

John 20:19-31, Year B, Easter 2

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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To begin with the end ...

[Verses 30-31 \(NRSV\)](#) state the purpose for which John has written this Gospel.

Note the direct address to **YOU**, the reader.

But these are written so that **YOU** ...

John is not writing an abstract treatise for whoever may happen to come upon it. He is writing with a very specific audience in mind. Namely, those second and third generation believers who are under-going severe persecution at the hands of the current Roman Emperor. (And, now, also to you and me.)

Malina & Rohrbaugh make two points about the English NRSV translation.

The first is that "believe" in John is better translated as "believe into." In John, "believe" does **NOT** mean "hold an opinion about." "Believe" means "trust," "bond with," "be loyal to." Think, "I am the vine and you are the branches." That is what "believe" means.

The second is that in this context, "may come to believe" and "may come to have life" could also be translated as: "may continue to believe" and "may continue to have life."

In either case, it is important to note that "believe" is not the end product. The crucial thing is that:

through believing, **you may have life in his name.**

That is, the questions we must be asking ourselves as we consider the various signs that John has chosen to write down for us are:

How does this help me to have life?

And not just any old sort of life, but the life that is in Jesus - in his name?

These are the questions to ask of the whole Gospel, and today, of Verses 19-29.

But to begin again with a personal aside ... If you feel anxious or uncertain about talking calmly and matter-of-factly about these appearances of the now-resurrected-Jesus, try reading [this note](#) about why we in the Western world have so much trouble with "spiritual" realities; or [this one](#) about not letting current science be the sole arbitrator of what is really real.

And now to begin with the beginning ...

Whereas in his appearance to Mary, Jesus could not be touched because he was in the process of ascending to his Father (John 20:17), this process is completed by the evening, and the now-resurrected-Jesus (presumably) descends from his Father to appear to the disciples.

Verses 19 and 26. The Galilean disciples are behind locked doors in fear that the Judean authorities (not "the Jews") would seek to have them arrested. The authorities were trying to obliterate Jesus and his "movement." The authorities would most certainly act against this group if they were found out.

Just as Jesus had spoken of these things at the Last Supper (John 14 and following), the now-resurrected-Jesus performs 3 actions:

1. He blesses them with his peace.
2. He blesses them with the Holy Spirit.
3. He makes them his agents to forgive - or retain - sins.

The latter is significant for the followers of Jesus because it replaces the Temple and sin offerings as the location and means for reconciliation with God and fellow believers.

But Thomas is not with the others. Where is Thomas? Christian Schwarz, [The 3 Colors of Ministry](#), makes an interesting observation that while Thomas' doubting has the constructive effect of providing the occasion for deepening Jesus' teaching; it also has the negative effect of weakening Thomas' bonding with his compatriots.

Notice that in Verse 25, the disciples echo the testimony first given by Mary Magdalene, "I have seen the Lord." It is this acknowledgement / acclamation that Thomas also uses later when the now-resurrected-Jesus appears to him: "My Lord."

Notice that though Jesus says to Thomas, "Put your finger here," the text does not actually say that Thomas did indeed touch Jesus. Instead, the response of Thomas is to the last instruction from Jesus, "Do not doubt but believe." (And see above about "believe.")

The episode ends with the now-resurrected-Jesus blessings those who - like us - trust and bond with the now-resurrected-Jesus without seeing.

But that is the whole point John tries to make throughout the whole Gospel.

John doesn't care that we see what is seen with our eyeballs. He wants us to **SEE** who Jesus really is. That is why he has written these signs for us. That in **SEE**ing, we might believe; and in believing, we might have the life that is in Jesus.

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Do you have the life that is in Jesus? Can you see it? Feel it? Know it? Glimpse it? Sense it? Walk in it? Then you have been blessed. Bring that blessing to the world that is seen with eyeballs.

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