## The gospel according to John 20: 19-31

## By Dr Maxwell Reid 16th April 2023 [Jesus Appears to His Disciples](https://www.biblestudytools.com/passage/?q=john+20:19-23)

**19** On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

**20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

**21** Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

**22** And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

**23** If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

[**Jesus Appears to Thomas**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/passage/?q=john+20:24-29)

**24** Now Thomas (also known as Didymus ), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

**25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

**26** A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

**27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

**28** Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

**29** Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

[**The Purpose of John’s Gospel**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/passage/?q=john+20:30-31)

**30** Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

**31** But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the gospel of Christ. **Praise to Christ the word.**

Please be seated.

Jesus, having previously appeared to Mary Magdalene (one of his prominent followers) came to a gathered company of disciples. They had heard Mary’s testimony as to having met the risen Jesus, but the news results only in a fearful retreat, in what was a clandestine meeting behind locked doors. It was the evening of the day of resurrection and the doors were shut. While the disciples might have believed Mary’s report, they had certainly not gone looking for Jesus, but were in hiding. None of the Disciples are named in this scene, but we know that the Disciples were huddled in a bolted room, dominated by fear of authorities, and with jolly good reason. Their fear of the authorities, and fear of an uncertain future was a perfectly natural and understandable reaction, because they lived in such a violent society and these were difficult times under Roman rule which was maintained by brutal oppression, particularly to anyone who claimed allegiance to someone other than Caesar. Their fears were well founded, as just two days ago they had seen their leader brutally and violently put to death. Naturally, their current and realistic fear is, if Jesus was so despised by the Jews that they got the Romans to get rid of him, what then was likely to happen to his followers?

Regrettably, we know that still to this day there are Christians in some countries and communities who worship behind closed doors in fear of reprisal. Fortunately, we live in a country in which you can worship any form of religion you like. Well, almost, but our Government might take exception to the Druid’s ancient niceties of human sacrifice!

However, the locked doors were no bar to the resurrected Christ, who miraculously overcame any human barrier or obstacle. Jesus’ appearance carries with it the marks of revelation, commission, and empowerment. Firstly, in response to his Disciples fears, he calmed the situation with reassurance. Jesus’ first words were “Peace”, which of course is a great antidote to anxiety, particularly when it comes from Jesus himself.

The showing of his wounds may be an extension of that gift in settling their fears. The wounds bear witness to the worst that the world can do and indicate that the worst is overcome. For the risen Christ to show the Disciples his wounds is to ask, “I met the promise I made you, what remains to be feared?” What will prevail but peace? My peace I bring you!

However, because Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the other Disciples, he was naturally sceptical of the related incident and needed some visible evidence himself. This we know, is just what the others needed as well since they too were initially so sceptical about Mary Magdalene’s report. Finally, a week later, he had his own encounter with Jesus. Consequently, Thomas had finally joined the group of believing eyewitnesses, in effect becoming one of its most significant members.

So where does this leave us in this modern-day worship. Remember, Jesus had told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Thomas wouldn’t believe unless he saw the evidence. Thomas was initially a doubter. 2000 years later, not a lot has changed – we still have our doubters. In the last New Zealand Census it appears that a high percentage of people are doubters. It is clear to me that in the Gospel of John, the characters are led to faith with differing experiences and varying degrees of evidence. This Gospel has a special significance for us now, who are removed in time and space from the original events and our faith is consequently born and nurtured by means of exposure to the resurrection witnesses through the text. It is almost as if Jesus has turned from Thomas, and is now addressing all of us. It follows that putting Jesus’ deeds into writing has enabled those who have not seen as Thomas did, to become and remain believers. The church lives by encountering and reencountering the signs of Jesus found in the texts written down by those close to these events, and carried on down the generations of faithful, through to us and on to the next generations.

One could argue that a word of caution arises around the word peace. It could be a mistake to assume Jesus meant our more commonly used definition of the word – that is, the absence of war, the presence of quiet and rest, with everyone agreeing and getting along. With this announcement of his intention is of sending his Disciples in the same way that he was sent by his father, we suspect that what he offered had nothing to do with tranquillity, harmony and affability. Jesus instead invited his followers into the same activity of peace making that characterised his own life and mission. It was this peace-making work that that in no small part got him killed. Jesus’ unwavering commitment to the work for which he was sent, the work of reconciliation and renewal, the work of feeding and healing – the transformation of society he was engendering – led to a final showdown with authorities that he could not avoid without abandoning the very people he came to save. In fact, his crucifixion cannot be fully understood without an understanding of his humanity and his peacemaking activity. His humanity came in so many forms including humility, gentleness, and spirit, but also courageously speaking out against injustice, bigotry, racism and apartheid.

A few years ago, Prince William (now the Prince of Wales) took the time to speak at the Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch, the place where on that horrible day the shootings took place. He told worshippers, “The forces of love will always prevail over the forces of hate. We must respond to hate - with love." I believe that this message would also represent the peace that Jesus alluded to when calming his Disciples. Surely, we can all feel the spirit of commonality in our quest for the peace Jesus talked about.

This type of peace-making activity is equally challenging today, just as it was two thousand years ago. The vision of a kingdom of God is no less threatening today than it was in the time of Jesus, and those who work for the inclusion of the ostracized, the love of enemies, and justice for the oppressed should be prepared for rejection and harassment.

It is not easy to follow the call of Jesus and be a peacemaker in a world marked by war in many regions. It is not easy to be a peacemaker in a society that incarcerates people without reason and trial. It is not easy to be a peacemaker in a country where guns are a prevalent part of the culture, or where too many children’s lives are marred by violence in the home, at school and at play. These horrific memories give us a reasonmake our quest for peace even more salient.

Consequently, it is up to us, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to follow Jesus in this radical peacemaking work, speaking out for the marginalised, the terrorised and the disadvantaged. In all we do in that kind of space or opportunity, we trust that Christ is always working with us. I will wish you God’s peace this morning during this service. What do I mean by that? What do you mean by that? For me, this is first of all, peace within yourself, because unless we are at peace with ourselves, how can we encourage peace among others, whether it be at home, within our families, within our communities, or ultimately, within civilisation itself.

As Christ said to his followers, peace be with you.

Amen