the dinner table when we have our family around us and mounds of delicious food to tuck into. Listen: Easter happens in the E.R. when the doctor comes out to the waiting area and shakes his head. We couldn't save him. Easter happens at the funeral home when that first glimpse of dad in the coffin hits you like a cinderblock to the solar plexus. You can't breathe. Easter happens in the crack house where men and women watch each other slowly kill themselves with drugs, where life has become a living death. Easter happens on the nursing floor where once strong-bodied men and women watch their peers disappear one by one and where these wheelchair-bound precious people know that all of life has now come down to this long waiting for death. Easter happens where death is, because that is the only place it is needed." That's why Easter happens on the third day." (Hoezee)

As you've seen "a lot can happen in three days." In three days we went from a party in the street, to a cross on a hill, to a boulder encased tomb. Those two days is where most of us live our lives. But for those who believe, they live in the third day. How about you? You don't even need to take three days to answer me. All you need to do is stand with me at the empty tomb and see for yourself. And I believe anyone who stands there, sees what has happened over those three days is left not crying but hearing their name called by the one who would rather die than live without them. Yes, a lot can happen in three days but a lot can happen in just a moment. Like when anyone, even you, calls out to the name of Jesus saying, "Come out of that empty tomb and enter my empty life" because I promise you, you will live fully, not just today but for ever more. Thanks be to God.