

## **“Has Jesus been pursuing you?”**

### **John 20:19-31**

Our Monday night and Wednesday morning adult Bible study studied the gospel of John this past winter. The last week in February, we took a close look at today’s gospel text when the resurrected Christ makes two appearances to his disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem.

To give you a sense of what our adult Bible studies are like, this is the first discussion question for this text . . . “Use your imagination. Where do you think Thomas was when Jesus appeared to the others?”

Some believed Thomas was being very practical and was out shopping for food. Jim Badowski thought that Thomas might be out mixing among the people, getting a “pulse” for what the people and the authorities were saying.

Some believed Thomas was one of those people who didn’t want to be around other people when he was grieving and want some “alone” time. Some thought Thomas might be the type to go to the local pub and try to drown his sorrows.

Whatever the reason, Thomas was not locked up in the house where the other disciples were hiding out the day after the resurrection. They were locked up “for fear of the Jews when Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”

To hear Jesus say, “peace be with you” would have been very comforting for the disciples who were hiding in fear behind locked doors when the resurrected Jesus suddenly is with them behind locked doors!

They had heard these words before. After his last supper, Jesus said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Just before leaving the upper room to go to the garden, Jesus tells them in 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!”

So Jesus’ greeting was very familiar to his disciples. Apparently it calmed them down enough to handle what Jesus is going to do and say next in verses 20-21 . . . “After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’”

The disciples have gone from “huddling behind locked doors in fear to rejoicing when they saw the Lord”.

Mary Magdalene had answered all their questions about what she saw, heard, and experienced at the garden tomb. The disciples had wondered if what she said had really happened. Peter and John confirmed the body was missing, but they never saw Jesus. Yet something about the passion and details of Mary Magdalene’s story makes them want to believe it’s true. But rather than taking Mary’s word for it, they have to see the Lord. They have to see the holes in his wrists and his side. Seeing is believing.

“Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’”.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Another discussion question from our Bible study, “What biblical images come to mind when you reflect on this scene?”

Genesis 2:7 – Then 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”. We’re not talking about c-pap machines here!

John the Baptist teaching in John 1:33 – I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

John 3:34 – He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

John 14:17 – This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

Through our faith in Christ, through our Holy Communion with Christ and with one another, we see Christ in one another.

We especially see Christ in the faces of our brothers and sisters in need.

Matthew 25:37-39 . . . <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

The Holy Spirit in each of us empowers us to see Christ in one another.

Thomas hasn't learned that yet. He was out of the room and hasn't seen Jesus. Before he will believe, Thomas demands to see and touch Jesus wounds.

John 20:24-25 . . . <sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>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."

Do you think Thomas' demand to see and touch Jesus' wounds is reasonable? Why or why not?

Linda's immediate response: "How would Thomas know that they weren't just messing with him?" Linda grew up with 3 brothers and gave birth to two sons. She knows how men interact with one another, mess with one another, and don't listen to the Mary Magdalene's of the world.

In what ways are Thomas' demands still prevalent today?

We agreed that today there are many doubting Thomas's for whom seeing is believing. Jim pointed out that because of our faith in science and the incredible advancements in medical knowledge and technology; we are much less likely to believe in miracles or healings unless they can be scientifically explained. For us to believe it, we want proof just as Thomas wanted proof. Thomas is willing to hang out with the disciples for the next week to hopefully see for himself.

John 20:26-29 . . . <sup>26</sup>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." <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>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."

Why do you think Jesus reappeared to the disciples and addresses Thomas' struggle with faith?

Some of us thought that Jesus reappeared out of his love for his disciples and wanted them all to see him, wanted them all to believe in the resurrection. Others thought that Jesus was teaching a good lesson to all of us who have doubts for all time. Just as the good shepherd would go in search of the one lost sheep so would Jesus reappear to the one disciple who did not believe.

Jesus pursues Thomas. He specifically reveals himself to Thomas, inviting Thomas to touch his scars. In what ways has Jesus been pursuing you?

We all agreed that Jesus has been pursuing us. He pursues us to come to Bible Study, to study scripture together, and to learn from one another. We see Christ in one another when we listen to how people read the same scripture differently and how we can then learn from one another.

Jesus had been pursuing two of our Monday night participants, Devon and Amber, teenagers in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, to come to Bible study to help her prepare to be baptized and to help him prepare to affirm his baptism in the Rite of Confirmation. Amber told us that she started out knowing nothing about the Bible. Through listening on Monday nights she now knows the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and is ready to be baptized as his follower.

She will be baptized and he will be confirmed when we combine them into one upcoming Saturday night worship time.

How has Jesus been pursuing you? Divinity is full of opportunities to learn and to serve. You just need to show up.

Thomas spent 3 years showing up to witness Jesus' miracles and to listen to his teaching. Yet he refuses to believe until he sees him. What are some things about God that are still hard for you to believe or wrap your mind around?

Some of our thoughts – the universe, creation, eternity, forgiveness, the free will that allows us to murder, to destroy ourselves, to destroy our planet and yet the promise of a new creation and resurrection life. There's a lot that's difficult to wrap our minds around.

One last thought and question. Jesus' appearance after the resurrection is consistent with all he has promised, taught, and declared. What changes about being a follower of Jesus Christ after the resurrection?

We agreed that the resurrection changes everything. Now we are free to serve, love, forgive, and to take risks, knowing this life is just the very beginning of eternity.

May the peace of God . . .

#635 – We Walk By Faith