

“One Last Time”

John 20: 19-31

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Ever living God, in the quietness of these moments, breathe your Holy Spirit into the words that are read and proclaimed like you breathed your Spirit into the disciples of long ago. Open us to the power of the risen Christ in this place, in our lives and in the world. Amen.

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In the second act of the award winning Broadway musical, *Hamilton*, the character of George Washington announces to Alexander Hamilton he will not to run for re-election as President. This introduces America to the practice of a peaceful and orderly transition between administrations. In it is his philosophy of governance and the importance of knowing "how to say goodbye." He discusses his plan to retire and live the rest of his life outside public scrutiny.

George Washington asks Alexander Hamilton to help draft his last address to the American people. They have the following dialogue in the song *One Last Time*.

Washington: Pick up a pen, start writing. I wanna talk about what I have learned. The hard-won wisdom I have earned.

Hamilton: As far as the people are concerned. You have to serve, you could continue to serve.

Washington: No! One last time. The people will hear from me. One last time. And if we get this right we're gonna teach 'em how to say goodbye. You and I.

Hamilton says: Mr. President, They'll say your weak!

Washington: No! They will see we're strong.

Hamilton: Your position is so unique.

Washington: So I'll use it to move them along.

Hamilton: Why do you have to say goodbye?

Hamilton doesn't want Washington to go. Hamilton thinks the world will judge him. But Washington knows he must.

Washington suggests a final address to the people.

One last time to draft his farewell address.

One last to collaborate.

One last drink with a friend.

What Hamilton wouldn't give for this one last time with him.

According to the Gospel of John, the disciples spend that first Easter evening, indoors, huddled together in a locked room. Grieving their friend. Stunned at the news they have heard that he is raised from the dead. While they are there, Jesus appears

to them. Except for Thomas. Poor Thomas wasn't there when Jesus snuck through that door and appeared to his friends the first time. When Thomas returns Thomas wants to see and know more. He wants proof of Jesus. He's pretty emphatic about seeing Jesus for himself.

What Thomas wouldn't give for one last time with his friend.

Karoline Lewis, Associate Professor at Luther Seminary, writes, "We think Thomas demands proof, but he doesn't. As if proof beyond a reasonable doubt is even something that's possible, given the presented circumstances.

There is nothing, after all, reasonable about any of this.

Nothing reasonable about an empty tomb.

Nothing reasonable about "I AM the resurrection and the life."

Nothing reasonable about promises kept...

Nothing reasonable at all.

But that is how we tend to interpret Thomas, that he is trying to reason this whole thing out. That his ultimate goal is to put all of the pieces together into some sensible whole. When, in fact, all Thomas wants, all Thomas needs, is what everyone else had and, if we are honest, what we want -- to see Jesus.

One more time. Mary saw the Lord. The disciples saw the Lord.

Because the Word made flesh *isn't* -- if you can't see and feel Jesus one last time."¹

One last time is not just about death. What we wouldn't give to have one last time.

One last favorite place to visit.

One last . . . cup of coffee and great conversation with a mentor.

. . . last dance.

. . . curtain call before the show closes.

. . . walk on the path holding hands.

. . . great meal with the one you love.

This week, I've wondered about those who went to Easter services in the churches in Sri Lanka, or just yesterday in the Chabad Community Center in Poway, California during Jewish services at the end of Passover, or the communities who grieve after the attacks at the mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand over one month ago. What they wouldn't give for one last time with their loved ones?

What I appreciate about Thomas is that he doesn't have it all figured out. But he does help us in some way. Thomas lingers to remember that the grief was real. That the grief of losing a

¹ Karoline Lewis, *Linger a Little. John 20: 19-31*, April 28, 2019. <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5319>

dear friend hurts. It stings. Thomas tells us that all of that is ok. Because we forget to wonder, to question, and to sit in that lingering for a while. We get so caught up in the sign, the promise of resurrection for our future. We seem so eager to go on to the next miracle.

Thomas helps us linger, just a little bit, just for a little while. He helps us not move on too soon.

-Linger over a beautiful sunrise.

-Linger a little longer with a family member before time and miles separate you.

-Linger, because I can still smell his scent on his overcoat.

-Linger, because then, I'll still have you close.

For Thomas, this was more than belief or getting proof. It was about relationship. His relationship with Jesus mattered and he wanted to be with his friend.

In the 1st century, believing was about relationship. It was about coming together to hear the stories and to learn together the teachings of Jesus. It would take a certain togetherness to make it through the trying times after Jesus death and carry his message forward. Together in community, the disciples learned to pray, learned to be in mission in the world, learned to stay together, even when Jesus said, "he was going on before them." Believing was about relationship. It was Thomas' turn

to encounter the risen Christ and experience that relationship again, just like the others just days before.

So a week later, when Thomas was with the disciples in the house...Jesus shows up again. Jesus greets Thomas and shows him his wounds. This is so hard for Thomas, but this is not the same Jesus he remembers. As much as Thomas wants to linger with Jesus, he knows things can't be the way things were. Thomas has to realize the future looks different.

Back to Hamilton. The stunned Alexander Hamilton doesn't want Washington to leave the presidency and return home. Hamilton wants the journey of the country to continue. But Washington knows for the strength of the country, he must relinquish power, and turn things over to others to govern. Hamilton concedes and assists Washington with his final address:

Hamilton asks, "Why do you have to say goodbye?"

Washington replies, "If I say goodbye the nation learns to move on. It outlives me when I'm gone." Like the scripture says:

"Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree

And no one shall make them afraid."²

They'll be safe in the nation we've made

² Micah 4:4, 1 Kings 4:25 and 2 Kings 18:31

I want to sit under my own vine and fig tree

A moment alone in the shade

At home in this nation we've made

One last time.³

What we know about the final weeks of Jesus' life, is that Jesus spent a lot of time with his friends. Teaching them. Instructing them to continue God's mission even after He was gone, giving the disciples tools for the journey ahead. Jesus knew that everything comes to an end. Jesus says, "don't hold on to me. I am going on before you. I will be with you always."

It's Thomas who helps us linger on the promises of God. The promise that Jesus will be with us always, to the end of the age.

Thomas is the one who "gets it." He gets it that the Word became flesh isn't if you can't see and feel Jesus one last time.

I think that Thomas also knows that Jesus will keep showing up in his life and in the life of his friends. In the word, in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine, Jesus shows up. Jesus came to the disciples when their guard was down. When our guard is down, Jesus will keep showing up. When our fears get the best of us, when our grief is just too great to get through.

³ Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *Hamilton*. (2015) Songwriters: Lin-Manuel Miranda. One Last Time lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc. (The historical Washington was fond of quoting this line in his correspondence.)

When we reach for something to hold onto through difficult times, Jesus shows up. Jesus will keep showing up.

Thanks be to God for the risen life of Jesus Christ.

Christ Is Risen.... He is Risen Indeed. Thanks Be to God.

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