

It's a Lifestyle: Jesus, Belief and a Godly Discipline: John 20:19-31

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Sunday, May 1, 2011

Text

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.'

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

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

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.' 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.**' Thomas answered him, '**My Lord and my God!**'

The Matter of Proof

- Thomas insists on materiality - a physical connection
- Who is this man?
 - the pre-resurrection Jesus of memory
 - a new post-resurrection Jesus
 - one appearing to be the pre-resurrection Jesus
 - a charlatan
- Thomas' needs are satisfied

What are the effects on the disciples

- Power of the event - experience of the life in the new community
- Faith/belief encouraged

- Disciples are models for believers

What about us, today?

- What happened long ago connects with what is happening in us right now
- Ancient questions may or may not be similar or relevant
- Similarity or difference between the pre-resurrection and post-resurrection Jesus
- From “what is truth” we now consider “what is doubt”
- Karen Armstrong, vis.

Doubt today and contemporary atheism

Religion's task, closely allied to that of art, was to **help us to live creatively, peacefully, and even joyously** with realities for which there were no easy explanations and problems that we could not solve: mortality, pain, grief, despair, and outrage at the injustice and cruelty of life.

Religion is a **practical discipline**, and its insights are not derived from abstract speculation but from **spiritual exercises** and a **dedicated lifestyle**.

Religious insight requires not only a dedicated intellectual endeavor to get beyond the "idols of thought" but also a compassionate lifestyle that enables us to **break out of the prism of selfhood**.

Insight . . . required **kenosis**, "negative capability," "wise : passiveness," and a heart that "watches and receives."

Many of us forgot that religious teaching was what the rabbis called *miqra*. It was essentially and crucially a **program for action**. You had to engage with a symbol imaginatively, become ritually and ethically involved with it, and allow it to effect a profound change in you. That was the original meaning of the words "faith" and "belief."

Because "faith" has come to mean **intellectual assent to a set of purely notional doctrines** that make no sense unless they are applied practically, some have given up altogether. Others, reluctant to abandon religion, are obscurely ashamed of their "unbelief and feel uncomfortably caught between two sets of extremists: religious fundamentalists, whose belligerent piety they find alienating, on the one hand, and militant atheists calling for the wholesale extermination of religion, on the other.

"**Belief** no longer means "**trust, commitment, and engagement**" but has become an intellectual assent to a somewhat dubious proposition.

We may find that for a while we have to go into what mystics called the **dark night of the soul** or the **cloud of unknowing**. This will not be easy for people used to getting instant information at **the click of a mouse**. But the novelty and strangeness of this negative capability could surprise us into awareness that stringent ratiocination is not the only means of acquiring knowledge.

But **something indefinable happens** to people who involve themselves in these disciplines with commitment and talent.

The point of religion was to live intensely and richly here and now. Truly religious people are ambitious. They want lives overflowing with significance.

Instead of being crushed and embittered by the sorrow of life, they sought to retain their peace and serenity in the midst of their pain. They yearned for the courage to overcome their terror of mortality; instead of being grasping and mean-spirited, they aspired to live generously, large heartedly, and justly, and to inhabit every single part of their humanity. Overall they found that the disciplines of religion helped them to do all this. Those who applied themselves most assiduously showed that it was possible for mortal men and women to live on a higher, divine, or godlike plane and thus wake up to their true selves.