

## Scripture Comments

John 20. 19-31

April 28, 2019

Touching

Cary G. Speaker, D.Min.

This reading from John occurs in all three years of the lectionary cycle on the Second Sunday of Easter. The season of Easter begins with Easter Sunday and goes to Pentecost Sunday. The Easter Season provides opportunities for the church to reflect on the biblical witness concerning the disciples' experience with the risen Christ. We will also read stories designed to bless those who have not seen and still believe (v. 29). Beginning with the Easter story in John, the author uses parallel double-stories to provide testimony to the resurrection. In vs. 1-18 we read of Mary and the two disciples. In vs. 19-29 we read of the ten disciples and Thomas. The stories are about faith and doubt and how an encounter with the risen Christ overcomes doubt. These double-stories provide four experiences with the risen Christ. They are not random stories. They indicate different levels of faith. Throughout the Gospel According to John, we read of faith based on signs and faith that needs no signs. We read about weak faith and strong faith; shallow faith and deep faith; growing faith and faltering faith. Faith is not a once and for all decision. It is made new in each situation. The story for today features Thomas. He is already a disciple. Thomas is devoted to Jesus (John 11.16) and theologically alert (14.5); there is also a noncanonical Gospel of Thomas; tradition says that he was a missionary to India, and this man is best known as "Doubting Thomas."

The "beloved" disciple believed based only on the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene believed because of a word and the ten disciples believed because they saw Jesus. For Thomas, too much was at stake. He could not be sure unless he had physical contact. The story is unclear as to whether or not Thomas did actually touch the risen Christ. I think it is remarkable that Thomas is labeled as the "doubter" when he did not ask for any more than the other disciples had already seen.

Following the previous story, we know that Mary has already told the disciples that the tomb was empty and that Jesus appeared to her as the gardener. Even so, the response to the news is for the disciples to hide in a clandestine meeting behind closed doors. The description of the gathering, plus Jesus' opening comment, "Peace be with you," gives us the impression that the disciples were afraid. Were they afraid of the Romans? Were they afraid of the High Priest and the Temple police?

Jesus' response to Thomas is important. The author assures readers that faith is no less a possibility for us than for the original disciples. Faith is available to all persons in all times and places. After recording the different ways faith is generated, John pronounces a blessing on all those who believe. The blessing complements what Jesus said in his prayer (17.20) "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." Thomas is no less than the other disciples and they along with Thomas have no privileged place over those who will come later, those who are not eyewitnesses but who also believe.

One way to think about the character of Thomas is that John uses him as the subject of a

dramatizing technique. Thomas stands for a spirit that was abroad in the early church community. The author of this story makes Thomas a caricature in making specific demands about touching wounds. Perhaps through the words of Thomas, John is giving voice to the doubts and denials that were of concern in his day. Whether we take a more literal view of Thomas or a more literary view, the meaning of this encounter seems to be clear: belief does not come to us based on evidence. True belief is always a gift from God.

The promise of the Holy Spirit has been repeated through chapters 14 – 16. Here it is fulfilled. This is John's Pentecost. The gifts of the Holy Spirit have been previously discussed, but it is here that the apostles are given authority to grant or refuse to grant forgiveness. The expression, "he breathed on them" (20.22) reminds us of the creation story (Gn. 2.7). This giving of the Holy Spirit indicates a new creation and a new community that proclaims a Gospel of forgiveness. This is the beginning of the new life of believers in the risen Lord.

Verses 30-31 are an obvious conclusion to this Gospel. There may have been a time when this was the end of the story for John. That means that chapter 21 is an epilogue added at a later time. The last two verses of chapter 20 are a conclusion or summary of the purpose of this Gospel: to generate faith. The author began with the belief that his readers already had some faith. The purpose of this Gospel was to clarify, inform and deepen faith. The last word of the original ending may have been an assurance that the crucified Jesus was gracious and not judging. The assurance of John 3.16 has not been forgotten.

In verse 31 it is impossible to be certain as to the original intention of the phrase we translate to read, "you may continue to believe" or "you may come to believe." When we consider this Gospel as a whole, we are led to the probable conclusion that it was written to nurture a Christian community in crisis rather than as an evangelistic tract for the unchurched. The actual writing of the Gospel enables "those who have not seen" to become and remain believers. That is why the church is depicted as the people of the book. The church lives not by oral tradition or a continuum of mystical experiences, but by encountering the signs of Jesus found in the book. If we did not already "get it," now we understand why the church must be Bible-centered. That is why preaching, teaching, church programs and pastoral care must all be rooted in scripture. That is why we must fight against Biblical illiteracy. That is why faithful interpretation of scripture is critical to the life of the church.

#### References:

Charles B. Cousar, et al., *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year C*, 1994.

Fred B. Craddock, et al., *Preaching Through the Christian Year. Year C*, 1994.

William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, reprint 1985, first pub. 1939.

Gerard Sloyan. *John. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. 1988.

What does it mean to "comment on a verse with a verse" or "only scripture can explain scripture"? I see these kinds of comments popping up in comment threads that discuss the meaning of a verse. What exactly does this mean, and how is it useful for resolving disputes? Can you cite examples of this where it makes the difference between two different understandings? Share. 4 months ago. Scripture Commentary Lamentations 2 by FGGMM. Ken Wimer - Scripture Commentary. Comments. Post comment. Live Now. DjJ. See more ideas about scripture quotes, scripture, bible. 375 Likes, 7 Comments - Black Rice (@blckrc) on Instagram: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, neither hath the heart conceived, neither hath the words of the Bible. Bible Verses Quotes. Bible Scriptures. 365 Quotes. Bible Quotes On Strength. Acts Bible. Scripture Verses. Wisdom Quotes. The Life. Stephen's Blog. Scripture definition is - the books of the Bible often used in plural. How to use scripture in a sentence. Examples of scripture in a Sentence. someone who frequently quotes Scripture. Recent Examples on the Web The first Catholic to be elected president since John F. Kennedy, Biden has repeatedly referenced his faith throughout his time in office and 2020 campaign, citing hymns and scripture that resonate with him. Resolution: 980x980. Name: Holy Scripture Comments - Scalable Vector Graphics. License: Personal Use. File Format: PNG. Holy Scripture Comments - Scalable Vector Graphics is a free transparent PNG image carefully selected by PNGkey.com. The resolution of PNG image is 980x980 and classified to null. Using Search and Advanced Filtering on PNGkey is the best way to find more PNG images related to Holy Scripture Comments - Scalable Vector Graphics.