

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 20:19-31

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Years A, B, and C - Easter 2, Text: John 20:19-31
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Editor's Note: We are hear splicing together two of Wendt's commentaries on this same text.

General Considerations

Jesus' continuing presence among His people is stressed in 20:19–23 and 20:26–29. When Jesus appears among His followers, He does not “come” from anywhere. He is among them constantly, although invisibly. On several occasions, the risen Jesus reveals His presence in a visible way. His greeting on each occasion is, “Peace be with you” (20:21, 26).

John's account compresses Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Spirit (20:22).

(According to John 7:39, the Holy Spirit will appear and begin His work only after Jesus' coronation and resurrection.) “He breathed on them,” reflects Genesis 2:7. Although Jesus says He will eventually send the Spirit to His disciples, He also says that He himself will come to them (14:28) and that He and the Father will make their home with them (14:23); see also Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:9–10; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17. When the Spirit comes, His mission will be to continue Jesus' mission (16:14). He will teach and accomplish what Jesus would have taught and accomplished had Jesus not “gone away.”

The series of titles begun in chapter one reaches its grand finale in 20:28, “Lord and God.” Finally, John defines his purpose in writing his account, to inspire people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing, to have life in His name (20:30-31).

Although the Gospel possibly did end initially at 20:31, chapter 21 describes the resources available to the post-resurrection community — the continuing presence of Jesus who dines with His brothers and sisters and defines their mission and responsibilities. The fact that these shepherds and fishermen gather a huge haul of fish points to the fact that the Messianic Age

has indeed broken in (see Ezekiel 47:1–12; note v. 9) and that success will crown their witness.

Finally, the risen Lord feeds them with bread and fish, an act symbolizing His continuing presence among His disciples, and His bonding with them (e.g., His feeding them through the Eucharist). Three times Jesus asks Peter, who had denied Him three times, “Do you love me?” (21:15–17). He tells the disciples that some will have to experience martyrdom (21:18–19) and that His reappearing will not take place as soon as some might wish (21:20–23).

Commentary

Verse 20:19: In John's narrative, Jesus meets first with Mary Magdalene, then with ten disciples, and a week later with eleven disciples. The meetings no doubt take place in Jerusalem. Although Mary Magdalene believes what the Risen Jesus says to her (20:1–18), the disciples continue to live in fear — behind locked doors. Jesus' greeting, “Peace be with you!” reflects the promise He made in 14:27. (Note also Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:36–39.)

Verse 20:20: The theme of rejoicing in v. 20 reflects 16:22. In John, Jesus shows the disciples His hands and His side; in Luke 24:39–40, Jesus points them to His hands and feet.

Verse 20:21: Jesus repeats His words of peace, and then “sends” them. The disciples (“those who learn”) are now “those sent,” apostles — although John does not use the latter term. The disciples are to perpetuate the work that Jesus' Father sent Him to do.

Verse 20:22: “He breathed on them.” As Adam's life came from God, so the disciples' new spiritual life comes from Jesus. John's version of Pentecost is reflected in this verse. Thought might also be given to Ezekiel 37:9; the chapter describes dead bones being restored to life.

Verse 20:23: Forgiveness of sins is not merely about

personal repentance in relation to individual deeds. It has to do with the Christian community's Spirit-empowered mission to continue Jesus' work of making God known to the world. It is to make people aware that, by nature, they stand under God's judgment and then to point them to God's forgiving grace revealed in Jesus' ministry.

Verses 20:24-25: What the ten disciples announce to Thomas reflects what Mary proclaimed to the disciples; see 20:18, 25. Thomas' initial response resembles that of the disciples to Mary (20:19); they locked themselves in a room "for fear of the Jews." Thomas' words reflect the spirit of Nathanael's statement in 1:46.

Verse 20:26: See v. 19. The risen Jesus does not rebuke His disciples. He says to them, "Peace be with you."

Verses 20:27-28: Jesus' invitation to Thomas reflects what Thomas referred to in v. 25b. The end result is that Thomas goes from unbelief to belief — and does so without touching Jesus. Although it is traditional to refer to Thomas as "Doubting Thomas," it is better to point to Jesus meeting Thomas' demands to bring him to faith. Thomas' words, "My Lord and my God!" reflect the message of the opening verse of John's Gospel (a literary bracketing, or book-ending), and constitute the most powerful confession of Jesus' identity in John's Gospel.

Verse 20:29: The beatitude in v. 29b pronounces a blessing on future generations — those who will believe without seeing. Faith, not sight, matters!

Verses 20:30-31: Although some see these words as the original conclusion to John's Gospel, they might well serve as merely the conclusion to chapter 20. John wrote his Gospel so that people might believe in Jesus as God's forgiving, Servant-Messiah and experience true life through their relationship with Him.