

John 20:19-31  
Easter 2B  
April 8, 2018

And Now...an Eyewitness Report!

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! ... He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

John tells us the purpose of his Gospel writing (John 20:30-31) *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* John wrote these words as an eyewitness of what Jesus did throughout His ministry. We trust His eyewitness account of the Good News of Jesus Christ...

“Eyewitness News”...that was the name of the local news I watched nightly growing up. Reporters would go out into the community and speak with people about what they saw. These “eyewitnesses” told their version of what they saw. Because they were there, and I wasn’t, I trusted their accounts. Then, when a couple more “eyewitnesses” came together and related the same account...I trusted them even more. The more the accounts agreed with each other, the more likely the story was true. Depending on the angle they viewed things from, the accounts may differ in some detail, but the essential story came together in the many eyewitness accounts.

Most eyewitnesses can be counted on for reliable testimony, but sometimes we need to take the eyewitness account with the proverbial “grain of salt.” Yes, they were there to survey the scene firsthand. But, they can have different agendas that shape what they see. Some are too close to the situation to be objective. Maybe it was their house that was vandalized or destroyed. Or it was their relative who was hurt or killed.

Some have an axe to grind. They’ve felt neglected by their neighbors and feel they or someone else is at fault. They believe the “victim” had it coming to them.

Some are simply too overwhelmed...they can't speak in logical sentences. They can't articulate their thoughts and turn into puddles of emotion as they scream, cry, and gesture at the scene they so desperately wish to describe. Some eyewitnesses can be unreliable.

Early one February evening in Southern California, a 13-year old girl named Teresa Pham was riding her bicycle through her neighborhood. As she crossed a busy street in the crosswalk a car driven by a man hit her throwing her to the pavement. In the confusion of the scene, the driver escaped the accident scene as others sought to assist the helpless girl as she lay in the middle of the street. Concerned motorists stopped, shielded the girl from on-coming traffic, rendered aid to comfort her, and called 911. When the police came, the eyewitnesses gave vague descriptions of the car that hit the girl. But they were so focused on the girl they didn't get a good look at the car that hit her. There was one eyewitness though who did get a good look at what happened... the driver of the car. But he was long gone. When he got home, he told his family that he'd been in an accident of some sort, but he didn't report himself...

In and around Jerusalem following that Passover a little over 2000 years ago, there were many accounts saying Jesus had risen from the dead...one group of eyewitnesses, some women, said they saw an angel...a couple other eyewitnesses from Emmaus said they met Jesus on the road home...even John and Peter claimed they witnessed an empty tomb. But...the majority of the disciples hadn't witnessed anything. Despite these eyewitnesses, the disciples remained in unbelief as they huddled in the dark, in fear behind locked doors in Jerusalem. They were so certain that people who were crucified and buried in a tomb didn't come back to life. They might be next!

These eyewitnesses to all Jesus had said and done now feared for their lives ... they fled in fear three nights earlier when their leader, Jesus, was arrested. Then they looked on from a safe

distance as He was crucified. Now their Messiah was dead ... they were alone in the world, in fear, unsure of what to do next.

Put yourself in their sandals...what thoughts would be running around in your head at a time like this? Perhaps you've been there in a similar circumstance...someone close to you has died...there's a gaping hole in your life now. Maybe you, or someone you know, has been struck by a disease or has been injured in a way that's going to change an entire life. Or, possibly someone you thought loved you has hurt you in a way that you couldn't have imagined ... breaking a once solid bond of trust. There are many ways we can find ourselves in shoes similar to Jesus' disciples ... alone, afraid, unsure of what's next.

We've been told to trust Jesus our whole life. And we have. Then tragedy hits. Tragedy hurts. The pain is immense. The emotions are raw. We might wonder, "Where are you Jesus? How can this happen?" We can feel alone in the world, uncertain. This is how the disciples felt.

Then, something happened! John writes **(John 20:19-20)** *"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"*

Locked behind closed doors, Jesus appeared to His disciples...well most of them anyway. He stood among them. He said "Peace be with you." I can picture the words rolling around in the disciples' heads at this instant..."A ghost! A spirit! It can't be Jesus! He's dead! Maybe it's just somebody who looks like Jesus."

Then Jesus puts out His pierced hands and lifts up His cloak and tunic to reveal His wounded side. Jesus showed the wounds He'd received three days prior as He suffered and died on the Cross as payment for their sins and the sins of all mankind. Here Jesus was ... wounds still fresh

... alive, defeating the power of sin and death for all who believe in Him. He presents Himself to His disciples so they can become eyewitnesses to the Resurrection!

In offering them “peace” He makes peace between them and Himself...between them and God. Jesus forgives them for their unbelief. He forgives them for abandoning Him in His time of greatest need. Their burden lifted, the disciples were filled with a state of utter joy and happiness ... in an instant all that Jesus had been talking about in the days, months and years they had devoted to following Him became clear to them.

But ... their work wasn't done ... it was only beginning. As eyewitnesses of Jesus' miracles, signs and wonders ... His death ... His miraculous Resurrection. Jesus says, [\(John 20:21-23\)](#) *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*

Jesus came to reconcile God's creation to Himself. To restore the relationship Adam and Eve broke after God breathed life into them. Jesus breathed new life into His disciples ... giving them the Holy Spirit. He commissioned His disciples to be His eyewitnesses. Through their words and actions of mercy and grace they became His hands and feet, eyes, ears and mouths through whom He'd proclaim His gospel of forgiveness and eternal life to all mankind.

These eyewitnesses went to work on their first convert...Thomas...the one who wasn't there. The disciples worked on Thomas for a week. Over and over the disciples proclaimed the good news they had witnessed to Thomas ...

“Thomas...it was amazing! You should've been there. Jesus appeared to us. He showed us his hands and side. It was really Him! The voice, the face, even the wounds we saw Him receive on the Cross! It was really Him!

“Remember how we always felt when He was around us...the calm, the peace, the joy? Well, it was back. He said, ‘Peace be with you’ and just like that...we were at peace.

“That wasn’t all ... remember how He said He’d leave us a ‘helper ... the Holy Spirit’? Then He breathed on all of us and said ‘Receive the Holy Spirit...’”

Despite their persistence, Thomas continued in his unbelief uttering his famous denial, (John 20:25) *“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe!”* How sad ... despite such gripping, eyewitness testimony, Thomas remained in unbelief.

A week went by ... although the doors were locked yet again, Jesus returned to the disciples. Once again Jesus said, (John 20:27-29) *“‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”* Thomas received Jesus’ peace. Jesus overcame Thomas’ doubt. Thomas confessed Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” because he saw and believed. He became an eyewitness to the Resurrection and to the power of Christ’s mercy and forgiveness. Today, we are among those blessed by this additional eyewitness account of our Lord’s Resurrection.

Thomas joined the other eyewitnesses to spread the Gospel of Jesus’ mercy and forgiveness to the world. They believed that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” By believing they “received life in His name.” Their eyewitness became the witness we have received today.

The one eyewitness to Teresa Pham’s accident came forward. The driver confessed that he hit Teresa, leaving in fear of what he’d done. But 13-year old Teresa Pham, laying in a hospital bed with broken legs and serious injuries, a witness to the gospel of Jesus “written in this book”

forgave him saying “Maybe he has a family. I don’t really know what’s happening in his life but maybe he’s dealing with stuff ... I’d say ‘God bless you.’” She obeyed Jesus’ command to go into the world and spread His gospel offering the peace of forgiveness to the man who hurt her.

We all go through times of darkness and doubt. We encounter others going through pain and suffering. In these times, we remember the eyewitnesses who experienced the similar doubt and darkness after Jesus died. We remember how Jesus came to them ... showed Himself to them...granted them peace and gave them the Holy Spirit. We remember how Jesus makes peace with us too, giving us faith and the Holy Spirit in our baptisms. He nourishes our faith in His word and His body and blood found in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Then, Jesus tells us, **(John 20:21)** *“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* He sends us to join the disciples of every age to boldly proclaim Jesus’ peace of forgiveness of sin by our merciful and loving words and actions to those in need of forgiveness ... family, friends, neighbors, and even complete strangers. In this way all, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may come to believe as the disciples did, as Thomas did, and as we do today. And by believing, they too, along with us, will receive peace with God the Father through forgiveness and the gift of life in His name.

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James Kent