

Brave Enough to Seek Jesus
John 20:19-31
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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I remember the day I realized I wasn't going to get what I wanted.

You see, while still in high school, with the help of mentors who were able to see gifts in me that I hesitated to see in myself, I had identified a call to ministry. I didn't know what that would mean, but I believed it enough that when I was looking at colleges I declared my intention to pursue a degree in religion. I didn't yet envision myself standing behind a pulpit Sunday after Sunday, but I did have a sense that I was called to a life of service in Jesus' name.

However, I really would have liked to know more. I really would have liked to have a sense of what this call would look like. I really would have liked to have something that I could articulate when people asked why a religion degree?

What I actually wanted was to have a neon sign drop from the sky, a message from God, with all the details clearly planned out. Both then and now, I like to have the details planned out.

But, the day came when I was talking to a friend, actually standing out in front of the main lodge at the Christian Conference Center. It was in that conversation, having articulated my dream of a neon sign, that I realized the message wasn't going to come that way. Instead of a single moment in time with concrete evidence, I was going to have to find my way, moment by moment, discovery by discovery, toward a sense of understanding my call.

In this way, I can relate to Thomas. Thomas, who wanted to know for certain...Thomas, who wanted to see and touch and feel confident about what he was hearing and what he was hoping.

Perhaps we can all relate to Thomas. Perhaps, maybe not all, but perhaps most of us like to see things in concrete form, to know for sure that what we believe is true, to have proof of the things that we claim.

And, perhaps this moniker of "Doubting Thomas" that we so commonly use, doesn't tell us all of who Thomas was.

Because he was much more complex. After all, while the disciples were gathered behind locked doors for fear, Thomas was not there. Now, we are not told where he was. We are only left to speculate.

But I can't help but wonder.

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I wonder why Thomas wasn't with the others.

I wonder where he was.

I wonder if he was hiding somewhere else...or if he was the bravest among them, willing to be out on the streets just days after the crucifixion of their leader.

I sometimes wonder if he was the one sent to the market to get food and if his timing wasn't just bad.

Or maybe, just maybe, he was out looking for Jesus...trying to figure out what had happened.

Maybe Thomas was the only one brave enough to seek out Jesus.

After all, while the scripture names the fear that the disciples had of those in power, the reality is that the thought of Jesus being alive, that might have been a little scary, too.

As Rev. Scott Hoezee (pronounced hoe-zay) writes, "Could it have been that they were afraid of running into . . . *Jesus himself*? Certainly at least Peter would have had reason to avert his eyes from the Lord in case he ran into him. The last time Peter had spoken to Jesus, his words had been full of confident bluster. But then some hours later a rooster crowed off in the distance..." Rev. Hoezee goes on writing "John is honest throughout his gospel about how clueless the disciples often were....And so Mary says Jesus is alive, but what if he is bearing a grudge? Suppose his first order of post-resurrection business was settling some old scores?" ([John 20:19-31 - Center for Excellence in Preaching \(cepreaching.org\)](http://www.cepreaching.org)).

Now we are so used to, and I think rightfully so, thinking of Jesus as kind and tender in ways that mean these suggestions might be hard for us to consider. After all, we know Jesus as one who forgives easily, one who calls people back into relationship.

But there might be *other* reasons why the thought of seeing Jesus might have been scary.

After all, did you hear what Jesus did when he entered the room? John writes this, "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19b, NRSV). Then John writes, "When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (John 20:22-23, NRSV).

Friends, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, at least in John's telling of this post-resurrection encounter, he did so with an assignment. He appeared to them and asked something of them.

Yes, he also gave them the resources they needed. He came as what we today would call a non-anxious presence. He stood among them and spoke peace to them, offered peace to them.

He breathed on them, not just the stale breath of someone who spent a few days in a tomb, but he breathed the Holy Spirit on them. He offered them the power and presence of God in the form of the Spirit who he had already promised would remain with them.

But he didn't give them these gifts for themselves alone. No, he gave them in order to empower the disciples to be able to continue his work, work that included offering forgiveness.

What if Thomas missed seeing Jesus at the very time he was out looking for him? Maybe that's what happened. Maybe not.

But either way, it seems this story invites *us* to be brave enough to seek out Jesus. Because, friends, that can be daunting to us as well.

It's one thing to sit comfortably and sing "Jesus Loves Me." It is another to go into the world to love others in the same way.

It's one thing to tell stories of all that Jesus has done for us. It is another to live in the ways of Jesus so that others' lives are impacted for good.

It's one thing to proclaim God's gift of forgiveness that we know in Jesus. It is another to be people who share the gift of forgiveness in ways that actually bring wholeness to a fragmented world.

What if the fear the disciples experienced was really the fear of finding him? And what if we are afraid to find him, too? Because when we find him, then we might just be invited to commit to living like him. When we find him, we just might realize that he wants to live in us and through us and that might just change our lives.

So what about us? Are we brave enough to seek out Jesus? And when we find him, are we brave enough to follow? Amen.