

Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-18-2022

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.

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The first paragraph of this lesson occurs on Easter evening. That morning, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene alone in the garden where he was buried, according to John. Jesus commanded Mary to go and tell the others what she had seen, which she does. The disciples gather that evening (all except Thomas) and are locked behind doors out of fear of those who put Jesus to death. Jesus appears in their midst despite the locked doors and grants them peace. He then gives them physical proof of his death and resurrection by showing them his hands and side (John made a point to mention Jesus' spear wounded side earlier in the passion narrative). This leads to the disciples' rejoicing.

Again, Jesus grants them peace and says "as the Father as sent me, so I send you" and gives them the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised (along with his gift of peace) earlier in John's gospel. Jesus' breathing on the disciples calls to

mind the gift of breath given to the first human being (see Genesis 2:7). Here, the Spirit is that which enlivens and empowers the church to do the work Jesus is giving. Somewhat ominously, the disciples are sent “just as the Father sent” Jesus—to love, give, live, die, and rise again.

In John’s gospel, the idea of “sin” is roughly equivalent to a failure to see God revealed in Jesus (see, for example, John 9:40-41). So for Jesus to give the community of faith gathered there the authority to forgive sin, he is giving them the power to proclaim the faith and continue the revelatory work Jesus began with his own earthly ministry. In some ways, Thomas becomes a “test case” for this new work the disciples find themselves called to. He refuses to recognize the risen Christ, yet they invite him back the next week to see and touch for himself.

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Despite Thomas’ bad rap as “doubting Thomas,” he merely demands the same evidence of the resurrection that the others had already received. It was in seeing the Lord’s wounds that the disciples knew it was him and rejoiced; Thomas says he needs to see and touch for himself as the others had already had a chance to do. Jesus does not scold or shame Thomas, but meets his demands exactly. Rather than dismissing him as “doubting Thomas,” Jesus encourages him to greater faith. Thomas becomes the first one in the gospel to make such a grand profession of faith as “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus’ words of blessing to those who have not seen yet who have come to believe are not intended to belittle Thomas’ faith, but rather to acknowledge the difficult road ahead for the disciples. They (those who had seen the risen Lord) were tasked with proclaiming the resurrection to those who had not seen him. This would be tough for anyone to believe.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think the disciples were still behind closed doors a week after their encounter with Jesus? Does this indicate a failing on their part?**
- 2. John’s “Pentecost” story seems to come here on Easter evening when Jesus breathes on the disciples. How do you compare and contrast this story with the more familiar Acts 2 account of Pentecost?**
- 3. If you had to call Thomas something other than “doubting” Thomas, what word would you use to describe him? Why?**