

## SUMMARY: JESUS' RESURRECTION APPEARANCE (John 20:19-31)

John's Gospel is understood originally to have ended with the words of today's text, with Chapter 21 understood to be a later addition, although also by John. The passage describes the transition from Jesus' actual historical presence and life as the primary pointer to God's Presence on earth, to the empowering of the disciples/ the Church to being so. This launches the Church's primary purpose – which is for us to continue Christ's work of bearing witness to God in the world – our main work being to be pointing to God's sacred presence everywhere - *the veil of the temple separating the sacred from the mundane has been torn open* - now no longer any separation! It's the calling of all humanity to come back to realizing that!

And so we come to this 'Mystery'<sup>i</sup> of the risen Christ appearing with the disciples as they were hunkered down behind those locked doors. Our text begins by describing how they were just terrified. And of course they were. They'd just seen the venomous effects of Rome's acquiescence to Sanhedrin hatred: the brutal & bloody Roman execution of their precious leader. Were they now going to be next on that hit list?

We're told how they were all gathered together in that upper room, probably the same upper room that they had all just been in a few nights ago as they'd had their Last Supper together. All there, but not Thomas who we're specifically told was not with them. We're not told why Thomas wasn't there, just that he wasn't. We do know that he was no coward. In fact, earlier, when Jesus decided to return to Jerusalem after Lazarus' death, it was Thomas who urged them all to go with him '*that we might die with him*<sup>ii</sup>'. ...definitely no coward. It's been suggested that he was alone because he was in grief and couldn't bear to see anyone.<sup>iii</sup>

That's when Jesus appeared to the others... Some believe Jesus' resurrection body must have had the capacity to pass through physical barriers perhaps by de-materializing and then reconstituting itself, but I don't think our knowing how it happened is the point. The point is that Jesus appeared! And - *despite the fact that his appearing on the inside of locked-doors made utterly no logical sense at all* - they were given to believe it. But again, not all of them. Because Thomas was not there, and he was honest enough when told about it to proclaim that he could not believe until he too was given to see.

Notice: it wasn't that he WOULD not believe, but that in all honesty he COULD not believe! Literally: '*by no means will I be able to believe...*' unless I too get to see! I love that. I understand that it was Alfred Lord Tennyson who once wrote that: '*There lies more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds*'. And that's just what Thomas was expressing. Honest, doubting, disbelief is very different from the stubborn choice of deliberate and intentional unbelief. Thomas was saying, in a sense, that he wanted to believe but that in order to do so he was going to need help.

When he received the help he needed, he was immediately able to make one of the most profoundly faithful confessions of all scripture: '*My Lord, and My God!*'

We're also told that Thomas was called the 'Twin', but we're not told of whom. Some believe that's intentional, that he is our twin – the reader – that we are intended to see ourselves in him! After Jesus did what is necessary to bring him to faith, Jesus went on. He spoke of how while Thomas was being given to believe because of what he had seen and felt, the days were coming when there would be those who'd be blessed to believe even when they were not able, physically, to see...

All those disciples came ultimately to be transformed as a result of their encounter with the risen Christ. They all came to know how they had been exposed to something/ONE greater than all the sum of their locked-in fears. They were being given to glimpse resurrection – the risen Christ was being revealed to them as very present in their lives - and what a difference that made. They became this unstoppable force of life and 'poured-out' love as they were moved/ impelled/ compelled to go out to share their new experiential knowledge of God with everyone!

There's room for us. Our faith in the risen Jesus Christ is intended to be spacious enough for all the room we need for our own personal doubting! We do not all come to the same realization of resurrection - in the same way. And yet, we ARE all still somehow given to glimpse it, often even despite our worst attempts to withdraw into ourselves, or hide behind locked doors

Some still do see the physical presence of the risen Jesus Christ as something somehow external to us ...over there with us over here reaching out in worship, or passively awaiting our orders. Others understand something infinitely more intimate, that this is about the risen Christ manifesting the disciple's miraculous rise of faith. We may see the risen Christ's presence as actually incarnating their burgeoning awareness/ their opening up to a whole new way of knowing & being/ of understanding themselves/ others/ all creation. Christ's resurrection is about them being given to re-embrace an understanding of their whole God-given identity and purpose – something which they had previously allowed to become so limited!

Cynthia Bourgeault writes of 'Imaginal' knowing – also called Noadic knowing<sup>iv</sup>. I think I'm calling it 'RESURRECTION-KNOWING!' This isn't about something we just get to make up and control, but rather a rising awareness of something infinitely more objective and real. Christ's resurrection is about our dawning realization of the world far more real and holy and eternal than simply the transient order of just all this. It's about our embracing what some have called an objectively higher order of coherence and clarity.

The way of the risen Christ is a way of sensing and being and knowing beyond simply the obvious and temporal/ beyond the linear, objective, egoic. It is a SOUL-knowing. Profoundly syncretistic: allowing our recognizing of how, in Him now out of the tomb, all things are being revealed as having come together!

This is about something so much deeper than even our very best cleaned up 'egoic' knowing! It's a knowing drawn by the risen Christ out from the very center of who and what we all already are.

It's a knowing that puts us properly back in touch with the eternal God of beauty and life and love and justice and compassion, justice and healing hope right here within us and within all creation! This is our 'risen-in-Christ' awareness of how our lives are being touched, our hearts opened! That is what He breathed into existence with his exhalation of 'SHALOM' 'PEACE' It is still what the poured-out Holy Spirit does: opening our eyes to reveal the holiness of God everywhere and in everything! And once we are in touch with that kind of knowing/ that foundationally undergirding sense of God's most real reality – well, that is an empowering that even death is not able to end.

By Jesus breathing out God's Holy Spirit, he was doing here for the disciples what God<sup>v</sup> had done with the creation of Adam, (*meaning humanity*) - you know, after God formed him from the dirt and breathed LIFE into him. It's what we see bringing life to the dead bones in Ezekiel's<sup>vi</sup> vision as the wind (*RUACH*) blew and those valley bones grew flesh and came alive.

And so, here, in today's post-Easter, resurrection text, we see John describing not only the birth, but also the whole purpose, life, witness and authority of the Church. *Just as Jesus Christ is related to God, so we see are to see the Church now being related to Jesus Christ. What had once been the mission of Jesus Christ alone, is now the whole mission and purpose of the Christ-worshipping church.*

Where does this leave you? What are you most hearing in all of this today? How aware are you of Christ's risen presence in your life? How are you coming alive as Christ breathes God's Holy Spirit into you? How open are your eyes to see Christ's risen holiness everywhere? How quickened are your hands and feet to serve him?

O may this BE the air that we breathe...

***And so, closer than our breathing, thank you Dear God for who you are, for what you are doing, and for revealing yourself, even now, within us and all around us.***

***Thank you for the risen work of your Son, Jesus Christ.***

***Thank you that we are starting to believe that there is nothing anymore that has the power to separate us from you and your love even as you dwell into all creation.***

***May we come to believe that Holy truth more,***

***May we come to live that Holy truth better***

***For we pray, in Jesus Christ' Name***

***Amen***

Rev Robin Jacobson

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<sup>i</sup> But again, as I say 'Mystery' - remember – it's not because it's meaning can't be known, but because it can only ever be infinitely known... Infinitely so... We may never come to the end of it because there's always more to understand, more for us to be impacted by as we chew on this wonderful truth of Christ's resurrection...

<sup>ii</sup> John 11:16

<sup>iii</sup> Perhaps his biggest obstacle had been his allowing his grief to take him out of community. 'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there', Jesus had elsewhere said...

<sup>iv</sup> Blog post interview Encountering Silence: Silence and the Imaginal realm (Part 1 and 2)

<sup>v</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>vi</sup> Ezekiel 37