

Raymond E. Brown

The Resurrection in John 20 — A Series of Diverse Reactions

John is a gospel of encounters: Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the cripple at Bethesda, the man born blind, Mary and Martha, and even Pilate. One after the other they have made their entrance onto the Johannine stage to encounter Jesus, the light come into the world; and in so doing they have judged themselves by whether or not they continue to come to the light or turn away and prefer darkness (Jn 3:19-21). It is not surprising, then, that the principal Johannine account of the appearances of the risen Jesus becomes a series of encounters illustrating different faith reactions.

The following arrangement of four episodes can be observed:

- 1) 20:1-10: Reactions of Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple
- 2) 20:11-18: Reaction of Mary Magdalene
- 3) 20:19-23: Reaction of Disciples
- 4) 20:24-29: Reaction of Thomas

The first pair of episodes takes place in relation to the tomb, early on Easter Sunday morning; the second pair of episodes takes place where the disciples are gathered, first on Easter Sunday evening and then a week later. Although the respective characters in the episodes are interrelated, the reaction of one does not influence the reaction of the other. The total scenario reminds us that in the range of belief there are different degrees of readiness and different factors that cause people to come to faith.

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EPISODE IN 20:1-10: REACTIONS OF SIMON PETER
AND THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

In all four gospels women come to the empty tomb on the first day of the week, but only in John does Mary Magdalene visit the tomb twice. The second visit (Jn 20:11ff.) is the one that has major parallels to the other gospel accounts; the first visit functions mostly to set the stage for the story of Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Even in such a stage setting, however, there are Johannine touches. As in Mark and Luke, Mary Magdalene¹ comes "early," but only in John do we have the added indication that "it was still dark." In this gospel where light and darkness play such a role, darkness lasts until someone believes in the risen Jesus. We are not told why Magdalene comes to the tomb;² but her alarmed reaction of racing off to tell the two disciples, "They took the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him!" (the first of the three times she stresses this), suggests a personal attachment to Jesus — an attachment the Good Shepherd will draw on later in the scene. Her immediate conclusion that Jesus' body has been stolen, a conclusion reached seemingly without entering the tomb, is peculiar to John. Matthew 28:13-15 attributes to "the Jews" the calumny that Jesus' disciples stole the body; but Mary Magdalene jumps to the conclusion that Jesus' "enemies" have done this, for she reports to *disciples* that others have stolen the body. Later (20:19) we shall hear of doors being closed "for fear of the Jews." This has been a gospel shaped by antagonism between the followers of Jesus and the synagogue, and that hostile context carries over to the resurrection account.

The two disciples who respond to Magdalene's report about the tomb are Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple. The latter figure, never mentioned as such during the first part of the gospel which describes Jesus' public ministry, has appeared with startling fre-

¹ That Mary Magdalene was not alone is suggested by her "we" in 20:2. However, since she is the sole recipient of the appearance of Jesus in 20:11-18 (and in that John may be closer to original tradition than Matthew 28:9-10 where "the other Mary" also sees the risen Jesus), any others who went to the tomb with Magdalene tend to fade into the background in John's understanding of the tradition. John is fascinated by the dramatic possibilities of individuals, even if a group is present.

² In Mark and Luke she comes to anoint the body; in Matthew, to see the sepulcher guarded by soldiers.

quency in the second part when "the hour has come for Jesus to pass from this world to the Father" (13:1). He belongs to that context where "having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end." Before John 20 this disciple has appeared at the Last Supper next to Jesus, in the high priest's courtyard next to Simon Peter, and near the cross of Jesus next to Jesus' mother. These contexts have been recounted in detail by the Synoptic evangelists who, however, never seem to have seen the presence of this disciple; for them he is the invisible man. The present instance is no exception: Luke 24:12 tells us that Peter arose and ran to the tomb, looked in, saw the linen cloths, and went home wondering.³ Luke gives no indication of the companion disciple who features so prominently in John. Yet Luke 24:24 may give us a key to this enigma: "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women said." In other words Luke knows of several disciples going to the tomb, and yet is capable earlier of mentioning only Peter because the others were not important as witnesses. The one whom John calls the disciple whom Jesus loved may have been invisible to the Synoptic tradition because he had no great name or rank, whereas his presence was eminently memorable to others who had a different criterion of greatness. For them he had the highest rank of all because Jesus loved him. John 20:2 uses two titles: The first is "the other disciple"; the second is "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The first may have been the way he was evaluated (and therefore forgotten) by other Christians; the second was the way he was known to those who preserved his memory in the Johannine tradition.

John paints artistically the delicate relationship between this disciple and the famous Peter (with whom he has appeared in a situation involving contrast twice before [13:23-24; 18:15-16] and will appear twice more [21:7, 20-22]). That the disciple reached the tomb first but did not enter, allowing Peter to catch up and enter first, has been the subject of imaginative speculation as to who had the greater ecclesiastical dignity. In fact, the arrangement may be dra-

³ This verse in Luke is textually dubious. Some scholars theorize that it was added by a later scribe who copied it from John; others suggest that it was originally part of Luke but excised by a scribe, because, by not mentioning the Beloved Disciple, it seemingly contradicted John.

matic, not theological: his entering last makes the disciple's reaction the culmination of the episode. In any case, neither the arrival nor the entry is the featured point of John's contrast between the two figures. What matters to the evangelist is that they responded differently to what they saw in the tomb, namely, the burial garments and the separate headpiece without the body: The disciple believed, and nothing is said to indicate that Peter believed.⁴ In the Pauline list of those to whom the risen Jesus appeared, the name of Cephas (Peter) comes before all others (1 Cor 15:5). But John knows of one who believed in the risen Lord even before an appearance, with a perspicacity that arose from love.

John 20:8 relates this belief to what the disciple saw, namely, the burial garments in an otherwise empty tomb. Because the evangelist takes such care to describe the burial wrappings lying there, with the piece of cloth that covered the head rolled up in a place by itself, many have thought that the configuration of these garments was significant to the disciple, for example, that they preserved the form of Jesus' body. Others have contended that the presence of the garments caused the disciple to deduce that the body had not been stolen, for grave robbers would scarcely have taken the time to unwrap the corpse and carried it away naked. Such reasoning does not explain why neither Simon Peter nor Mary Magdalene were moved to faith from having seen the garments. A better suggestion involves inner Johannine symbolism. Lazarus came forth from the tomb "bound hand and foot with linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth" (Jn 11:44); Jesus has left the same twofold set of wrappings in the tomb. Lazarus was resuscitated to natural life but would die again and need his burial garments once more. By contrast, the garments left in Jesus' tomb revealed to the disciple that Jesus had been raised to eternal life. The added Johannine comment that "as yet they did not understand the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead" ex-

⁴ I am not impressed by the argument that if John meant that Peter did not believe, he would have mentioned it. John does nothing to denigrate Simon Peter who in his estimation was one of Jesus' "own" whom he loved to the very end (13:1, 36), and who stayed with Jesus when others turned away because he recognized in Jesus the Holy One of God who had the words of eternal life (6:66-69). What John wishes to *emphasize* here is not the failure of Simon Peter to believe but the extraordinary sensitivity of the other disciple, stemming from the love of Jesus, that enables him to believe.

plains Simon Peter's failure to understand, for, as Luke 24:25-27, 32 shows, explanation of the Scriptures helped Jesus' disciples to accept the resurrection. Once more, by contrast, the extraordinary sensitivity of the first one to believe after the resurrection is highlighted since this disciple needed no such help.

EPISODE IN 20:11-18: REACTION OF MARY MAGDALENE

In 20:10 we read: "With this the disciples went back home." The evangelist's dramatic preference for individual encounter with Jesus has led him carefully to remove Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple from the tomb before the episode in which Mary Magdalene comes to faith there. The faith perception by the disciple and Simon Peter's lack of it have no influence on Magdalene whose reaction must be evaluated on its own. Next to Peter, James, John and Judas, Magdalene is the most frequently mentioned gospel follower of Jesus (eighteen times in all) and as such is a worthy character for the Johannine stage. In describing Mary's second visit to the tomb, John rejoins the common Christian tradition that she encountered an angelic presence there. Peculiar to John is the artistic touch that carefully positions one angel at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus had lain — a positioning comparable to the careful description in 20:6-7 that positioned separately the burial wrappings and the cloth that had covered Jesus' head. Readers are not meant to ask why these angels were not there when Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple entered the tomb. John is illustrating different reactions as greater aids to faith are supplied. In the previous episode Magdalene's first impression at the tomb was negative (20:1-2: "They took the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him"), but it served as a transition to the positive main story of how the Beloved Disciple came to faith (20:3-10). Similarly here, despite the presence of the angels, Magdalene's second impression at the tomb is negative (20:11-13: "They took my Lord away, and I do not know where they put him"), but it serves as a transition to the positive main story where she will come to faith (20:14-18). That development is made possible, not by angels but by Jesus himself.

The appearance to Magdalene may have been a very old tradition, despite the absence of women's names from a more official

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list of witnesses to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:5ff.⁵ John has expanded the traditional material into a dramatic encounter. Even though Jesus stands plainly in sight and speaks to Magdalene, she does not recognize him. Jesus' question "Whom [*tina*] are you looking for?" echoes the first words he spoke in this gospel, for in 1:38, when Jesus turned around and saw two disciples of John the Baptist following, he asked, "What [*ti*] are you looking for?" It is a question that probes discipleship,⁶ voiced most recently and tragically (18:4) in the garden across the Kidron to the arresting party brought by Judas to seize Jesus. The disciples of John the Baptist stayed with Jesus and found the messiah (1:41). The arresting party was hostilely looking for Jesus the Nazorean; they found him but were struck down in judgment (18:6). Magdalene is looking for the dead Jesus; she will find the living Lord.

Although the failure to recognize Jesus is a common feature in gospel resurrection narratives, the way John dramatizes Magdalene's lack of recognition is unique. Her reiterated supposition that people have carried Jesus off and her consuming concern to know where they have put him fasten in on whom she supposes to be the gardener (20:15), that is, the caretaker of the garden in which John 19:41 alone has told us Jesus was buried. The depth of Mary's concern can be seen in the question posed to her both by the angels and by the unrecognized Jesus: "Why are you weeping?", a query that gives the impression that tears have blurred her vision to heavenly interventions. The failure to see is overcome only when Jesus calls her by name. In John 10:3, 5 the Good (or really, Model) Shepherd was said to call by name the sheep that belong to him, sheep who will not follow a stranger "because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Mary's spontaneous reaction to being called by name, namely, her addressing Jesus as "Rabbuni," an endearing term for Teacher, verifies that claim of

⁵ I discussed this in relation to Matthew 28:9-10 in *Worship* 64 (March 1990) 164-65.

⁶ The parallelism constituted by a similar question in the opening and closing gospel scenes takes for granted that both men and women are disciples of Jesus in John — something not necessarily true elsewhere, for in Matthew "disciples" seem to be equated with the Twelve. Discipleship is the only category that is given importance in John, and it is open equally to all who believe and are begotten as children by God.

the Good Shepherd. In the instance of the Beloved Disciple, a faith that stemmed from seeing now-useless burial clothes represented one form of perceptiveness based on love. A faith that stems from Mary's hearing her name called represents another form: She is one of those of whom Jesus said: "I know my sheep and mine know me" (10:14).

Admixed in Magdalene's recognition and the love it reflects is an all too human element or, as John would phrase it, an element of this world below. Matthew's account (28:9) of the appearance to the women at the tomb has them clutching Jesus' feet. Something like that may be supposed here, for Jesus tells Mary, "Do not cling to me." She would hold on to his presence, keeping him here below; but he must remind her of the import of both clauses in the evaluation of his followers that he gave at the Last Supper (Jn 17:14): "They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world." When Jesus says to Magdalene, "I am ascending to my Father," he is reiterating where his home is, namely, the world above to which he belongs. When he adds "and to your Father," he is revealing to her that because of her postresurrectional faith the world to which she now belongs is also above — the heavenly house of Jesus' Father in which there are prepared many mansions (14:2). In indicating that "my Father" is now "your Father," Jesus is vocalizing in his own words the promise of the Prologue (1:12): "All those who did accept him he empowered to become God's children." That same new status is reflected in Jesus' reference to the disciples as "my brothers" in 20:17 as he sends Mary out to proclaim to them his ascension.⁸ If at the beginning of the tomb story, Mary Magdalene (named in full only at the beginning and the end: 20:1 and 18) went to tell the disciples that "They took the Lord from the tomb," at the end of the tomb story she goes to tell them, "I have seen the Lord."

⁷ The pattern is found in Ruth 1:16: Urged by Naomi to stay behind in Moab, Ruth insists that, though not an Israelite, she will come to Israel with Naomi; for from this moment, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

⁸ The Beloved Disciple already became Jesus' brother at the cross in John 19:26-27 when Jesus said to his mother in reference to the disciple, "Woman, here is your son." We shall see other instances of the priority of the Beloved Disciple in gifts and experiences that ultimately come to the rest of those who believe in Jesus.

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She already knew that he was Lord from what he had done in his lifetime, but now she understands the profundity of that title from what he has revealed after his resurrection. He is now more than the "Rabbuni" whom she lovingly recognized when he first called her name. The Beloved Disciple was the first to believe; Magdalene is the first to proclaim *the risen Lord*.⁹

EPISODE IN 20:19-23: REACTION OF THE DISCIPLES

In narrating Jesus' appearance to the group of disciples (as already in the instance of Magdalene's [second] visit to the tomb), John is close to common tradition, for several gospels describe a commissioning appearance of Jesus to the Twelve or Eleven.¹⁰ Once more, however, John has his own way of arranging the reactions. In 20:1 he gave this setting: "Early on the first day of the week when it was still dark"; in 20:19 he gives this setting: "On the evening of that first day of the week when, for fear of the Jews, the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were." The darkness has been dispelled since the Beloved Disciple and Mary Magdalene know that the Lord is risen; but fear and hiding still mark the lives of the disciples, despite Magdalene's report to them of what had happened at the tomb. Yet the fact that the disciples have already heard that Magdalene has seen the Lord makes intelligible the absence of doubt when they see Jesus appear.

⁹ In chapter 21 we shall see that although the Beloved Disciple has a certain priority over Simon Peter in faith and love, he is not made a shepherd of the sheep. Here in chapter 20 his priority in faith does not make him a proclaimer of resurrection faith. The relation of the disciple to Jesus is interior; exteriorly his only service is to witness (19:36). As for Magdalene, while her proclamation of the risen Lord is (in the language of other New Testament works) an apostolic role, we should remember that "apostle" is not Johannine terminology.

¹⁰ See Lk 24:36-49; Mk 16:14-18; Mt 28:16-20; also 1 Cor 15:5. John does not define which "disciples" were present; but the absence of Thomas, "one of the Twelve" (Jn 20:14), suggests that others of the Twelve were among the disciples. John does not demote the Twelve (see 6:67-69 where they have a special attachment to Jesus), but his use of "disciples" is more widely representative of those who would believe in Jesus. If one puts together 20:2, 10, and 18, one might judge that the disciple whom Jesus loved should be present; but one can never anticipate the reappearance of that mysterious figure.

His "Peace to you" (a statement of fact, not a wish) in 20:19 goes beyond a greeting¹¹ because of what Jesus proclaimed at the Last Supper: "'Peace' is my farewell to you; my 'peace' is my gift to you; and I do not give it to you as the world gives it" — words Jesus coupled with the statement that if he was going away, he was also "coming back to you" (14:27-28). Next, in 20:20, the risen Jesus shows his disciples his hands and side with the wound marks inflicted during the crucifixion (as 20:25 will make clear). He thus removes all question of his identity¹² and fulfills a Last Supper promise (16:21-22): "You are sad now; but I shall see you again, and your hearts will rejoice with a joy that no one can take from you." In reporting the reaction of the disciples John says that they saw that it was "the Lord," and this use of the standard postresurrectional title is the closest that John comes to telling us that they believed. Their insight brings them joy, a response that fulfills the goal enunciated by Jesus at the Last Supper (16:24): ". . . in order that your joy may be full."

Jesus repeats "Peace to you" (20:21); this not only further clarifies that we have here no simple greeting, but also suggests that peace is to accompany the disciples in their forthcoming assignments. The first of those is conveyed through a commissioning: "As the Father has sent me (*apostellein*), so do I send you (*pempein*)." While John's stylistic preference for varied vocabulary plays a major role in such an alternation of the verbs "to send," the fact that he does not use the title "apostle" (*apostolos*) may be another factor in his not employing *apostellein* in reference to the dis-

¹¹ While "Peace to. . ." is a general greeting in rabbinic Hebrew, in biblical Hebrew the *shalom* greeting tends to be confined to solemn, often revelatory moments, for example, Judges 6:23.

¹² In Luke 24:37-39 the invitation "See my hands and feet" responds explicitly to questionings that rise in the heart of the disciples who think they are seeing a spirit. While Jesus' showing his hands and side in John 20:20 and inviting Thomas to examine his wounds in 20:27 imply a certain tangible corporeality, the fact that Jesus comes and appears in front of the disciples even though the doors are locked (20:19) should make us wary of assuming that John had a crassly physical understanding of the body of the risen Jesus. There is no solid New Testament evidence that the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples on earth was other than bodily (and certainly no evidence that his body remained in the grave); yet there is much evidence that this was a different kind of body or one with different properties from the body before death.

ciples. Nevertheless, this is a commissioning comparable in large part to the apostolic commissioning of the Twelve (Eleven) in Luke 24:46-49; Matthew 28:18-19; and Mark 16:15.¹³ The paradigm for the commissioning in John is the Father's sending of Jesus with all that implies by way of purpose, for example, to bring life, light, truth. Just as the Father was present in the Son during the Son's mission (12:45: "Whoever sees me is seeing him who sent me"), so now must the disciples in their mission manifest the presence of Jesus to the point that whoever sees the disciples sees Jesus who sent them. That is an enormous challenge! It was anticipated at the Last Supper (13:20): "Whoever welcomes anyone that I shall send welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me."

Such re-presenting of Jesus on the part of the disciples becomes possible through the gift of the Holy Spirit (20:22). Jesus was designated by John the Baptist as "The one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit" (1:33);¹⁴ and at the Last Supper he promised to send the Holy Spirit (15:26). That promise is now fulfilled for the disciples when the risen Jesus says to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."¹⁵ A particular aspect of this gift of the Spirit is signaled by Jesus' breathing on the disciples, a gesture that even in vocabulary is evocative of Genesis 2:7: "The Lord God formed the human being out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." We should be aware that "spirit, wind, breath" often represent the same vocabulary cluster, for that makes intelligible the passionate exclamation of Ezekiel 37:9: "From the four winds come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may

¹³ I say "in large part" because the other commissionings specify the destination (the world, the Gentiles); in John 20:21 the mission is as wide as that of Jesus' mission from the Father.

¹⁴ The gift of the Holy Spirit in 20:22 is connected in the next verse with the forgiveness of sins; notice that before John the Baptist's description of Jesus cited above, he described him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29).

¹⁵ At Jesus' death his Spirit was given over to the Beloved Disciple and to the mother of Jesus (who had now become the mother of the disciple) as they stood near the cross (Jn 19:26-27). Notice that in many aspects of the complex of resurrection/ascension/gift-of-the-Spirit the Beloved Disciple has priority over the other disciples in John. Different New Testament works will deal with that complex in different ways, for example, Acts 2 has still another moment for the giving of the Spirit (Pentecost).

come to life." This motif is repeated close to New Testament times by Wisdom 15:11: "The One who fashioned [the human being] and breathed into him a living spirit." Just as in the first creation God's breath brought into existence a human being in his image and likeness, so now Jesus' gift of his own Holy Spirit makes the disciples God's children in the likeness of the Son. Now they are born of Spirit (Jn 3:5). The breath of God in Genesis gave life; the breath of Jesus gives eternal life.

In addition John relates Jesus' gift of the Spirit to the power over sin: "If you forgive people's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you hold them, they are held fast." Jesus was sent as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29; see also 1 Jn 2:1-2); he now shares that power with his disciples. The description of this power as including both forgiveness and binding is related to the fact that the coming of Jesus produces a *krisis* or judgment as to whether people will opt for darkness or light so that some are condemned and some are not (Jn 3:18-21). If Jesus so mirrored God that when people met him they were forced to self-judgment, his disciples must so mirror Jesus that those who encounter them are provoked to a similar *krisis*. At the Last Supper (17:18) Jesus spoke more specifically than here of sending his disciples *into the world*; in that context he spoke both of the world hating them (17:14) and of the world believing because of them (17:21). The provoking of *krisis* or self-judgment is not the total range of the forgiveness and binding of sin granted in John 20:23,¹⁶ but it is an aspect that John would not have us overlook. To represent Christ to a degree that forces people to make a decision in their lives is a tremendous empowerment.

EPISODE IN 20:24-29: REACTION OF THOMAS

In a transitional verse (20:24) John tells the reader that Thomas the Twin¹⁷ was absent. He has been portrayed in John 11:16 and 14:5

¹⁶ Patristic writers will see the power over sin granted in John 20:23 as being exercised in baptism; later writers and the Council of Trent will see it applied in the sacrament of penance and will specify that this exercise of the power is not granted to all Christians. As legitimate as these specifications are, there is no requirement to think that the evangelist had them in mind. Our concern here is to understand this power in light of the overall gospel context dealing with sin and judgment.

¹⁷ It is not clear why the evangelist takes the trouble to explain the meaning

as a figure not easily persuaded. The disciples who saw the risen Jesus in 20:19-23 give to Thomas exactly the same report that Mary Magdalene had given to them (20:18): "We have seen the Lord." On the basis of Magdalene's report the disciples did not doubt when Jesus appeared to them; but Thomas is adamant in his refusal to believe on the basis of their word. He wants to probe the wounds of Jesus in order to be sure. Other evangelists mention doubt on the part of the disciples after the resurrection (Mt 28:17 Lk 24:11, 41; Mk 16:11, 14); only John dramatizes that doubt so personally in an individual. Thomas' words, "If I do not see . . . and put my finger . . ., I shall never believe," reflect an attitude condemned by Jesus in John 4:48: "Unless you people can see signs and wonders you never believe." The Jesus of John does not reject the possibility that miracles lead people to faith, but he does reject miracles demanded as an absolute condition.

That "after eight days" Jesus appears in the same place (once more with the doors locked) may indicate that there was already a reverence for Sundays in the Johannine community. (Indeed in the same decade of the 90s in which the gospel of John was written we find a reference to "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10.¹⁸) There is a touch of Johannine irony in having the time and circumstances of the appearance to the disciples the same as those of the appearance to Thomas. Jesus' "Peace to you" is repeated despite Thomas' antecedent doubts! Knowing what Thomas had said (even as he had shown previous knowledge of what was in the human heart [2:25]), Jesus invites Thomas to examine his hands and side — an invitation that turns the tables on Thomas by probing him. Scholars have debated whether in fact Thomas physically probed the risen body. Surely, on the basis of Johannine theology, however, if Thomas had examined and touched Jesus' body, he

of the Semitic form underlying "Thomas." Some have speculated that he was Jesus' twin in appearance; in gnostic speculation he becomes the recipient of special revelations.

¹⁸ It is not unlikely, even if unprovable, that the eucharist would have been celebrated on a Sunday thus designated, and that would mean the presence of the risen Lord. Less certain is the interpretation of "after eight days" as the first evidence of a Christian theology of the eighth day (*ogdoad*), illustrated later in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 15:9: "We celebrate with gladness the eighth day in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and having appeared, ascended into heaven."

would have persisted in a disbelief that he had already demonstrated and would have ceased to be a disciple. The words of Jesus as he challenges Thomas should be taken literally: "Do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer." Thomas accepts that directive, does not touch Jesus, and so professed faith.

The final irony of the gospel is that the disciple who doubted the most gives expression to the highest evaluation of Jesus uttered in any gospel: "My Lord and my God." At the beginning of the gospel the evangelist told the readers that the Word was God (1:1). Now by an inclusion he has shown how difficult it was for Jesus' followers to come to such an insight. Thomas has been remembered in Christian imagery as the doubter par excellence; yet the last words of Jesus to him in response to his confession of faith are an enviable encomium, "You have believed."

If the gospel narrative ended at that point, we would have been satisfied that in chapter 20 we had seen four different reactions to the risen Jesus. Much to our surprise Jesus and the evangelist are interested in a fifth reaction. The Beloved Disciple believed when he saw the garments left in the tomb; Mary Magdalene believed when she heard the voice of the risen Jesus call her name; the disciples believed when they saw the risen Jesus and realized that it was the Lord; Thomas believed when challenged by the risen Jesus to carry out a disbelieving program of probing. The final praise for belief, however, is extended by Jesus to those who have believed without seeing garments or bodily presence. In the Johannine portrait no greater praise can be given to Jesus than "My Lord and my God"; no greater praise can be given to Jesus' followers than "Blest are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Through that faith the prophecy of Hosea 2:25 (23) is fulfilled: A people that was formerly not a people has said, "You are my God."



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