

## “The Rest of the Story”

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Text: John 20:19-31

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Ordinarily my task this morning would be to explore a particular passage of scripture – to exegete the text – to discuss what’s there and to excavate – to “mine” the gems that lie within the verses. And this text from the Gospel of John contains several jewels deserving of our attention today. As a matter of fact, for those churches who utilize the lectionary – the three-year cycle of scriptures – this passage is always up for consideration on the Sunday after Easter. Such is the significance of the themes and theology presented in these verses. We have here Jesus bestowing peace upon the disciples. The peace of Christ could be our focus this morning. Or what about the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples – after all, this is John’s version of Pentecost. And then, even though it’s only one verse, we have the powerful admonition to forgive the sins of others. And then, we have the whole Doubting Thomas scene, which prompts us to talk about honest doubt, and seeing and believing. All that is there in the text. But we’re not going there this morning.

I don’t want to spend our time with what’s in the scripture. Rather, I want to talk about what’s not there. Verse 30 is our clue: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.” Why didn’t John include all the stories? Why did he quit writing? Did he run out of parchment? Did he not want to start another scroll? Was he worn out from everything he’d already written? If it was so important to capture everything he could about the person of Jesus, why stop short of including even more miraculous signs done by the Son of God?

I have a guess – it’s an educated guess – but it’s still a guess. I believe John admits that not all of the stories are written down because he wants to keep us alert to God in Jesus Christ present and active in our lives right here and right now, refusing to fence in that which defies all fences. The stories are not all written down, because they are still happening. The Jesus that John knew was and is a living Jesus, a post Easter Jesus, one whose stories could not be written down because they were still taking place. The signs were still happening in the lives of the disciples then, and are still happening in the lives of disciples today. The story John relates to us is a never-ending story. Our story is a never-ending story.

We know the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes with five loaves and a few fish. That story is written down. Jesus still feeds people now – feeds people when we support the Breadbasket with food donations, feeds people when we participate in the CROP Walk, feeds people when we reach out through our Week of Compassion offering, feeds someone when we assist a needy individual with a Dillons food certificate. Those stories haven’t been written down. They’re still happening.

We know stories of Jesus healing the sick, the blind, the deaf, those possessed by demons. Those stories are part of the written record. And Jesus still heals people now, heals people through the skilled hands and minds of doctors and nurses, technicians and therapists. Jesus still heals people – now – heals relationships and memories as we share life and forgiveness with each other. That story hasn’t been written down, because it’s still happening.

We know stories of Jesus reaching out to include in the kingdom of God the lepers, the sinners, the tax collectors, the outcasts, those whom tradition and culture said to exclude. We’ve heard and read those stories. And Jesus still reaches out to include outsiders when the church practices radical hospitality – when those who are different find a welcome place to be who they are – when the church affirms that it is the Lordship of Christ that unites us and not our opinions or our backgrounds of our traditions. That story of inclusion – of Christ reaching out with love and acceptance – is still being played out – it’s still happening.

We know of stories of Jesus encouraging the faint hearted – those are written down. Jesus still encourages the faint hearted – still helps those facing difficult situations – when Christians pray for each other – when friends sit with other friends in the hospital waiting room, amidst well worn magazines and styrofoam cups of coffee – when they bring food and flowers at the time of a loved one’s death. Jesus still encourages through support groups, 12 step groups – wherever someone offers a listening ear and a hand of support to someone who’s hit a rough stretch of road. That story is still being acted out and acted upon.

And we know stories of Jesus inspiring people to live beyond what they thought they were capable of living – Nicodemus, the woman at the well, Zacchaeus. Jesus still inspires people through the Word of God read and proclaimed, through participation in Holy Communion, through prayer, through the power and beauty of music, through the decision to lead one’s life differently. That story is still happening.

You see – this is why John couldn't write down all of the stories – because they're still happening. Because as long as the church is in mission, living, loving, including, serving, feeding, caring, Jesus is still at work in the world.

Not too long ago, the College Age Bible Study group read a book entitled *Yours are the Hands of Christ*. This title is a reference to the words of St. Teresa of Avila:

- Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, but yours, no feet but yours.
- Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ is to look out on a hurting world.
- Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good.
- Yours are the hands with which He is to bless now.

Jesus is still at work in the world, and we are an integral part of that story.

Several years ago there was a series of children's books published under the title of *Choose Your Own Adventure*. Each story was written from a second-person point of view, with the reader assuming the role of the protagonist and making choices that determine the main character's actions in response to the plot and its outcome. After an introduction to the story, the reader is asked to choose the next course of action. If you decide to start back home, turn to page four. If you decide to wait, turn to page five. After the reader makes a choice, the plot branches out and unfolds, leading to more decisions and eventually multiple possible endings. If you go to the "Choose Your Own Adventure" website, you're met with a screen that says:

Beware and Warning: These books are different than other books. You and you alone are in charge of what happens in this story. There are choices and adventures and dangers. You must use all of your talents and your intelligence . . . . At any time, you can go back and make another choice and alter the path of your story and change its result. Good luck.

Now while we are limited in what we can go back and "do over," we have a wide range of choices when it comes to our own faith story. We can help write the next chapter of the Gospel.

For there are people waiting to be fed, and we can decide to feed them. There are people who are needing to be healed, and we can choose to help them be healed. There are many around us who have been identified as outcasts, as marginal, as not normal, and we can decide which page we're going to turn, to wrap them in the loving embrace of Christ and His church. There are those waiting to be encouraged, and we have the freedom to choose whether we'll look beyond ourselves and offer our support. There are those waiting to be inspired and we must decide if we will help that happen. There are those who are waiting – longing – crying for someone to care about them. That, too, is our choice. But we don't act alone. Working through us, Christ will continue to do signs and miracles. Through the resurrection power of the living Christ, they will be done. We are a living church, because we are empowered by a living Lord.

John could not write down all of the signs of the power of God at work in Jesus. He couldn't. They're still happening. The Easter story is a never-ending story, and whenever and wherever these marvelous events occur, more people see and more people are encouraged and led to faith. We're a life-giving, life-changing, never-ending story. After we leave this sanctuary, what part of the story are you and I going to play?

God, we've heard that there are no small parts only small actors. In your story, which is our story, there are no unimportant parts. Help us play our part as big Christians. Amen.

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