

April 23, 2017  
Sunday after Easter  
John 20  
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For those of you who may not have heard the story of the last couple of weeks I want to fill you in. I know, we're all busy...There's lots of news about these days. But in case you've missed it:

Jesus of Nazareth was executed.

A man known for his healing, for his teaching, his presence, his intimacy with God; a man known for his vision for the world. A vision very different from the way we do things now, you know. His vision would require a lot of us. He said we were up for it. But there was a lot of resistance. And fear about change. And reordering everything. Or un-ordering everything.

I mean, we work hard to establish ourselves and make a place for ourselves. And those who don't quite make the grade? Well, we have a place for them too, don't we? It is the righteous who prosper, we are told. Those of us who do well hold fast to that. And rank has its privileges they say. Well, we work hard for them.

But Jesus didn't think like that at all. It wasn't about rank or righteousness or prosperity. It was about being just and kind. Non-violent. Generous. It was about connecting...as equals. Everyone was in. No one was out. That isn't the way we order things. Somehow Jesus' vision of the world doesn't seem quite fair.

And what's more Jesus claimed his vision was what God wanted for us. A vision of a life, of a society, of a world, where yes everyone is in. Welcomed. Accepted. Cared for. No one is a free loader or enemy or other. And, now get this, everyone was to be seen as a child of God.

People who met Jesus, or saw him, even from a distance, were "startled awake," as someone once described it. When your eyes lay on him it was hard to break away. People who heard him speak, or watched him move within a crowd, or saw the way he looked at his disciples or at children or women, or the unwell, or broken....were caught by something. It was hard to describe really. It was compelling. He was magnetic.

There was something about him that made you feel, that made me feel, I don't know, young again? In touch with possibility, refreshed, whole, softened and strengthened all at once? A little disorienting, really.

There was something about him that made men.... want to be midwives and women rabbis and the outcasts lions of courage. In other words, he turned expectations upside down.

There was something about him that children recognized and delighted in. They greeted him the way your dog does when you come home.

There was something about him that....well....I will say it: made you want to weep. Was it a longing? Or a kind of sadness? Or a kind of irrepressible, inexpressible joy? You really wanted to follow him. But most didn't.

So, Jesus was executed. By Crucifixion. You know, the punishment for insurrectionists, traitors, rabble rousers. Threats to the State. A harsh sentence for Jesus I think. Actually I think he was wrongly charged. He shouldn't have been crucified. But he was.

The other part of the news that maybe you haven't heard is that a few days after he was killed – and that day of execution was dark like a total eclipse of the sun–well, a few days after his death, people claimed they continued to experience him. I don't know, the stories are all over the place.

Some say they heard their name called. Some say they saw him by the lakeside. Some say he ate fish in front of them. What do you make of that? Some say they felt his breath on them.

One said he put his hands in his side. Well, he was invited to put his hand in his side. Imagine that.... And that changed him. He went from grieving about this horrible execution of this very wonderful and remarkable man, he went from feeling sick from grief and disbelief, to experiencing Jesus invite him to enter his wounds. It changed him. He went from knowing Jesus to....well, really *knowing* Jesus, he said..... Everything that Jesus stood for and talked about and embodied seemed more real, more possible, at that moment than during Jesus' lifetime. Jesus was more real to Thomas after his death than before. Can you imagine that??? You'll have to ask him about that. I am just trying to bring you up to speed....

But I'll tell you something else that Thomas said. He now considers Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. Caesar is not Lord. You know, "Lord" is one of the titles for Caesar along with "Prince of Peace" and "Son of God" and "Savior of the world." Caesar loves those titles for himself. But for Thomas, Jesus is now his

Lord. Jesus is his commander in chief. Not Caesar. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; Jesus is the Savior. Not Caesar.

The invitation to enter Jesus' wounds... Thomas said it was like entering the gaping wounds of all of humankind. For all time. It was like entering the wounds of our own existence. Thomas saw our fate mirrored in Jesus. I don't know what to make of that. But what Thomas saw made him realize that if we do not change our ways violent death will befall all of us. Jesus body is our body. What killed Jesus will kill us all. We must change our ways.

We must help one another, says Thomas. We must help one another heal our fears and alienation and hatreds. Justice and compassion are imperatives. Not just good ideas.

And Thomas decided, in that moment, that now he would follow Jesus. Jesus became his Way. His Truth. His Life. His Light.

I don't know. What do you make of all of this?

As I think about him, Jesus was particularly sensitive to people's woundedness. And pain. But you know, he also loved celebrating with us. He could throw back his head in laughter as heartily as the rest of us. Sometimes more heartily than the rest of us. And he could send a smile to you over his shoulder like a bride's bouquet.

But for those of us who were in pain, felt lost, rejected, marginalized, those who were untouchable, invisible...forgotten ....those who were isolated from the social world for whatever reasons.....for those he was like the balm of Gilead that heals a wounded soul.

You know, even the righteous are removed and isolated in their own way. Even the privileged are. They have no idea who the rest of us are or even seem to care....In their own way they are disconnected too. And Jesus saw that. He showed compassion for them as well. Jesus had compassion for all those carrying pain and loneliness. Seen and hidden. That pretty much includes all of us, doesn't it?

Well, we're all in. We're all in his care.

So Jesus who is ever attentive to our woundedness asks Thomas to be attentive to his. And in doing so attend the wounds of us all. Put your hand here. And here. I don't know.....I don't know where to go with this...But Thomas' experience struck me. It's almost like his experience is becoming my own. It's a bit disorienting. I am still trying to figure this out.

Surely the encounter Thomas had with Jesus changed him. Even his face changed a little. He still looks like his twin. But different somehow. I see a quiet and strong hopefulness in him now. He seems steady. At peace even. Assured in a way I hadn't noticed before. And whatever doubts we may have about changing up the social order? Thomas doesn't seem to think it is so improbable anymore. He thinks it's the way to go. The only way. Ask him about it. He'll tell you.

So, those of you who haven't heard...a lot has happened. Jesus was executed. And then, about three days after, people started to experience him....as though he was alive....Amazing. And Jesus' vision for the world? Instead of dying with him, it seems newly unstoppable.

I know there are others who have seen Jesus, or heard him, or felt him. Or been touched by him. Ask around. Ask, have you seen Jesus, the One Thomas now calls Lord? Ask around. And let me know what you hear.