16-22 April 2023 Unlocking the Easter story

John 20:19-31

New International Version

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Bible notes**

Jesus’ disciples had locked the doors to protect themselves from the Jewish authorities, who were eager to round up Jesus’ supporters and dispose of any threat they might pose to the peace of Jerusalem. Their experience reflected the hostility endured by the Gospel readers from their local synagogue (John 9.22,34; 16.2), as well as the regular rhythm of weekly meeting for worship and fellowship. Jesus’ appearance behind locked doors was enough to breathe new life and hope into his frightened followers. Thomas’ absence and subsequent reaction revealed the natural, questioning spirit he displays elsewhere in this Gospel (e.g. 14.5). Perhaps his actions also showed that he was seeking emotional safety behind his locked inner doors.

Thomas’ Easter story was unlocked a week later, not by his companions’ attempting to argue him into belief, but by the repetition of the previous week’s evening events. Thomas had made demands (v.25) that turned out to be unnecessary. The sight of the risen Jesus and the sound of his greeting were enough to validate the witness that went back to Mary Magdalene (20.18). Now Thomas could make the full Johannine confession of faith in the descending and ascending ‘Lord and God’. The sequence of appearances and testimony that started with Mary Magdalene and culminated in Thomas laid the foundation on which this Gospel’s Easter faith was built.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

At the end of each episode of a gripping TV drama series, viewers are often left wondering what happens next. They may be shown a few tantalising scenes from next week’s episode, or they might want to stream the whole series and watch it all at once, such is the power of the programme’s appeal. When we realise that the Easter story is even more compelling, we can’t help being drawn into its drama. We know what happened next in, as it were, episode two. But, many episodes further on, we may wonder what happens next in our lives.

**Questions for reflection**

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| *You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Click on the image to view a larger version  or use the *Jump menu* to go to *This week's images*.  For artist's details, see [this issue's illustrators.](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2023/124-march-april-2023-a/issue-124-illustrators) |   **Questions**   * What might this fingerprint be about to unlock? * What parts of the Easter story need unlocking for you? * Jesus said many will believe without having seen; what is your part in making this a reality? |  |

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

### A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Jesus showed Thomas his hands and side; the man was overjoyed at his presence.   
We too are filled with joy to meet with you.   
Thank you that you send us forth in your name,    
to do your will, and to be your presence in the world.   
Thank you that you are always with us.   
In you there is a world of joys and excitement still to be unlocked.   
We praise you, Lord.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord Jesus,   
walk with us through this week,   
support us when we try to see the truth in things that puzzle us.   
Give us courage to search for answers,   
and hold us in your unfailing and all-encompassing love,   
each and every day.  
**Amen.**