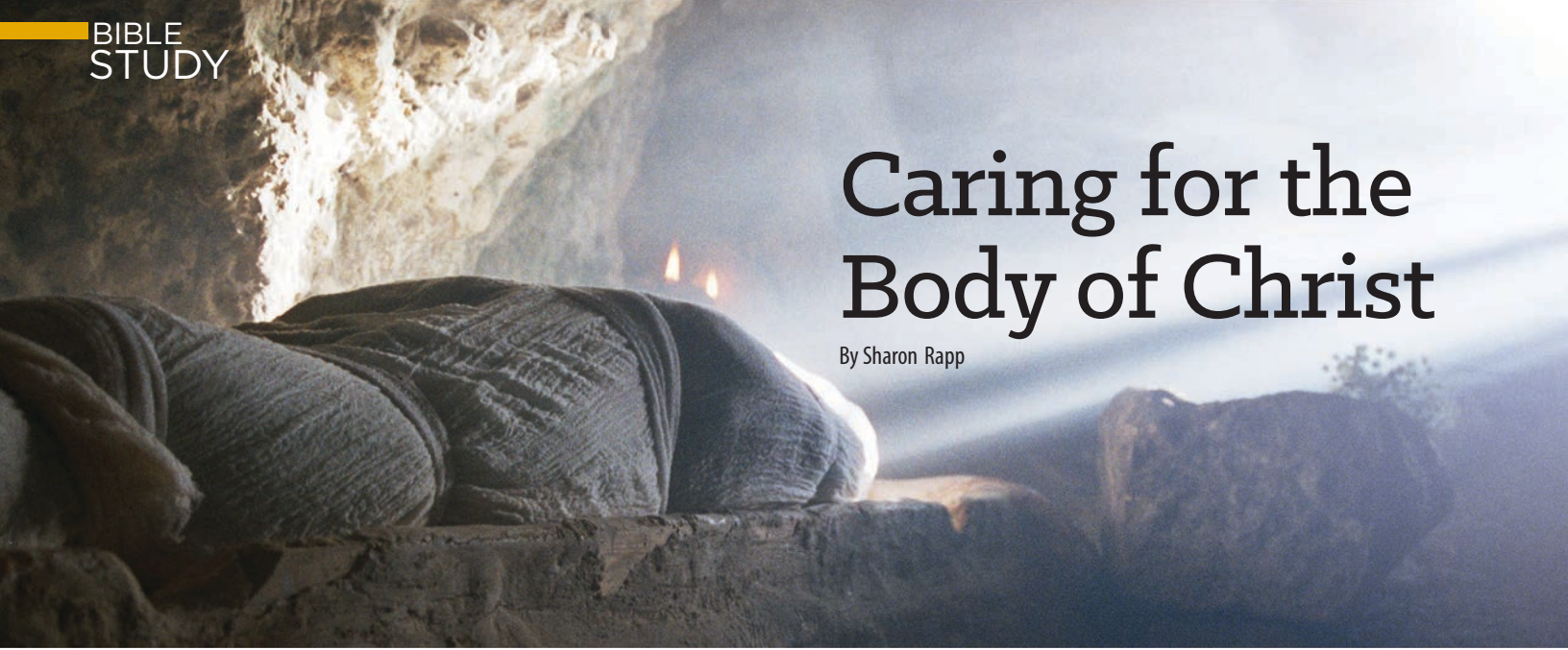


Caring for the Body of Christ

By Sharon Rapp



It is a beautiful fall day in Israel. Our small faith-based tour group walks along the Mount of Olives toward Gethsemane, singing praise songs, rejoicing that our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection gives us salvation and a living hope. We visit possible crucifixion sites, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Garden Tomb, marveling at the courage of those who risked relationships, reputation, position, uncleanness — even life! — to honor our Lord at His death.

Opening Prayer: "Where charity and love prevail There God is ever found; Brought here together by Christ's love By love are we thus bound. Let us recall that in our midst Dwells Christ, His only Son; As members of His body joined We are in Him made one." ¹ Amen.

Caring for the Physical Body of Christ

What do we learn about the care for Jesus' body provided by Joseph and Nicodemus in the following passages:

Matthew 27:55–61; Mark 15:40–47; Luke 23:50–56; and John 3:1–16, 7:50–52, 19:38–42? List several facts about the men, events, and locations.

Consider: origins; resources; professions; relationship to Jesus; timing; requests made and to whom; action taken/ care given; details of the tomb; and additional information.

Joseph of Arimathea	Nicodemus
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Fine linen and large amounts of spices were not uncommon for a royal burial. Tombs were often hollowed out of rock and included shelves around the sides for the placement of bodies. The heavy stone used to close the tomb was likely several feet in diameter. It rolled in a hewn track and was used for keeping out animals.

What do you think prompted Nicodemus to seek out Jesus?

Why might Joseph have kept his discipleship secret? See **John 12:42–43.** _____

How might this have worked in his favor in asking for Jesus' body? _____

To whom does Paul refer when he mentions Jesus' burial in **Acts 13:27–29?** _____ How does this information fit with the references to Joseph and Nicodemus? _____

Use the previous Scripture passages and categories to locate information about the women involved.

What were the temple guards instructed to do in Matthew 27:62-66 and why?

In spite of the precautions taken, what did Mary Magdalene — one of the last to leave the cross and the tomb — discover when she returned to the tomb early on the first day of the week and what were her reactions (John 20:1-18)?

Isaiah had prophesied: And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death (53:5). "Jesus is buried [in a rich man's tomb]. By sharing our human grave, He sanctifies our tombs and makes them places where our bodies can rest, confident in the resurrection. [We] honor the faithfully departed by remembering their graves and by praying for their families. As Christ burst from His tomb, so shall He raise all the dead on the Last Day."

Caring for the Spiritual Body of Christ

"Paul repeatedly describes the Church as the Body of Jesus, believers united under one head." He writes to the Ephesians: And he [God] put all things under his [Christ's] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (1:22-23).

How are the members of the Body described in the following passages?

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 24b-27
Galatians 3:27-29
Ephesians 4:4-6
Colossians 2:9-12

Using the analogy of the body, Paul expresses his concern for the unity of the church. What unities are described here?

- John 14:16-17
1 Corinthians 10:16-17
Romans 6:3-5
1 John 1:8-9

How are we to deal with other members of Christ's Body?

- John 13:34-35
1 Corinthians 1:10
Ephesians 4:1-3
1 Peter 3:8-9a

"The Church is the body of believers created and sustained by God (1 Corinthians 12), the new Israel (Galatians 6:16), people called together by faith through God's Word and Sacrament. Christians share in (1) apostolic doctrine, (2) the Lord's body and blood in Holy Communion, and (3) specific acts of mutual love."

Create a short list of loving acts that can contribute to the unity of a congregation.

Born again of water and Spirit in Baptism, we live in the promise of forgiveness, salvation, resurrection, and eternal life. In repentance and faith, we — the Body of Christ — approach the table of the Lord's Supper where we unite in receiving our Lord's body and blood. And we care for Christ's Body — local, national, international, universal — through the giving of our time, talents, and treasures.

My student travel-study group and I are now near the altar of Canterbury Cathedral when a prelate ascends the pulpit and motions for quiet. Speaking regretfully of a recent skirmish in a nearby capital, he asks that all those in his hearing pray together for unity, using the words of the Lord's Prayer. Many languages surround us and differences in words are evident. In the rhythm of the phrasing and the pauses between, however, this huge group — unrehearsed — speaks in unison and arrives simultaneously at "Amen."

When time allows:

- 1. Using a concordance, research one of the following: adelphoi, church, fellowship, member.
2. Examine one or more of the creeds and Divine Services for evidence of unity and/or caring.
3. Make an extensive list of ways to care for the Body of Christ, then choose one and put it into practice.
4. Select a hymn from the index topic "Church" and memorize one or more of its verses.

Closing Prayer: "Forgive we now each other's faults As we our faults confess, And let us love each other well In Christian holiness. Let strife among us be unknown; Let all contention cease; Be God's the glory that we seek; Be ours His holy peace." Amen.

Closing Hymn: Say or sing together verses one and six of "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" (LSB #766; LW #431; TLH #458).

1 LSB #845, verses 1 and 5; 3 and 4
2 "Key Terms and Phrases in Paul's Epistles," The Lutheran Study Bible, pages 1901-1904
3 Note on Matthew 27:57-61, The Lutheran Study Bible, page 1648

Sharon Rapp, LWQ Bible Study Editor and Heart to Heart Sister, lives in Jackson, Tennessee, where she and her husband, Mike, are members of Concordia Lutheran Church. She is president of the local LWML and served previously as president of Mid-Arkansas Zone.