

I've always been the type of person that re-reads books. I know it's not everyone's jam—for some people, once you have read something, you've read it, there's no point in going back. You already know what happens, all the twists and turns, so what's the point of going through all of that again when you already have all the answers. Yet for me, well it kind of got summed up by a character in the book I'm *currently* reading. She said she liked to reread her old favorites because the endings change. This of course elicited a lot of confused looks, because obviously the endings *don't* change, and yet, she explained...they do. They changed depending on where you're at in life, what you've experienced, what you've learned. Something that didn't make much of a difference the first time around might make all the difference the second or third time. Something that seemed so significant once becomes a passing detail, all depending on your life, your mood, your mindset when your fingers start turning those pages.

I have never experienced this more than I have with what I will still claim as my favorite book of all time despite my now rollercoaster history with it. From the moment *The Great Gatsby* fell into my hands, I was in love. There has always been something about it that has called to me, resonated deep in my soul. The first time I read it I was a junior in high school and I thought Gatsby and that green light at the end of Daisy's dock

were just about the most romantic thing I could ever imagine. It tugged at my heartstrings and just made me feel everything. I returned to it again when I was in college and that sway was still there, something more evocative in the era, the setting, the undertones of Nick's wrestling with trying to figure out where he belonged. Then I read it in my late twenties, turned the last page and realized that for a good portion of the book, I couldn't stand Gatsby. I thought he was annoying and whiny and basically a stalker who needed to something else to occupy his time. The last time I read it, I had a little bit more grace for everyone's experience, the reality that life takes you on journeys you don't anticipate and you have to figure out how to maneuver your boat against the tide to find a safe harbor.

How could you not want to reread a book if the experience can be that different every time? When it can be like something entirely new and unexplored each time you open the cover? Within well worn pages we find different parts of ourselves and each time we learn something a little bit deeper, we understand just a little bit more, we realize what we might have missed all the other times when we were too occupied by other interests to notice them. Sometimes we have to look at the same thing with fresh and newly opened eyes in order to fully understand what we've been reading but not fully comprehending all along.

Even before they began their lives of discipleship, before they answered the call to follow me, the disciples would have been men who generally knew the scriptures. We've found it safe to assume that the men whom Jesus called would have been relatively well-versed in their Torah, known the stories, the parallels that they were witnessing come back alive in Jesus' life, how different scenes and scenarios were those that had been spoken through the prophets. Even if they weren't fully up to par on their scripture knowledge *before* Jesus entered their lives, then you would imagine that as they spent year after year with Jesus, things started to become clearer in their minds, their knowledge expanding, connections deepening. No longer were the words of scripture just words on a scroll, but things they had experienced, witnessed, felt. Before their very eyes, scripture was coming to life, different strands of prophecy and the ways God works through God's people coming together to form a holistic picture of what it meant to believe that they were following in the footsteps of the Messiah, that he was standing right in front of them.

Yet, time and time again we have seen the disciples get it unbelievably wrong. Stories, words, messages that they've been hearing their whole lives completely misconstrued or taken the wrong way depending on where they are in their lives. They would have known the

words of Isaiah, when he said that God's servant would have to suffer, would come indeed as a *servant*, as well as a Messiah, and yet when Jesus would speak to them of his upcoming suffering and death, they wouldn't understand. None of it made sense. They would have known Amos' words of letting justice flow like an everlasting stream, and yet when Jesus spoke of care for those on the margins and a kingdom of God that was entirely opposite to the kingdom they lived in sometimes there was confusion. They would have known the scripture saying the Messiah would come to open the eyes of the blind and preach good news to the poor, and yet when Jesus performed miracles before their very eyes and opened his community to those on the margins, sometimes the disciples were more concerned about their place within the kingdom than who they were called to be as servants of the living Messiah. It's not that they didn't know the words, know how the story ended, but for where they were in their lives, some of the connections, some of the realizations just didn't click.

Now though...now in the days after the resurrection when it is time for the keys to the kingdom, the mission of the Messiah to be handed over to them, Jesus needs them to read the book one more time, to find new understanding, new revelations because they're in a completely different place in their lives than they have been before. Jesus recognizes that even as

they're standing there, physically witnessing the resurrection, they can't believe what is happening. He senses their doubts and their fears. He even says to them, I told you all of this before, while I was with you, I told you how my life, my identity was written into the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms. Yet, Jesus knows that because of where they were in their lives and journeys, they didn't get it then, so now...now they've gotta know. Jesus opens their minds to understand the words they've read their whole lives, so that they can finally see the heart of what they mean: hope, love, repentance, forgiveness. These are the things they are being called to preach in the world. These are the things they are called to proclaim to all nations in the name of Jesus, the risen one, the resurrected Lord. Now, now at this point in their lives, disciples for three years, witnesses of the resurrection, about to be commissioned for the kingdom, now, they are at a place to get it.

Jesus tells them this is what they have witnessed. A kingdom defined by love and vulnerability and grace. A kingdom open to all, which thrives on justice and equality. A kingdom defined by those it includes rather than excludes. A kingdom that is about self-sacrificial love and servanthood. A kingdom that doesn't shy away from giving of oneself for the sake of others. A kingdom that knows what real forgiveness is. A kingdom that is open to doubts but helps you understand. A kingdom that is about life. Those are

the keys to the scripture they've known for so long, those are the keys to understanding the last three years of their lives, those are the keys that will help them spread the gospel, as long as they remember that's the lens through which they came to understand who God is in the world.

I think in a lot of ways we struggle with the same thing as the disciples. Each of us in our own way, know scripture, know the things we've heard from the Bible, and yet, more often than not, we're more determined to see within them the things *we* want to see, rather than using the lens of what we know about God, about Jesus, about resurrection and life to help us understand them. I saw this comic the other day of Jesus standing in front of a lot of people holding their Bibles and he was saying, "The difference between me and you is you use scripture to determine what love means and I use love to determine what scripture means." And isn't that the truth? It doesn't matter how many times we've heard the gospel, how much we proclaim that God is all about love and grace and forgiveness and hope, when we come face to face with situations in our lives where we don't want to express those things, we will twist scripture all around to make sure that it agrees with us rather than having it line up with who we know God is and what Jesus came to teach.

So in these post-resurrection discipleship days of ours, which understanding of scripture are we going to cling to? Our own? Our own which we use to justify all kinds of hatred, inequality, oppression, and prejudice or the understanding of our risen Lord who came to show us that love is the way, forgiveness wins out, and all are equal at the foot of the cross? It is far, far easier to cling to our own understanding, to strive for what we want in the world, to define the kingdom of God in our own terms and yet that is not where the resurrection calls...

The resurrection calls us to new life, abundant life; life which is not defined by exclusion and violence, misguided judgments and bitterness, division and rage, but by a grace which knows no bounds, a love which calls to each of us exactly as we are, a hope which guides all of God's children to be a light for one another, a faith which says we may not all understand all of the time, but together, we can help each other walk the journey with acceptance and peace. At the end of the day, which understanding would we rather choose? The one that tries to twist the cross and the empty tomb into some sort of exclusive club meant for only those we accept or the one that sees those things for what they are: an open door for all of God's children to find life? We've read the story hundreds of times, turned the pages over and over, but now we must decide...which ending do we want? **AMEN!!!**