

Adult Education: First Presbyterian Church
Characters in John's Gospel
Joseph of Arimathea

John 19.38-42

38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Matthew

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Mark

42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God,

went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body* was laid.

Luke

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, 51had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. 52This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. 54It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. 55The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read all four accounts of Joseph and note how each gospel writer presents the story of Jesus' burial.
2. Which disciple, Joseph or Nicodemus strikes you as more faithful? Why?
3. What difference does it make that in John's gospel the embalming with spices takes place at the hands of Joseph and Nicodemus rather than at the hands of the women returning after the Sabbath?
4. Jewish law denied anyone condemned to death by the Sanhedrin of an honorable burial if he had committed a crime as bad as blasphemy. Which account narrates the most honorable burial? Which one the least?

5. Is Joseph a disciple of Jesus in Mark and Luke's narration of the burial? Did he become a disciple?
6. One hundred pounds of spice would be both expensive and massive, possibly covering the body or significantly occupying space in the tomb. What do you make of the large amount of burying material?
7. John has two categories of disciples, those who openly believe in Jesus and those who believe but are afraid to disclose this fact publicly. What is John telling us about Joseph's status as a disciple in this scene?
8. What is implied in John's presentation of Joseph about our own discipleship?