

WHAT APOSTLES DO AFTER EASTER



GAMALIEL'S WISDOM ABOUT SUCCESS AND FAILURE AND THE GREAT ANGEL JAILBREAK

Scripture:

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'

²⁸Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Acts 5:12-42

12 Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. ¹⁶A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

17 Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, ¹⁸arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, ²⁰'Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.' ²¹When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching. When the high priest and those with him arrived, they called together the council and the whole body of the elders of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the temple police went there, they did not find them in the prison; so they returned and reported, ²³'We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.' ²⁴Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on. ²⁵Then someone arrived and announced, 'Look, the men

whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!’²⁶ Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27 When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them,²⁸ saying, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.’²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.’

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time.³⁵ Then he said to them, ‘Fellow-Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men.’³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared.³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.³⁸ So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail;³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!’ They were convinced by him,⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.⁴¹ As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.⁴² And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.



HOSPITALITY MINISTRY

His drummer played a different beat. Allegro with hardly any adagio except when praying, or sleeping which he did little enough to allow him his solitude fix way up the mountain, by a stream, in full sunshine, fully exposed, lean and leathery, strong and quick, pyromaniac of trees and chariots, and had even tamed Elijah’s fiery horses enough to come when he whistled, eat from his hand, carry him running wherever he steered.

He hung out with all the sinners and tax-collectors. Where do you suppose he got the idea of hospitality ministry? His parents knew about hospitality all his life. A kindly keeper whose inn was full gave them safe warmth for their new-born amongst the stable beasts.

The high-and-mighty and the low-lifes brought him stuff early on: safe haven way down south when Herod was killing off the hometown kids.

A WIDE VARIETY OF CHARACTERS

Nazareth, where he grew up, was on the main trade route between the known ends of earth, so he got a first hand look at all those fascinating folks

with far flung costumes and customs. The wise guys in the temple fielded his amazing questions and speculations.

So it was only natural that he’d feel right at home with a wide variety of characters — rebellious and rectitudinous, sour and soulful, joyful and jaundiced.

**Jesus quick-witted them all
with one more story about
another way, a better way:
Try looking through God’s eyes,
knowing love.**

Who could ever fathom that in this world?

JESUS’ SELF SUFFICIENCY

Could a mother impart self sufficiency to a child early on? Who felt confident enough having entertained travelers from all points of the known universe, since they were so interesting, to go traipsing the world, hop on the nearest transport, knowing it would lead to adventure beyond

imagination; all this foreshadowing his going through death to hell and back.

He'd been on his own for half his life by now, clever carpenter enough to plan ahead, and train and practice, argue and prevail. He'd figured out how they reached their conclusions and he offered a different route with a destination far beyond them. Telling stories, Jesus would give them all kinds of examples from the farm, house, business deals, family squabbles, neighbor spats, rivalries, stuff he knew they knew too, and then they had to supply a moral you wouldn't suspect, surely not the way you thought but with a better result.

Jesus hung out with all the colorful characters, "eating with tax-collectors and sinners." His most memorable dinner was with bread and wine so we could remember his life and resurrection.

AN INNER CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Jesus had an inner circle of friends and followers. These probably weren't the friends he grew up with since childhood. He'd out distanced most of them long ago. Now people had a way of grabbing onto the pattern of thought which matched the disordinary lives they led. Can't fit into the regular mold - can't be regulated either. They puzzled at his stories, and argued among themselves. They kept trying to figure out how he got from here to where he was going and they were always a few jumps behind, but getting farther along than they ever imagined.

Jesus' fishing buddy Pete ate several out of every haul of fish he netted. His arms were big, his shoulders broad with rowing, and his chest rippled all over from hoisting sail, and he was stiff-necked beyond necessity. He'd jump in to see if he could out-swim the wind, especially when a storm was brewing. Almost nothing scared this guy except his own poor choices, and reactions to perceived threats around him. Brother Andrew was more thoughtful with his friends, and would change their thinking, staying under the teaching tree.

THEY DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HIM

But after he was gone and then came back, they didn't recognize him.

Last rites shouldn't have included a total shave, but his mother was there taking charge from Joe Aramath who'd done the legal requisition, and had the right place for the wake. She was the last to touch her son, and of course, she'd make him her baby again at last.

His friends and women didn't recognize the resurrected one since he no longer had his trademark beard. (His mother only knew one other bearded youth who couldn't figure out how to take care of himself and was so obnoxious that nobody else wanted to either.) His mother's favorite way of expressing disapproval was nagging. "You look awful! Cut it off, or at least trim it. I can't see your beautiful smile," etc., ad nauseam.

Nobody knew who he was now, so he could go incognito almost anywhere. Eventually somebody who'd heard him before, would say, "That sounds like you're describing the new way of doing things that makes God happy with all the people." It won't work for you if you're too invested in the way things are around here now. (That's who Gamaliel was talking to.) Unless you really can see beyond this life, which is what He wanted us to see, beyond self-care to care for neighbors -- anyone in need. Spread your seed so thick you can't count them or care for them - more than the space stars or beach sand, or desert sand for that matter, too much or too many for your care? Quit being selfish - help them.

THE GOD CONSCIOUSNESS

Figure out what part is of God, and what God is trying to teach you.

Make sure the God consciousness gets passed on to the next growth spurt for the life of the world, and to whatever other ET's are included in God's creation.

You are doing it. The examples are here in this congregation. You trust your pastor, I know, because you have told me your stories and everyone of you has some mission in life. You are working with building houses in Mexico, feeding the Montgomery High School youth, taking care of the office and the church property and reaching

out into the community for those who are in need. There's the Prayer Chain, the Tuesday Crew, the breakfast crew, the Simply Friends and someone helping with just a few people or one someone who is distressed. I could name you all, all the groups and organizations and individuals in this congregation making Christ's presence and the new way known. So keep up the good work, and forge ahead.

Your shadow is your influence when the light is bright. So make sure God's light is shining when you are living that life, and you can make the community in which you move know Love Divine.

THOMAS AND HIS DISBELIEF

Thomas was the last literal *toucher*. He wouldn't give up until you'd arm-wrestled him to the table or pinned his mind to the floor, he was so stubborn. But Jesus was adept at making his point however he had to in order to convince the suspicious: like the legal interpreters who stretch their own version of a story and let nobody else think freely or act originally.

Thomas is our patron saint as Presbyterians – we doubters.

**Disbelief can help you learn more
about who you are in life.
Honest doubt is not a
contradiction to faith,
but doubt is an essential quality in a
healthy growing relationship with God.**

In the gospel of John, Thomas recognized Christ by his scars. We all have scars of some sort. Some are visible, and some can never be seen, but are deeply felt. You trust your pastor to carry them, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death together. God in Christ descended into the hell of suffering. (Hebrews 4:15)

Christ shares fully in our human experience and weakness. The nail-scarred Christ meets us when we touch the scars and the wounded places in our own lives. We touch a lot of pain, and probably anger, loneliness, and anguish. Then we hear something deeper: the voice of Jesus saying, "I love you. You are precious in my eyes." When Christ invites Thomas to touch the scars on his body, he invites each of us to experience the presence of Christ by touching the scars in our own lives, and knowing that Christ loves us. Peace be with you.

Let us pray. O Lord God, we thank you for your word to us. So motivate us that we may act upon our belief and that we may forgive and love and go forth in the resurrected life of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.



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