

**Title: Encountering the Christ while Questioning the Christian**

**Text: John 20:19-31**

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**\*\*A little foot note about John's use of the word "Jews" used in John's gospel. In John's usage especially, this functions as a technical term for those among the people who did not accept Jesus as Messiah. In this time and place it is a term that reflects the growing antagonism and mutual recrimination that developed in the latter part of the first century between church and synagogue.**

**John 20:19-31**

20:19 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."

20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

20:22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

20:24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

20:25 So 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."

20:26 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."

20:27 Then 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."

20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

20:29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

20:31 But 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.

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## **Introduction**

In Ancient Greek thought, time is a very complex concept. They had multiple words for love and multiple words for various seats of emotion and places of cognition within the body, they also had multiple words for time. And two of the words were *chronos*, which is chronological time or the great, measurable expanse of time, and *kairós*. And *kairós*, in Greek — several definitions, but for me, it's a moment that stands outside of time. It's atemporal space that is timeless. And in the *kairós*, in the New Testament, the *kairós* is "the time is nigh." It's like an in-breaking. It's like a moment of opportunity that is distinct, that transcends the kind of flow and the increments of the passage of time, chronologically.

These resurrection experiences are like that - mystical.  
They seem to transcend time, even though they are in time.

It is still Easter Sunday in our Gospel reading today.

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We are in John's gospel today...

And in this communities' perspective on the life of Jesus, the resurrected Christ has already appeared to Mary in the garden, she doesn't recognize him, thinks he is a gardener, she realizes that it is the Christ when he calls her by name and with compassion asks her tenderly why she is weeping.

Mary goes to the other disciples to share this encounter.

This story is still the first day of the week – and the disciples are hiding behind locked doors.

And then we read but Thomas.

## **But Thomas...**

He was not there and was therefore totally reliant on the testimony of the disciples. And something of their testimony and their actions for him was not enough.

He doubts their words. Perhaps he saw that they were still in the house, behind closed doors and wondered if they had encountered the risen Christ and received the Holy Spirit – Why are they still behind closed doors?

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Following this way of Jesus, calls for so much courage in us. Sometimes I wonder if I am really up for it.

And then I hear stories of Christians with great courage, and I am inspired...

Poet, author and community builder, Pádraig Ó Tuama lives in the tension of his life as an Irish Catholic man who is also gay.

In his book *In the Shelter*, he writes a heart wrenching account of how Christians treated him because of his sexual orientation:

“As a gay man walking carefully through the halls of God, I had got used to the names that were used about me. During some complicated days when I was enduring exorcisms for the demon of homosexuality. I was told that if I called myself gay, it was like the man calling himself Legion.”

Sadly, Padraig is not alone...

Nadia Boltz Weber writes in her recent book *Shameless*, of a woman named Cindy.

Cindy after having similar experience to Padraig, found her reconnection to God in the safety of a sweat lodge.

“Gathered with a dozen women in the extreme darkness and heat, she prayed to God without doctrine, without judgement, without the distraction of having to be or say or believe anything in particular, there was nothing to pretend.”

One weekend, Cindy arrived early so she could burn something in the fire that readied the coals for the sweat. She took her bible and tore out 8 very specific pages – the ones that had been used against her regarding her homosexuality and burned them.

Then she held the gospels close to her heart and acknowledged that though she had been hurt by Christians, Jesus had never hurt her.

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I often meet people who explain to me that they used to come to church, but they have been away for a while. And they are often surprised by my response:

I say:

“Our spiritual life is complex, we need times away as much as we need times together.”

And I usually share of my hiatus from church.

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For as Brian McClaren says:

“Doubts are not bad for your faith, pretending you don’t have doubts is bad for your faith”  
“Faith is a way that we as humans cope with the mysteries of life, not so much a set of belief.”

Our faith journeys mirror human development.

There are times when faith seems

- simple,
- complex,
- perplexing, or
- harmonious.

This is all part of the journey. It seems that doubt is necessary for faith to keep developing.  
It’s really a form of curiosity.

Often the stone in our shoes, the things that sparks our questioning is when our value of LOVE  
is not enacted by the authority figures we have come to trust.  
And we see people hurt by the church.

And so it is when we find ourselves in a place of perplexity that we leave the church, we might  
get accused of that old term backsliding, or having become overly cynical.

It is my hope that the Church needs to model questioning, and needs to be part of identifying  
the brokenness of systems

But not to stop here.

We also need to keep opening up to experiences that shift us – to the softness of life that can  
become radiant to us again

Perhaps it’s through mysticism, poetry, encounter with the Mystery of the Spirit without  
control.

A place of grace for myself and everyone.

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I’d like to end with a poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes

You who are so sure,  
go easy on Thomas.

He is the one looking but  
not catching your eye on the sidewalk,

the one at the back  
with the unasked question,

those with everything on their back,  
or maybe just in their memory

that they can't leave, not speaking  
of what's behind them,

still shaking, with every reason  
not to but still looking—

and don't pretend he isn't there, too,  
the little voice inside you—

not easily convinced, but still  
looking

for a sign  
of hope.

Amen.