

Rev. Julie U. Riley
John 20:19-31
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I was not one of the twelve, but I was with them that day. I had followed Jesus for years. I remember the first time I saw him, I had never heard of him before. I actually wasn't following him that day, we both just so happen to be guest at the same wedding party. I probably wouldn't have even taken notice of him except that there was some kind of commotion. I was trying to get some more wine, but I couldn't get the servants' attention, they were all gathered around him. I remember wondering to myself what made him so special that he had all the servants running around such, but soon the commotion died down and I had a fresh glass of wine, good wine I remember, and I probably would have forgotten all about him except that when I was in Jerusalem for the festival I heard a commotion in the temple. I went to see what was going on and I heard snippets of conversations, "healed", "crippled", "thirty eight years." Then I heard his name, Jesus.

I began to hear more about this Jesus, so when I heard that he was in the area; I followed the crowd to see him. I was surprised to find that this Jesus was the same man I had seen at the wedding. It was clear to me that day that this was no ordinary man. You see, we had been sitting on the hillside all day, listening to him teach. We were so engrossed in what he was saying, we didn't even realize how late it had become. He seemed to notice, though. He spoke to his disciples, and I saw a young boy bring him a basket. He took some bread out of the basket and he broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, and they began to pass the bread through out the crowd, there was fish, too, but I don't like fish much. I don't know how much food that boy had in his small basket, but I know it wasn't enough for that crowd. And yet, when the loaf came to me, there was plenty. I started to take just a small piece, but then I looked around and saw that there was bread every where, so I took more. When we had finished eating, we put all the leftovers in baskets, and I know there was more than we started with; there were twelve baskets of food! That day on the hillside, I became a follower. I cannot say that I really understood who Jesus was back then; all I knew was that I had to know more.

I followed Jesus everywhere. I was there when he taught in the temple; I was there when he healed the blind man. I was there when he raised Lazarus and, yes, I was there when they killed him. Afterwards I didn't know what to do. That's how I found myself in the house that day with the disciples. Mary Magdalene had come to the disciples that morning with the most remarkable news, that Jesus was risen from the dead, that she had seen him with her own eyes, talked to him, even. No one knew what to think, least of all me, and so we sat all day, hidden away in the house, waiting. I don't know what we were waiting for, I guess we were just waiting for something to make sense. For days now nothing had made sense. How could they have killed him? How could any of this happen? And now, what are we to make of Mary's, what? Story? I know she believes what she saw and yet it is so very unbelievable.

That's when he came. He just stood there in front of us saying, "Peace." We must have all looked like we had seen a ghost because Jesus showed us his hand and his side. It wasn't that we didn't believe exactly, it was just that we could not comprehend what we were seeing. All this time we had seen sign after sign, and we knew that this man was sent to us from God, for no one could do the thing he did apart from God, but now, here he is, risen from the dead, alive, in the flesh in front of us.

Then he said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." I heard him, but I was sure that he didn't mean me! The disciples, maybe, but not me! I could never do the things he did. Then, as if to answer me, Jesus breathed on us, on all of us, me included, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." I cannot describe to you how that felt, it was like I was breathing Jesus into my lungs, into my life. It was like I was that lump of clay that God breathed life into on that first day of creation. It was like I was given a whole new life that day.

This new life is no longer a life of simply following Jesus, of seeking to know about Jesus; this new life is no longer simply about showing up and listening. This new life is not simply about observing Christ, but instead it is living Christ. This new life is his life; it's about Christ living in me and through me. This new life is about me living in Christ, and he in me. It is amazing. But this new life isn't just about me; it's about all of us. Together we are the body of Christ. This Spirit wasn't given just to me; it was given to all of us, all who believe in Christ. Together we are the signs that point to God. Together we are the face of Christ, the face of God's love in the world. What an awesome gift; what an awesome responsibility. What will we do with it?

For God so love the world that God sent the only Son... (John 3:16a)

Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you. (John 20:21b)