

John 20:1-9 That You May Be Faithful . . .

The first half of the Gospel of John is built around what to us are miracles but are known in John as “signs.” There are seven of them. The reach of them into the experiences of life is remarkable. The first is the changing of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. From there is a collection of signs that address life’s most pressing needs:

A healing involving a royal official’s son and another of a paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda. Then there is the Feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee, followed by the restoration of sight to a blind man and the raising of Lazarus from death.

These “signs” address the celebration of one of life’s major events, sickness and disease, paralysis, hunger, blindness, and death. One is drawn into the story because of the familiarity with these things or things like them.

The First Meeting

The first time after Easter Jesus met with his disciples, the one called, “Thomas,” was not there. It happened in the evening and those disciples who had gathered were behind locked doors for “fear of the Jews.”

He appeared in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Given the events in our lives and in the world, a

word of peace would be welcomed to us too. He let them see his hands and side. One assumes that by then they had heard the reports of the women who had been at the tomb and so may not have been completely surprised.

The brief encounter that ensued seems unremarkable and is often overlooked in Easter celebrations. He again offered them peace and said, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” There is an allusion to the Great Commission found in Matthew’s Gospel, “Go ye therefore into all nations, baptizing and making disciples . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.” Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

And then Jesus said this, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” The meaning of these words has been much debated by Protestants and Catholics, and by those within Christian expressions who wonder about who has the authority to forgive sins. As baptists we have always maintained that one does not need a priest, but can address God directly for forgiveness.

But one thing is sure, the Forgiveness of Sin has been proclaimed from the very beginning and is still proclaimed as a sure meaning of the Cross and the Resurrection, and it is a meaning of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas and Faith

Then the story takes a turn because one week later the disciples were again gathered in a locked room and once again Jesus appears. This time Thomas *is* present. The scene is a familiar one, much more observed and the subject of many sermons.

Jesus remembers Thomas's absence and knows that, like so many people in our times, has already decided that he won't believe in the Resurrection unless he sees. Therefore, Jesus singles him out. He offers to Thomas his hands and side. He tells him to stop being faithless.

Sooner or later and one way or another everyone faces the same encounter and must decide what to believe. Thomas gives words to our confession, "My Lord and My God." And as if we ourselves are in the audience Jesus nods at us by giving his blessing to those who have not seen and yet believe.

Billions More

So the disciples were sent with the Spirit and resurrection and forgiveness on their wings. Nearly 2,000 years have passed and there are reportedly somewhere between 2 and 3 billion believers who are willing to make the same confession, "My Lord and My God."

Each believer is faced with how to apply their faith to their lives. Does it have any meaning at all? Is it a superficial kind of thing, involving an assent to a proposition, that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Does it apply only to personal piety? To Citizenship? How are we to respond when our lives are characterized by hunger, paralysis, sickness, blindness, when we are in the Valley of the Shadow of Death?

Among the believing multitudes of our time there is all manner of faithfulness, and there are also failures of various kinds. To deny these is simply irresponsible.

Let Us Be Informed

Largely, life's most pressing needs still harass us. We too are hungry, if not for physical food than for the kind of food that fills the emptiness in the soul. And we know sickness and disease, paralysis, blindness, the Valley of the Shadow. We know these things as physical realities and also as metaphors for spiritual sickness and paralysis and hunger and blindness.

There is a mess out there in the world, and in the larger sense, the church is a mess, and very often, it is a mess inside our own lives too. But let us not be discouraged by the news of the day or of our lives. Instead, let us be informed by the way the chapter ends,

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

That is to say that this gospel has been written so that we may trust in Jesus fully, Christ, Son of God, because to believe is to trust. And to trust is to be faithful. To believe, to trust, to be faithful, are different words in the English language but in the Greek they are the same word. To be faithful is to have life in Jesus’ name, and these things have been written that we might be faithful.

To Be Faithful

To be faithful means that no matter who you are, where you are from, what you have done, or what are your circumstances, meaningful life is possible through faith in Christ. Abundant life, as John has put it in chapter 10:10, is not beyond possibility. We are filled with hope.

Past failures fade.

The significance of the world’s problems is diminished.
The mess of things is smaller than it seems.

When you catch yourself being angry or discouraged;
When you catch yourself in a failure of love,
compassion, or ethics or morals; when you are

tempted to the notion that everything is falling apart without the possibility of redemption, be reminded to believe. Remember:

The water turned to wine,
The healing of the official’s son, or the paralytic at Bethesda,
The feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water,
The blind restored to sight,
The dead raised.

These signs also involved impossible situations with seemingly no hope, but there was hope, just as again there was hope on Easter morning when Jesus came forth from the grave, and so will there always be . . . because the power that accomplished the signs has conquered sin and death and emptiness for all of us, and for all time.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)