

Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-5-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 20:19-31

¹⁹When 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.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.”

²⁶A 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.” ²⁷Then 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.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

¹⁹When 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.”

“That day” is Easter day. This account takes place after John’s account of the Resurrection in which Mary Magdalene alone discovers the empty tomb. She runs to tell Peter and “the beloved disciple,” who race to the tomb and then return home. Mary then encounters the risen Christ. The disciples, meanwhile, gather in fear behind locked doors, presumably in the same home in which they shared their last night with Jesus. That Easter evening, Jesus appeared to them.

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Jesus’ showing of his hands and side functions to confirm Jesus’ identity to his disciples. Although Jesus now apparently can transport through closed and locked doors, his body is still recognizable in part by the wounds he received on the cross. Jesus gives the disciples peace a second time and then greets them with a somewhat ominous command: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” This phrase has different layers of meaning—on the one hand, it reminds us of John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” And again, John 3:17—“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” In part, Jesus is sending the disciples to continue this mission of salvation and love. On a more ominous note, though, we know the Son was sent in part to die. Jesus is also sending his disciples to share in his suffering.

²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

In John’s story, this is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus from John 15—that he will send the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) to lead the disciples into all truth. This is quite a contrast from Luke’s version in Acts 2 when the Spirit comes upon the church 50 days after Easter at Pentecost. In truth, the Spirit has been since the beginning and comes upon the church again and again. Jesus’ words about forgiving and retaining sins may sound strange to our ears. In John’s gospel, “sin” does not refer to individual (or even corporate) moral failings or wrong actions. Rather, to sin is to fail to recognize and trust in Jesus. Therefore, to forgive sins would involve

helping bring others to faith. Jesus is commissioning this community of believers to go and continue his work of “taking away the sin of the world.”

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It is impossible to know where Thomas was that evening, but his absence is intriguing. He is often labeled as “Doubting Thomas,” but his request seems reasonable, as he is only asking for the same evidence the others have already received. His unwillingness to believe the testimony of his fellow disciples underscores the challenge this new community has before it—they have to go and proclaim the resurrection to people who would never see the risen Christ first-hand.

²⁶A 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.”

The disciples gather again the next Sunday evening. This is the start of a pattern of worshipping weekly on Sundays that the early church developed. This pattern continues to this day. This time, however, Thomas was present with the others. Also, this time, notice the doors are shut, but no longer locked. Jesus bids the whole community peace again.

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Jesus meets Thomas’s conditions eagerly, bidding him to come and get the “proof” he desires. Thomas’s response echoes Nathanael’s confession of faith from John 1:49. Likewise, Jesus’ response to him echoes Jesus’ response to Nathanael in John 1:50-51.

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

Verses 30 and 31 seem to be a logical conclusion point to the gospel. “These” signs could either refer only to the events of chapter 20 or to all the signs written in the gospel. At the very least, Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances are included as “signs” that Jesus did. “Signs” in John’s gospel point beyond themselves to a greater truth about Jesus. For instance, his “sign” of changing water into wine pointed to his abundance. His “sign” of healing a man born blind pointed to the fact that he is the “light of the whole world.” Here, his “signs” of appearing after the Resurrection point to the fact that Jesus has completed his hour of glorification.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think Jesus bids the disciples “Peace be with you” more than once?**
- 2. Do you think it is significant that at first the doors were locked, but a week later they were merely shut? Why?**
- 3. If you had to give Thomas a moniker besides “Doubting Thomas,” what would it be? Why?**