

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.' 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.' 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. (John 20:19-30)

Last week was Palm Sunday, when the crowds welcomed Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. Five days later they cried "Crucify". On Easter morning, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb to add spices to the body, but sees it is empty with the stone rolled away. She runs to tell Peter and John and returns with them. They, being men, look in, see the linen, assess the situation and go back to where they were staying. They left Mary weeping near the tomb. She sees two angels seated in the tomb. They ask, 'Woman why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' ¹⁴ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' ¹⁷ Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:13-18)

Mark's version is slightly different. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As

they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, “He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”’ ⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Other versions have this as verse 9 *Then they quickly reported all these instructions to those around Peter. After this, Jesus himself also sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.*

So Mark’s version has three women go to the tomb, and Jesus in the garden isn’t mentioned, nor that Peter and John went to the tomb.

Now let’s look at what happened later. John skips the road to Emmaus account in Luke, as do Matthew and Mark, and moves on to Sunday evening when the disciples were together apart from Thomas. John includes some significant revelation in this encounter. 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.* Firstly – Jesus breathed on the ten disciples and said, “receive the Holy Spirit”. This forty days before Pentecost when the disciples and those with them were baptised in the Holy Spirit, and spoke in many languages to praise and glorify God which the many foreigners in Jerusalem could understand. In breathing out onto the disciples to give them new life, we are reminded that this happened to Adam (⁷ *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* Genesis 2:7). Were the disciples already filled with Holy Spirit before Pentecost? We won’t go into the theological debate to be had on this issue as it is not relevant or important really. Secondly - what is important is that Jesus, having breathed on them to empower them with Holy Spirit, also gave them the power to forgive sins and withhold forgiveness. Whether they did so is not revealed in the New Testament. Jesus often said to those he healed, “your sins are forgiven”. He could do that as he was acting on his Father’s instructions. Can we do this? Probably we would consider it presumptive to say, “your sins are forgiven”, but after someone has confessed his or her sins and asked Jesus for forgiveness, we have the assurance that the person is forgiven, and we can give the person that assurance. Only acting in submission and obedience to hearing from the Holy Spirit could we ever say to someone who has not confessed sins and repented, “your sins are forgiven” in the same way Jesus did. Jesus didn’t ask the lepers, the lame, the deaf and the blind first to confess their sins before he said, “you are forgiven”. These men had faith that Jesus could heal them. He did forgive sins sometimes before healing and sometimes after healing.

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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!'*

Jesus though physically solid is also able to walk through masonry or get past locked doors. He gives the usual Jewish greeting – Shalom – and turns to Thomas. Thomas has got a bad press for doubting, but who among us would be much different if we were faced with the situation he found himself in? However, Thomas's response is one Holy Spirit breathed into him would have influenced. He is the first disciple to say out loud that Jesus is God. Peter recognised Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God, but the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – was not seen as a Triune whole until much later.

Plenty of people have seen Jesus – in a dream or vision, and as a result believe. Having an encounter with Holy Spirit reinforces faith and is personal convincing evidence of the reality of Jesus. Many Christians will never have had a spiritual encounter with Jesus and still have a strong faith. Jesus acknowledges this by saying *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Other translations closer to the Greek change the way we should look at this line. Disciples' Literal New Testament has for verse 29 ²⁹ *Jesus says to him, "You have believed because you have seen Me. Blessed [are] the [ones] not having seen and having believed"*. Many theologians have assumed that John's Gospel was written to encourage existing believers to continue in their faith. They conclude this because John mostly uses the present tense when he speaks about having faith or believing rather than the past tense. Surprisingly the word "faith" as a noun is not used in John's Gospel at all! John speaks of believing as an active verb rather than belief as a noun which is non-active. "Do not disbelieve but believe" is a key point in John's message to the disciples to whom the Gospel is addressed. There is much for the non-believer in this Gospel, but like so much of the New Testament, their authors addressed existing believers rather than non-Christians.

We now come to last verses of this chapter. 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.* John sums up as if this is the end of his Gospel. But there is chapter 21 which seems as if it was written a bit later as an afterthought.

To conclude – what can we take from these few verses relating to the resurrection of Jesus.

- 1 The eyewitnesses report what they saw and experienced.
- 2 The eyewitnesses all knew Jesus before and after the resurrection.
- 3 The eyewitnesses corroborate the other Gospel accounts.
- 4 The eyewitnesses went to their deaths rather than deny what they had seen and reported. Few men are willing to die for believing something that wasn't true.
- 5 We too can believe that Christ is risen from the dead and is alive today.