

Sent

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Jn. 20:19-31

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Thomas catches our attention in this gospel reading.

“Doubting Thomas” gets a bad rap.

He is not around when Jesus shows up and so doesn’t get first-hand look.

We don’t get a first-hand look either.

A common evangelism method is confrontation until resistance breaks:

accept Jesus as your personal Savior!

Against all reason and common sense, ascribe to a religious assertion because someone tells you to.

Believe!

Doubting Thomas gives us all pause—and gives us a period of grace.

Jesus showed up and the first thing he says is *not* ***“Believe!”***

Jesus showed up and the first thing he said was, “Peace be with you.”

In all your struggles and worries and confusion, “Peace.”

Wherever you are on your faith journey, for whatever reasons you are here, whatever questions you have,
first and above all, “Peace be with you.”

The very first thing Jesus says to us all is, “Peace. I am here. You will be okay.

God is still your god and is bringing about a better day.

Peace!”

But I am getting ahead of the story.

Things have really gotten messed up in America.

Our country has gone off the rails and grown-up, common-sense has disappeared.

Tirades on Twitter have taken the place of coherent platform.

Disorganized impulse substitutes for measured policy.

Name-calling, subverting institutional authority, disregard for ethics and practice

challenges our constitutional premise of separation of powers and the authority of each.

Truth is shucked for whim.

Respect for differences is trampled by bullying.

Anger dominates curiosity.

Outrage takes the place of listening.

Truth, facts, veracity, reality are defamed as “political opinion.”

This is *not normal*.

This is *not progress*.

This is *not safe!*

America is torn by idiocy!

In all this chaotic nonsense and vitriol and rancor

Jesus says to us also, “Peace.”

Take a breath.

Pause to collect.

Jesus is still our Lord.

God is still ruler of this age and this place.

We all can get along as nice people.

There was a time when *wisdom* was valued more winning,

when preparing for *life* was more important than preparing for a job,

when the *character* of a person mattered more than their “so-called success,”

and what counted most was not what one did in life but *who one was*.

And there was a time when truth was not *what we* would want it to be,

but truth was *understanding* how the world works,

how God is acting in this world,

and one’s place in God’s schemes.

Truth is *God’s way* in this world.

What's most important is not dominating and winning.
 What's most important is seeing *what God is doing*
 and *knowing our place* in God's grand scheme.
 Truth is, people in this world don't need a personality dominating,
 but someone taking time to care,
 taking time to share life's struggles and joys,
 taking time to show God's love to one another.
Truth is, church is not so much about doing stuff
as it is being holy people for each other.
 Church is about being there for one another.

But Thomas was left out.
 Thomas was away when Jesus came.
 All the others know truth,
 but Thomas was left out of seeing Jesus.
 Now people do not automatically believe truth and reject lies.
 It's not an obvious or automatic, logical thing.
 You know people do get worn down
 by the incessant, repeated lies told by those in power,
 and some will eventually come to believe the lies.
 And you know the truth at times is difficult to hear
 that people would rather pretend it isn't so.
 The son is gay.
 The husband drinks too much.
 The wife is unhappy.
 It's easier to pretend it isn't so.
 We need people to tell us truth.
 We need each other to keep us honest.
 And we need church to love us
 when the truth about life is hard.
 Belief, faith is too hard by ourselves.
 We need others to believe with us,
 to carry us in faith when we doubt,
 to hold to truth when we would rather avoid it.

Thomas was gone.
 The best person he had ever known was killed.
 All of them despaired.
 All of the disciples grieved the death of Jesus,
 but worse, they could not appear in public
 because of the hate of so many against them.
 They locked themselves away in fear.
 But Thomas was gone when Jesus came.
 He did not see truth appear.
 His grief hardened him to hope
 and hardened him to the pleas of friends.

Others saw.
 Others were there when Jesus appeared.
 Others know truth.
 Others know what God has done.
 Yet hearing their testimony did not change Thomas' heart.
 First-hand witnesses of God's deeds could not convince Thomas.
 It took Jesus *coming back* for Thomas,
 Jesus *coming back* for the one lost lamb out of the hundred,
 it was Jesus appearing *for him*
 that Thomas could believe.

Disbelief shuts one's mind to truth.
 And no amount of argument or proof or verifiable evidence
 will jar loose disbelief.
 People like Thomas, who set their minds in concrete
 and refuse to admit they might be wrong,
 will not be convinced by first-hand witnesses.
 Sometimes it takes an act of God to crack heads of stone
 —and that's where we come in.

In the middle of the doubting Thomas story,
 Jesus grants *peace*.
 You can imagine those shut up behind locked doors fearing for their life
 were a little *spooked* when Jesus just suddenly is standing there!
 Multiply that startle by stress of persecution
 and you can be sure the disciples jumped a bit when Jesus showed.
 And so speaking, "Peace," is not a mere, "Howdy, how's it going."
 Jesus gives *real peace* that calms jangled nerves
 and reassures that God is in charge and all is well.
 Twice he gives, "Peace,"
 a *double* dose of grace.

And then Jesus gives the church its reason and destiny,
 "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
 God in the highest heavens sent Jesus
 to reconcile our relationship with God and make amends.
 Jesus was sent to reveal God and bring about God's ways on earth.
 Now Jesus turns that work over to us.

Church is not about members joining a club and hanging out with coffee.
 This great commission of Jesus in John 20, verse 21,
 is about *church people sent out*.
 In verse 21, Jesus gives the church its great commission,
 it's purpose and our calling in God's kingdom,
 "*As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.*"
 Church is not a one-hour-a-week event.
 Church is not some place we go to for religion.
 Church is not a family of people like us and where we belong.
 Church is *God's people living out* God's ways in God's world
 seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.
 Church is *God's people appearing suddenly* in an unlikely, locked-up world,
 and bearing the peace of Jesus that calms nerves and gives hope.
 Church is God's people
 taking time to be with distressed colleagues,
 speaking up in work places when something offensive is said,
 refusing to give in to the hype and frenzy of radio rants,
 choosing right and good over familiar and easy.
 Church is God's people sent into the world,
 to be the way God corrects and forgives and restores and loves.
 Church is what you, God's people, do that cares about people,
 that builds up and gives hope and makes right and keeps safe and loves.
 That is what God's kingdom is all about.
 That is what God's rule and way of life is all about,
 you and me living as God's people in a hurting world.

But to some extent we all share Thomas' doubt.

How do we know what we are saying *is true*?
 How do we know what we are doing is *what God wants*?
 What if nobody wants to listen to us talk religion?
 What if I can't convince someone to come to church?

Truth is, Jesus is not asking that of us.

Jesus does not expect us to offer overwhelming, convincing argument for faith.

Jesus does not expect us to have answers or well-phrased beliefs.

Jesus does not expect us to have a plan for bringing people to church.

The only thing Jesus says in John 20, verse 21 is, "...so I send you."

We are the message.

We are the evidence of God.

*We are the answer and truth of God's gospel
 of forgiveness, new life and love.*

*You and I are the fact of God who forgives and loves,
 because we have received that forgiveness and love
 and we know it and we share it!*

*We don't have answers,
 we are answers.*

*We don't give proof,
 we are proof.*

The peace we bring to a clanging place,
 the time we give to a stressed colleague,
 the patience we show to contrary thought,
 the anchor we be for chaotic emotion,
 the welcome we are to the disregarded,
 is Jesus returning,
 is God's kingdom,
 is church *sent*.

We are God's answers to those who question religion.

We are the proof of God forgiving and making right.

We are the evidence and truth of a loving God, a merciful God.

We are the truth and fact of God's kingdom now come.

And so Jesus sends us to show the world.

Amen.