

John 20 contains four stories around the resurrection. The first two: the empty tomb and Mary and the gardener, we read last week. They serve as the last act of the gospel of John. It began with the majestic prologue of the first chapter which retells and reframes the story of creation (Genesis 1-2). Here, at the very end of the gospel of John, we return to the garden where Mary (and we by extension as the readers) experience the living resurrected Christ, it's a re-entry into the Garden of Eden, a re-creation, all things becoming new. Here it's the second scene of the last act. New creation shifts to the image of God breathing the breath of life (the spirit) into humankind to give life, first in Genesis 2:7 and then echoed here in the locked room into which Jesus comes and makes all things new. It's not just their story, but our story of faith, journey, recreation and being sent as apostles in his name as the last verse makes clear.

**FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS::** In the other gospels fear marks the guards and the woman as they see the angelic messengers in the tomb. Here in John it's the Jews, rather than angelic visions, that cause the fear..either because they fear being persecuted by the Jewish authorities as Jesus was; or because they fear being accused by the Jewish authorities of complicity in the stealing or disappearance of the body of Jesus.

**Peace be with you::** In Rabbinical Judaism this was the ordinary greeting. It's also used throughout the testimonies of the Bible as a formula of revelation to Gideon in Judges 6:23; as expression of reassurance by Jesus after walking on the water in John 6:20; Mark 6:50; Matthew 14:27; as an angelic reassurance to Daniel in 20:19 and to Mary in Luke 1:28. Here it seems to be more than an ordinary greeting. It's more than a wish of peace. After the resurrection it is a statement of fact. Notice how it's repeated three times in this narrative section. It also points back (as the realization of) to the promise made by Jesus in John 14:25-27 <sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>**Peace** 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.”

**his hands and his side::** curiously Jesus here shows these, then later with Thomas it's a question of his hands and feet.

**As the Father sent me::** the word sent in Greek is the word “apostellein” from which we derive the word “Apostle.” At the heart of this notion of being an apostolic follower of Jesus is the active movement of being sent into mission, with a mission. It is the fruition of the prayer of Jesus in John 17:13-21 for his followers. <sup>13</sup>“But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil ... <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not

<sup>19</sup>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.”** <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, **“Peace be with you.** As the Father has **sent** me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, **he breathed on them** and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<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.”

<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**

one.<sup>16</sup> They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.<sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.<sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

<sup>20</sup> "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

**he breathed on them::** the noun for breath (pneuma) in Greek means breath, spirit, ghost. Here as a verb it evokes the action of God's creative breath in Genesis 2:7 "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,... 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." As earlier in John 20:1-18 in which the final story is back in garden (as in Genesis 1) John tells the story with the major theme of resurrection as a new creation, or re-creation. This also can be seen as a baptism (in) to new life when looking to the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus in John 3:3-5 : "<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered [Nicodemus], "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without **being born of water and Spirit.**"

**forgive the sins::** or "to release, let go" of their sins. Throughout John we've seen sin portrayed as deliberate blindness: refusing to see what God is doing in and through Jesus.

**Thomas (who was called the Twin)::** The name Thomas in Greek means "twin." It's curious, or maybe intended, that Thomas is two-minded, with both a doubting and believing role. He personifies apostolic doubt, the need for proof overcome with faith or trust.

**Do not doubt but believe::** literally this phrase can be translated as "do not become unbelieving but believing." It's an active sentence, an dynamic invitation to Thomas to not need the physicality of the touch of the wounds in order to choose trust and belief. The text does not portray Thomas as actually touching the wounds.

**MY LORD AND MY GOD::** This confession of faith by Thomas seems to be the climactic identification of Jesus who has been identified with many names, titles by others [including word, King of Israel, Elijah, Prophet, Son of God, Lamb of God, Messiah]; and self-identified in the seven "I am" statements" in the gospel. [ I am the bread of life (6:35, 48, 51); the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the door of the sheep (10:7, 9); the good shepherd (10:11, 14); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way, the truth, and the life (14:6); and the true vine (15:1).

**you::** The gospel form has limited the good news to a story narrated about others, here in the final verse (as many don't see chapter 21 as primary) John breaks the literary formatting and has Jesus speak directly to the implicit audience – the readers of the gospel – us.

**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."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.<sup>31</sup> But 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.

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- **What shimmers for you in this story?**
- **John 20 gives 4 examples of coming to faith: 1. John the disciple running to the tomb who sees the linen strips 2. Mary Magdalene called by name by the garden; 3. The disciples who see Jesus in 20:19-23; and 4. Thomas. With which do you identify as per your own faith journey? How?**
- **Resurrection is a dynamic new creation. A baptism. It's not just a static receiving, but also a consequential sending (remember that's what the word apostle means!). How are we (you) sent into the world? To do what? To be what? How do we live that out together as a faith community?**