

“GETTING CONFUSED WITH JESUS”

A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2017

Text: John 20:19-31

“Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” (Ephesians 5:8)

Like Thomas, Christians have a complicated relationship with the crucified and resurrected Jesus.

On one hand, we worship Christ. We are here today for the purpose of expressing our astonishment and praise. Thomas exclaimed “My Lord and my God!” We say many similar things in the course of our worship. We call ourselves disciples and followers because we believe in Christ. He is **not** just like us. He is practically our opposite. He is God: Karl Barth called God the *totaliter aliter*, the one who is “totally alien.”

On the other hand, you and I **are** just like Jesus. We are so much like Jesus that you could practically call us twins.

This is the great thing about having a Lord with two natures—divine and human.

I want to focus today on the second part of our relationship—how we are just like the one who is risen from the dead. And what makes it fun to do that today is partly a little theory I have. I could be wrong about this, but my hunch is that Thomas was called Thomas because he looked like Jesus.

The gospel of John says three times that Thomas “*was called*” the twin.

That is strange because the name “Thomas” *already* means “twin” in Hebrew. The Greek “Didymus” (or “twin”) is just a translation of the Hebrew word Taoma. So “Thomas, called ‘the twin’” means “the twin” called “the twin.”

But if his parents gave him the name “twin,” what did they name his twin brother or sister: Twin? Were they “twin one” and “twin two”? Or did they give the first one a normal name, and when a twin surprised them they named him “Twin”?

Perhaps. But I don’t think so. I could be wrong, but I think he had a normal name like “Sam” which he went by as a child; and he acquired the nickname “twin” or “Thomas” at some point because he looked a lot like somebody else he ran around with. A V.I.P.

Jesus’ disciples didn’t all go by the names on their birth certificate. James and John were called “The Sons of Thunder.” Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter. The group used to call the other Simon “the Cananean.” Luke says they also called him “the Zealot.” To distinguish between him and Peter, of course. They called Judas “the man from Keriot,” or “Iscaiot.” John they may have called “the favorite,” or “the one Jesus loved,” because he always got to sit next to Jesus. (Of course, they also said about Lazarus that he was the one Jesus loved. John 11:3-- “So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’” And Judas? I suspect they called him “the treasurer.”) And why was “James the Less” called that? He was the shorter of the two guys named James.

Women disciples also had some extra names. Remember on Sunday, we heard about Mary and “the other Mary”? Perhaps they kidded her like that. There was the “Main Mary” and the “Other Mary.” And “Magdalene” was not a “last name.” They didn’t have last names. They used a patronymic, “daughter of . . .” or “son of . . .” But nicknames were a serious industry.

My hunch—and it’s only a hunch—is that Thomas was called “Thomas” in Hebrew and “Didymus” in Greek because he looked a lot like . . . Jesus. *Could have been mistaken for him.* Like, maybe when Judas told the chief priests that he would help identify Jesus by kissing him, he was making sure they didn’t arrest Thomas by mistake. I think those guys all dressed alike, and they were about the same age, but Thomas especially looked like Jesus. My theory.

But that is my point today. It would be great if we all were to be confused for Jesus. If people would look at us and do a double take. In fact, you and I are called by Christ to be Christ in the world, and we are given gifts to make this happen. So this is not just my point today, it is the point of Jesus Christ. That we should be taken for him. **Our presence, our effect, our kindness, the way we look at others, the way we make peace, our strange practice of forgiving as we have been forgiven, the peace we enjoy even when we suffer--ought to remind people of Jesus.**

That day when Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to some of the women, ten of Jesus’ disciples were hiding behind locked doors because they were **afraid of being identified with Jesus.** They were afraid that the stigma of being Jesus’ disciples might spell death.

Peter had come close during the trial. A servant-girl had said “This man, too, was with them.” And again, “I’m sure I saw you with him.” And then they all said, “You talk like a Galilean, you must be one of them.”

So Easter evening they were in hiding. **They did not want to be seen.** Somebody might see them and it might trigger a bad reaction, like “Get the Galileans!” “Arrest them, too!”

According to the Gospel of John, this is what Thomas expected when Jesus went to Bethany where Lazarus was sick. When Jesus insisted on going, Thomas said “Let us also go with him, that we may die with him.” That might have been a heroic, self-sacrificing statement, or bravado, or even fatalism.

At any rate, he felt that *identification with Jesus* might get him into trouble. So, they went with Jesus. And when he got killed, they wondered if they were next.

They were hiding.

But Jesus came and stood among them. And gave them his Spirit. He passed the torch to them. He bound them to himself. He took their futures and his own future and tied them together in one mission from God. And at the same time, he bound himself—by his Spirit—to all who would believe in him.

The church would not be able to stay in a locked room, hiding from the world, any more than Jesus could stay hiding in a tomb for eternity.

Jesus had always made it a theme of his to tell his disciples that they ought to be “like him.” His whole time with the disciples he was drawing connections between how he was and how they should be. “Love one another as I have loved you,” for example. And “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do.” He called them his friends, his brothers and sisters and mothers. And he did this not as though he was giving us an objective, something we needed to work on. He did it as a gift. Like being born. Like having breath blown into you. Like receiving a transfusion from someone with better blood.

How better to illustrate this than to showcase the disciple who had been nicknamed his twin? It was Thomas who had said “We do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?” to which Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” And also “You in me, and I in you,” etc.

In fact, I think Jesus *hopes* that the world will confuse his followers with him. Remember, he said “As you do it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters (meaning his disciples), you have done it to me.” That is confusing, isn’t it, unless we are stand-ins for Jesus? But then, he tells us to let our light shine, when it is his light, and people will

see our good works but give the glory to our Father in heaven, just as they did when he did good works!

Where *should* people look if they want to see the resurrected Jesus Christ? In this skeptical, data-mad world, thousands of years after the fact, long after all living witnesses are dead and gone, where should they look?

How about 526 E 52nd St, Indianapolis, Indiana? How about your home address, or where you work or go to school? Might they see Christ there?

Jesus gave his Spirit, the Spirit of the Resurrection, the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of God—he gave that Spirit to us. Not as a mask for the truth about us, but as a sign to the world that Christ is not dead. The good Jesus had done was not interred with his bones. It is not over. It lives! Because his brothers and sisters, his twins, are at work. Amen.

