

There's Always One Who Misses Something

April 7, 2024

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

In my life, it must be said, I spend a lot of time in meetings. Meetings of church leaders here, meetings with leaders in other congregations around East Hawai'i, leaders of churches around Hawai'i Island, leaders of churches around the Hawaiian Islands. They're pastors, they're lay people, they're people with specialized training, they're people with long histories of leadership, they're newcomers to how to live their lives of faith.

And, just like the origins of nene school, at each meeting there's always someone who's missed something. Maybe it was discussed at the last meeting. Maybe they weren't there. Maybe they were there and they just missed it. There's always someone.

It's not uncommon that the someone is me.

You, maybe? You don't need to admit it.

On that first Easter day, the someone was Thomas. Everybody else was in hiding, keeping the door locked because the soldiers of the Temple or of the Roman Governor would not break down a locked door... well, they would, so the logic wasn't good. Scared people don't always think that clearly. Why were they scared? To put it in contemporary terms, they were close associates of a convicted criminal, a criminal whose crime of rebellion was so dangerous that he was tried and executed in less than a day. They had every reason to fear that the search for rebels wasn't over.

As Joy J. Moore writes at Working Preacher, "The unconfirmed rumors of the resurrection started by Mary has brought neither understanding nor obedience. Perplexity and amazement, cynicism and unbelief. The disciples are clueless concerning the meaning of Jesus' death, disappointed by this presumed dashing of their hopes, and astounded by reports of the empty tomb (not much has changed).

"The disciples are fearful. Good news does not erase fear. Good news, incredible news, can ignite hope, but even hope does not eliminate genuine fear."

Thomas, however, wasn't there. Thomas was the brave one. Thomas was the one who dared to go out and learn what was going on. To be clear, I don't know for certain that that's what Thomas was doing. But John mentioned his bravery earlier in the book, when he quoted

Thomas as saying, "Let us also go, so that we may die with him." Thomas was the one with the courage to leave the locked room and discover the truth.

Unfortunately for Thomas, the truth came to the locked room rather than waiting to be found elsewhere in the city. Jesus ignored the locks and came to the place where the disciples were. He didn't wait for them to develop Thomas' courage. He came to the place where they were.

They weren't ready for it. Can we be honest about that? They weren't ready. Jesus greeted them pretty conventionally. "Shalom aleichem" is the Hebrew of "Peace be with you," and Jews use that as a common greeting to this very day. To greet someone with a wish for peace is both a profound and a mundane thing, rather the way that we in Hawai'i use "Aloha." How often do we appreciate that we greet one another with love?

But they weren't ready. They said nothing until Jesus showed – with his wounds – that it was he, himself, for real, standing there. "Then they rejoiced when they saw the Lord." I remind you that they'd already heard the news from Mary Magdalene, that they were curious enough to get Thomas to go out and see what more he could learn, and they still acted, one and all, like they'd missed the memo.

There's always one who misses something. Or, in this case, ten.

All too often we make Thomas into the one who missed something. He did. But he was not the only one, and not the first one. He was just the one who got the longer story. As Debie Thomas writes at JourneyWithJesus.net, "I see a man who desired a holy and beautiful thing — a living encounter with Jesus. A man who wouldn't settle for someone else's experience of resurrection, but stuck around in the hope of having his own. A man who dared to confess uncertainty in the midst of those who were certain. A man who recognized his Lord in scars, not wonders."

Likewise Cheryl Lindsay writes at UCC.org, "I wonder if Thomas is our twin. If our story of hearing these accounts with some skepticism coupled with hope binds us together like a joint umbilical cord of faith being born. Thomas did not flatly refuse to believe; he rejects a faith that relies strictly upon the experience of others. His faith waits for an encounter with the Living God. Once he has it, his claim is swift and resolute, 'My Lord and my God!' Hope prevailed. Jesus lives. The world had changed. Life had changed."

Yes, he missed something. Beyond his expectation, what he missed he then experienced. As with the rest of them the week before, Jesus came to Thomas with what he needed – or at least what he said he needed – rather than insisting that Thomas come to some mysterious place to learn more.

What have we missed? What have you missed? What is that puka in your spirit that needs filling? What certainty do you need to lay aside in order to appreciate a new truth?

Faith does not have a problem with doubt. I've said this before. Faith has a problem with certainty. Jesus' disciples, from Simon Peter on along to Thomas, knew that he was dead. They knew it for certain. They'd heard the word that he'd risen, but, well, they'd missed something even as they heard it. They'd missed that it was true.

What do you know for certain that prevents you from appreciating the truth of God's aloha? Or God's shalom? Or God's resurrection and life?

What have you missed along the way that's begging to be renewed?

Here's the good news: whether you know what it is or not, Jesus comes not to where you ought to be, but to where you are. Jesus comes to where you've locked the door to your heart, not to the place where you'd like to be. Jesus comes to you, not to the perfect person you pretend to be and know you aren't.

Jesus comes to you with life and truth and peace and love and the Holy Spirit. And yes: blessed are those who, like us, have not seen and yet have come to believe.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson