

Echoes of Scripture

Easter 2a ~ John 20:19-31

Summary of John 20:19-31

Having appeared looking like a gardener to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, Jesus now appears to his disciples. Honest Thomas (AKA “Doubting Thomas”) misses out on the occasion, but fortunately Jesus appears again and invites Thomas to see, to touch and to believe.

Suggested Course of Study

- Read John 14-16 (Jesus’ farewell discourse)
- Read Genesis 1-2 (The Creation stories)
- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 (The Valley of Dry Bones)
- Read John 20:1-31 (The resurrection Appearances)

Immediate Context

John 19:17-37	The crucifixion of Jesus	John 20:19-31	Jesus appears
John 19:38-42	The burial of Jesus	John 21:1-14	Jesus appears to seven disciples
John 20:1-10	The Resurrection of Jesus	John 21:15-19	Jesus and Peter
John 20:11-18	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene	John 21:20-25	Jesus and the beloved disciple

Many scholars think that the John’s gospel originally ended with chapter 20 and that chapter 21 was added later. This makes sense when you look at verses 30 and 31. They form a natural conclusion to the gospel.

The Text¹

JOHN 20:19–31 (NRSV)

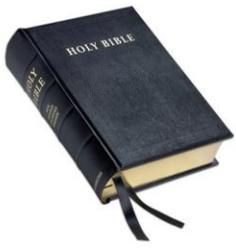
¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin^c), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

^c Gk *Didymus*



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Easter 2a ~ John 20:19-31

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe^d that Jesus is the Messiah,^e the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Key Words

WHEN IT WAS EVENING ON THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK – Notice the hint of darkness alluded to in the text. The disciples are afraid and most likely don't believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene. It is evening and the fact that it is still the first day of the week (which again draws us back to the creation story in Genesis 1:5) highlights the fact that Jesus is ushering in a new day; the new creation has begun. The light will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

DOORS OF THE HOUSE... WERE LOCKED FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS – Jesus had told the disciples that things were going to get hard. Jesus has just been crucified by those in power. No wonder they were afraid.

See John 7:10-13 ¹²“And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying ‘He is a good man,’ others were saying ‘No, he is deceiving the crowd.’” ¹³“Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.”

See John 11:7-8, 16 “Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again...’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’” “Thomas... said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’”

See John 11:45-57 ⁵³“So from that day on they planned to put him to death. ⁵⁴Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.”

See John 12:9-11 (The plot to Kill Lazarus)

See John 12:42-43 (“Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.”) Notice that many of the “authorities” believed in Jesus. It is dangerous to paint all Jews or “religious leaders” with broad strokes; to label all “Jews” or even all “those in authority” as opposed to Jesus. This clearly wasn't the case. A better way to talk about it is “those Jews who were opposed to Jesus”.

See John 14:27 “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid”

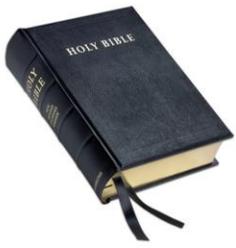
See John 15:18-21 “therefore the world hates you... if they persecuted me, they will persecute you... but they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”

See John 16:1-4 “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.”

See John 16:20-22 “Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”

^d Other ancient authorities read *may continue to believe*

^e Or *the Christ*



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Easter 2a – John 20:19-31

See John 16:32-33 “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone... I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

WHERE THE DISCIPLES HAD MET – In John’s gospel, we are not sure where this would have been. The text itself does not identify the exact location. Though, we can infer that it was likely either at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (see John 12:1-2) or at another location in a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness (see John 11:54). The home of Lazarus in Bethany is the more likely location, though if you look in the gospel of Luke, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem (see Luke 24:33).

JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID, “PEACE BE WITH YOU” – Just as the tomb could not hold Jesus back, neither can locked doors.

Jesus has come to offer Peace! The word for peace is *Εἰρήνη* in Greek. The Hebrew word for peace is *שָׁלוֹם*. The messianic expectations of peace can be seen throughout the Old Testament:

Isaiah 9:1-7 “⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (See also Isaiah 11:1-9)

Numbers 25:12 “¹²Therefore say, ‘I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. ¹³It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.’ ”

Leviticus 26:3-13 “⁶And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land.”

Isaiah 54:10 “¹⁰For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

Ezekiel 34:23-31 “²⁵I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. ²⁶I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing.”

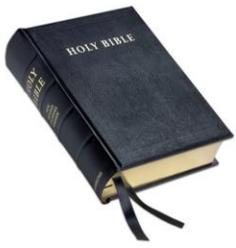
Ezekiel 37:24-28 “²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. ²⁷My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Malachi 2:4-7 “⁵My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.” (The word in Hebrew that is translated as “well-being” is the word *שָׁלוֹם*).

When Jesus comes to the disciples behind locked doors, he greets them twice with the words: “Peace be with you!” These words recall the words of comfort he gave them at the Last Supper:

John 14:25-31 “²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

John 16:33 “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”



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The one who has conquered the world (conquered suffering and death) is there standing before them, greeting them with an offering of peace.

HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE – (See John 19:31-37; Jesus' side is pierced with a spear).

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU – Throughout John's gospel, Jesus describes himself as the one who has been sent from the Father (see John 1:33; 3:31-36; 4:34; 5:23-30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16-18, 28-33; 8:16-18, 26-29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-49; 13:16-20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18-25). Jesus words here about sending the disciples into the world is reminiscent of what he said in his prayer for the disciples in chapter 17 (see especially 17:18).

THEN HE BREATHED ON THEM – See Genesis 2:7 “⁷then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” and Ezekiel 37:1-14 (the Valley of Dry Bones) which includes mention of the breath of God and the putting of God's Spirit within.

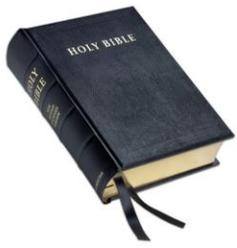
RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT – λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον. The Greek word πνεῦμα can mean “wind, breath or spirit.” In Hebrew the word is רוּחַ which also can mean “wind, breath, or spirit”. Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to the disciples. See John 7:39, 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15. Jesus also refers to the Holy Spirit as the Advocate (NRSV; helper in the NASB; counselor in the NIV and RSV; comforter in the KJV and ASV). The Greek word there is παράκλητος which means “helper, encourager, mediator”. In Luke-Acts, the Holy Spirit is received at Pentecost, but here it is given by Jesus through his breath.

RETAIN THE SINS OF ANY – Is this verse prescriptive or descriptive? Does Jesus give them power and authority? Or does Jesus describe what happens when people forgive or not?

THOMAS – See John 11:16 (where Thomas courageously invites all the disciples to join Jesus as he heads to Jerusalem to die); John 14:5 (where Thomas is confused by Jesus' talk of going to the father); and John 21:2 (where Jesus appears on the shore to a group of them while they are fishing in the Sea of Tiberias). Many call him “doubting Thomas”, but perhaps we should call him Courageous Thomas, Confused Thomas, or Casting (nets) Thomas. My favorite is “Honest Thomas”. Thomas doesn't ask to do anything that hasn't already been granted to the other disciples. He is honest about his need for proof and reassurance that this Jesus (who has been resurrected and who has triumphed over death) is the same Jesus who was crucified on the cross.

UNLESS I SEE... I WILL NOT BELIEVE – Thomas needs to see for himself. He wants to see what the others have seen, what Mary Magdalene has seen. Remember, Jesus showed the other disciples the marks of the nails in his hands. He showed them his side. Thomas wants to see what they have seen. And notice that Jesus obliges. He doesn't scold Thomas. He doesn't withhold the evidence. He shows him. “Seeing is believing.” Also notice that, though Jesus invites Thomas to touch, the text never says that Thomas touched Jesus. Instead he sees Jesus. Jesus speaks to him. And he answers in faith.

DO NOT DOUBT BUT BELIEVE – καὶ μὴ γίνου ἀπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός “But do not be without belief (unbelieving), but believe.” Thomas gets the name doubting Thomas because he shares his honest questions about whether or not Jesus is alive. But Thomas simply wants the same proof that the others received. He wants to see the marks of the nails that Jesus had shown to them. When Jesus appears to Thomas, he gives him what he wants. He shows him the marks and says “Do not doubt but believe.” A wonderful response to someone who needed something more, because to Jesus and to the gospel writer, believing brings life: “*these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20:31).



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MY LORD AND MY GOD – Most scholars agree that chapter 20 was the original ending of this gospel. If this is the case, Thomas’ answer in verse 28 becomes even more significant as the final testimony to the identity of Jesus. Just three verses later the gospel will come to an end. What is interesting is that the declaration that Jesus was and is God serve as book ends to the gospel of John. This declaration occurs at the very beginning and at the very end. Thomas’ testimony matches the testimony of the gospel writer in the prologue *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

THESE ARE WRITTEN SO THAT YOU MAY COME TO BELIEVE – There is a purpose for writing down the words and actions of Jesus; this testimony about Jesus. “Blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe.” Not everyone will get to experience Jesus as Thomas did, or as the disciples did. Jesus won’t appear to everyone and invite them to see and to touch. But we will have to rely on the testimony of others; the stories that are shared; passed down from generation to generation. Notice the footnote in this verse. Other ancient authorities read “may continue to believe” rather than “may come to believe.”

LIFE IN HIS NAME – For the notion of “life” in John’s gospel, see John 1:4; 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:21-29, 39-40; 6:27-68; 8:12; 10:10-17, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2-3. For “In his name” see John 1:12; 2:23.

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