

Sermon John 20:19-31 Proof, Power, Peace!

Lynn Smith

April 23, 2017

Who likes a good story or even better, a good mystery? Being an avid reader, I like mysteries and detective stories and historical fiction of any type. Who is your favorite author? It's hard to pick just one, isn't it? Bookstores are a sacred space for me and I regularly visit them to see what is popular with all ages. Currently I am reading *The Orphan's Tale* and recently finished *Victoria*-a book that PBS turned into a series on Sunday nights. Who likes ordering from Amazon.com with the awesome free shipping? If I find a captivating book, I savor each chapter-I like to read before I go to sleep-a habit from my childhood. I especially enjoy movies based on books-then I compare how they stuck to the plot or did not-and guess what? I always like the book better!

Do you remember the first time you heard or read the Empty Tomb story of Jesus? Take a second and think about that. (Pause). Was it as a child, a young adult or possibly as an older adult? Did you believe it immediately or just think it was a good fairy tale? Maybe you heard it for the first time this past Easter Sunday as described in Matthew. Join me as I briefly refresh your memory about today's text and our backstory in the first part of John's chapter 20. Mary Magdalene-a woman mentioned twelve times in our Gospels, a witness at the Cross, and a devoted woman to Jesus, arrives early at the tomb, walking slowly in despair over the One she loved so much-only to discover with her own eyes that the stone was rolled from the opening-she is horrified and desperate! Who did it? Who took the body? Sounds like a good mystery story to me! One unnamed disciple and Peter then follow after her-kicking up dirt as they ran-imagine the shock as each one sees precious linen clothes

lying in the tomb and a face cloth rolled up-but no Jesus! They didn't understand what Jesus had told them previously in John 14:28-

“You heard me say to you, I am going away, and I will come to you. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”

They retreat back to their homes (not shouting the news from the rooftops) and Mary remains at the tomb, weeping as two angels ask her, “Why are you weeping?” She is grieving the loss of Jesus and is worried-what happens now? Jesus was her life! She believes that the grave was robbed and then Jesus asks her the same question. She did not recognize him at first until He spoke her name-Mary! Don't you like when someone calls you by name? I imagine he was standing close to her-she knew his voice, calls him Rabboni while instantly recognizing him! She fully recognized Christ-not a mirage or

a hallucination from grief! With instructions to inform the disciples about his ascending- she runs off on her mission-an excited messenger-proclaiming the fact that she had seen the Lord! What a chapter! I can hardly wait to hear the rest!

Let's move into our story (vs. 19) --on Easter evening, the first day of the week, Jesus finds the disciples behind locked doors cowering in fear of the Jews, full of shame, sadness, grief-waiting most likely for that inevitable heart stopping knock at the door. After all, their Jesus had just been crucified!

Have you ever experienced fear at that level? I can imagine that many of you have- I know I have-and it has happened throughout my life. At age 19, I wanted to join the Peace Corp but I was afraid to leave the security of my family. Shortly after, I wanted to join the Navy to get my nursing degree-and my father said

absolutely not! I was afraid to go against him-
this episode is funny as he had been in the
Seabees (part of the Navy) in the Korean war as
a young man. In my 40's I became a divorced,
single parent-talk about paralyzing fear-how
was I going to raise two children on my own? It
was a long period of singleness and juggling
many nursing jobs-fear was my daily
companion-fear that my children were
damaged, fear that I could not provide for them
in the way I wanted to, fear that I would not
marry again- fear, fear, fear.

The disciples, gathered in a room-possibly dark
and shadowy, fear eating away at their hearts-
grief and loneliness engraved upon their faces.
Was Mary Magdalene right? Had she seen
Jesus? Did she embellish her story just a bit?
Suddenly, light and love enters the room...

Hear Jesus' greeting-Peace be with you! What?
Peace? But this greeting is Shalom-life at its
best, overwhelming peace in Christ with love

and forgiveness. Jesus shows the disciples his hands and side-visible scars of the Cross!! Jesus showing his real scars as proof-always open handed and open hearted towards us. The disciples could not help rejoicing as they saw Him!

Listen to the words of:

Psalm 30:11 in the New Living Translation (NLT)

¹¹ You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing.

You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy,

He comes to them in the middle of their fear-not what they expected after deserting Him-Jesus comes in the middle of our fear, our brokenness, our hurt, our anger, our grief, our doubts, our lack of forgiveness and our unbelief.

Then a second time, Jesus says, **Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**

Peace-a second reassurance-why did He say this? Maybe, their joy was mixed-maybe they were both overwhelmed and amazed, maybe their brains were still in shock-as Jesus had told them so many times before-**He is sent by God and He is now sending them!** Sent to be with them in their paralyzing fear-drawing near as a friend. The resurrected Christ breathes on them-reminding us of our Creator God who formed Adam out of dust--“breathing into his nostrils the breath of life”-Jesus speaking healing and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Can you imagine this? Warm, life-giving breath on exhausted, frightened, beaten down, discouraged, grieving disciples-did they feel reenergized with his words? Did they realize the power in his breath? Death that came to life! Remember Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:5?

“...he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead!” Jesus then describes forgiveness- this is the forgiveness of the Gospel message- people will believe or people will reject!

Our story progresses-the overjoyed disciples come with news of the Risen Lord to Thomas-the Twin (you may call him doubter, a skeptic, one guy that needs convincing, double-minded or rough around the edges.) Maybe Thomas thinks they are lying or delusional-or even hallucinating! After all, how many of them had been without much sleep? Full of fear, thinking they would end up on a Roman cross! Have you ever seen something that you just cannot fully believe? I can remember a time that I needed convincing--one short story--while on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic, when our country was attacked on 9/11, I did not believe the news when I heard it-I laughed and then got really angry-thinking someone was playing a cruel joke on us-only when I saw the news on

a computer and heard President Bush on the TV did I begin to believe! It continued to sink in as I traveled home and read newspapers and magazines for the details. Eventually though, I believed the truth, I had to return home and see with my own eyes!

“Unless I see in his hands **the mark** of the nails, and place **my finger** into the mark of the nails, and **place my hand into his side**, I will never believe.”

Powerful, strong words spoken by a grieving apostle-yet we know of other examples in the OT and NT where people doubted-doubt is complicated and multi-faceted. True believers often doubt, struggle and lament-grief takes us to places where our **faith** may be shaken-**words** that may be spoken and we cannot take them back. **Doubt** disturbs! Thomas was grieving his own way. Do you think Jesus loved Thomas any less? Does he love us any less when we are rigid

in our thinking, struggle with complex issues, or have times of doubt? Thomas wants to “see” the real Jesus and so do we!

Eight days later, the disciples are gathered again-and this time Thomas is present. Have you ever wondered why he came back? Blaise Pascal, a mathematician and theologian, has written, “There has never been a real complete skeptic.” I like to think of Thomas as teachable and coachable-maybe he is beginning to believe his friends or maybe he was there for comfort and a bit of peace in his grief. Was God’s voice speaking to him? It seems he forgot that Jesus had told them he would be raised on the third day (Matthew 20:10). Did he think there was a chance for him to really see Jesus? Thomas was a bruised reed, seeking comfort with his friends-hear the words of Isaiah 42:3 in the MSG version –

“He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant, but he’ll steadily and firmly set things right.”

“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, **Peace be with you.**” Again, reassuring the disciples that He is their friend. **Peace that passes all understanding! Christ in person- PROOF, POWER, PEACE.** He addresses Thomas directly- **“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”**

Can you picture Thomas’ face? How did Jesus know what I said? No hiding anymore! The real Jesus, “in the middle of his deepest fear, drawing near, overwhelming him with peace!” (words from a popular song, Find You Here by Ellie Holcomb). Panic turned into peace! Our Thomas responds, “My Lord and My God!” The Risen, Living Christ! This exclamation

is personal and affectionate! Christ was enough for Thomas-seeing with his own eyes! I am not sure about you, but I think I would have fallen flat on my face by now! Thomas who was filled with fear and doubt, now was full of faith and joy!

Jesus, his friend, our friend, speaks to him,
“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Let’s take a moment, can you imagine **Jesus looking into your eyes** and saying these words to **you**? Words spoken then, heard, and now written for us to “have life in Jesus’ name”. Should we end the scene here and roll the credits? Friends, indulge me and let’s return to the scene that Jesus reminds us that we are sent!

“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

Just like the disciples, Jesus is propelling us forward into the world-Jesus sees you and loves you-even though we have not seen him! Books and movies have endings-our story doesn't have an ending-yet!

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.” 1 Peter 1: 9 ESV

Peace, proof and power!

Peace spoken that releases fear!

Proof of his scars-he died and rose again!

Power-resurrection power that sends us!

Rejoice, Rejoice!

Amen.

