

## "Hide and Seek" - April 12, 2015

*Hide and Seek*  
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John 20: 19-31; Saying from the Gospel of Thomas  
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### **John 20:19-31**

“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

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The Gospel according to the disciple Thomas was one of the precious papyrus scrolls discovered in Egypt in 1945, buried in clay jars near the town of Nag Hammadi. This gospel was well known in antiquity but thought to have been lost. It is a collection of 114 sayings, many of which are familiar to us, including parables and metaphors of God’s kingdom. Dates for the writing of this gospel range from 40 to 140 A.D. If it was a source for the New Testament gospel writers, it would be the earliest writings we have of Jesus’ words. Another possibility is that it was written after the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, closer to the year 90, when the gospel of John was written. There are striking parallels between the gospel of Thomas and the gospel of John, along with quite different perspectives of Jesus. The way in which John portrays the disciple Thomas may have been in response to the Thomas Christians preaching at that time - a friendly debate or a more serious rivalry, who knows?

Why wasn't the gospel of Thomas included in the New Testament? There are many possible reasons, but one was simply that the gospel wasn't written in narrative form, and it doesn't relate or discuss the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It focuses on the "hidden words of Jesus" as the way to seek God and know the light of God within us.

Listen carefully to some of Jesus' sayings, most of which need to be heard or read several times, and even then, they may remain a mystery. As Jesus repeats often in the gospel of Thomas: *Whoever has ears should hear!*

### **Sayings from the Gospel of Thomas** Translation by Hans-Gebhard Bethge

"These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke. And Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down.

*Saying 1:* And Jesus said: "Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death."

*Saying 2:* Jesus says: "Let he who seeks remain always seeking until he finds. And when he finds, he will be troubled. Having been troubled, he will be astonished. And he will reign over the All."

*Saying 3:* Jesus says: "If those who lead you say to you; 'Look, the kingdom is in the sky! Then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you: 'It is in the sea,' then the fishes will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you and outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are the children of the living God. But if you do not come to know yourselves, then you exist in poverty and you are poverty."

*Saying 6:* His disciples questioned him and they said to him: "Do you want us to fast? And how should we pray and give alms? And what diet should we observe?" Jesus says: "Do not lie. And do not do what you hate. For everything is disclosed in view of the truth. For there is nothing hidden that will not become revealed. And there is nothing covered that will remain undisclosed."

*Saying 48:* Jesus says: "If two make peace with one another in one and the same house, then they will say to the mountain, "Move away," and it will move away."

*Saying 51:* His disciples said to him: "When will the resurrection of the dead take place, and when will the new world come?" He said to them: "That resurrection which you are awaiting has already come, but you do not recognize it."

*Saying 58:* Jesus says: "Blessed is the person who has struggled. He has found life."

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The prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures wrote about “seeking God with all your heart and soul.” We are familiar with Jesus’ words in the gospel of Luke: *Seek and you will find*. These words appear in three sayings in the gospel of Thomas, with one including the additional phrase: *Knock and the door will be opened*. In the gospel of Thomas, the finding is never the end of it. It is not a question of being lost and then being found, hallelujah, that’s it. It is more a question of seeking God and finding, comma....

Jesus says: When the seeker finds, he will be troubled-- confused, challenged by what he finds. *Is that really you, God? How can I do what you are asking? Why are you revealing yourself through this person or that loss?* Then, as the seeker digs deeper and struggles to understand, he will become astonished, amazed. Experiencing awe opens, teaches and changes us. Then, the seeker “reigns over everything,” that is, shines as God’s light in, over, and throughout the world. The fullness of God’s kingdom is realized on the inside and on the outside.

So, the finding is but one stage that calls us to yet another challenge and then another, until the seeker knows himself and God fully. As another Thomas saying puts it: *Jesus said: Blessed is one who has labored and has found life*. A central theme in this gospel is the work that the Christian seeker must do. We must labor to find authentic life, the life for which we are created; we must take responsibility for our growth in mind, body and spirit. God calls us to be partners in covenant, partners in the difficult and wondrous process of this gift called life.

See how this one saying from the Gospel of Thomas adds richness and a fresh perspective to words of Jesus with which we are familiar? Pretty cool, isn’t it?

We also recognize this phrase, also in the gospel of Luke: *The kingdom of God is within you*. According to Thomas, Jesus says: *the kingdom of God is inside and outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are the children of the living God*.

Seeking to know God means seeking to know yourself and discovering yourself as the image of the divine light hidden within you. According to Thomas, we have come from this light, the primordial light that existed before anything else. And Jesus calls himself the Light. We are seeking to **become** a light to others as Jesus was, to live the authentic life that Jesus lived, true to himself, true to our deepest selves.

Truth and authenticity. Jesus also says: *Do not lie. Don’t do what you hate. Do what you love. For everything is disclosed in view of the truth*. This was his answer to the disciples when they ask how they should pray and give alms, what they should eat.

These words fit in with the Jesus we know, who hated hypocrisy and who

proclaimed that sincere acts of compassion should have priority over religious doctrine and rituals. Jesus lived according to his passion for the kingdom, and that shocked many people, who regarded the law of Moses as the final word.

What undoubtedly shocked the writer of the gospel of John and other followers of Christ, was the idea expressed in Thomas' gospel that we have the potential to be like Jesus Christ. We can embody and spread God's light as Jesus did. In the gospel of John, Jesus is proclaimed as God in human form and the only way to know God; Jesus says: *Believe in me*. In the gospel of Thomas, Jesus says: *I am the light that is over all. I am the All. The All came forth out of me. And to me the All has come. Split a piece of wood—I am there. Lift the stone, and you will find me there.*

Hmm... kind of strange and mysterious! And what a gift for reflection and debate as Christian seekers according to Thomas and believers according to John! I wonder—can we be both at once??

Now that we have found the gospel of Thomas, John's portrayal of the disciple Thomas may not be such a surprise. Thomas is not only the one who doubts in our gospel reading this morning, but in two previous episodes in the gospel of John, Thomas sticks out as the most obtuse of the disciples. He takes Jesus' words literally and struggles to understand, blurting out a ridiculous comment or question. And yet, because of this, he is also a sympathetic character, all too human like us. Thomas may be the most courageous disciple because he says out loud what the rest of us may also be thinking!

Rather than always faulting Thomas for wanting to see and touch Jesus' wounds, rather than feeling badly about ourselves for not always believing in what we cannot see, we might look at Thomas with new eyes, through the gospel of Thomas.

Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus first came to the room where they were hiding. That doesn't necessarily mean that Thomas wasn't a true disciple. When we are struggling with grief or fear or both, there are times when it helps to talk with a friend and be supported within a community, and there are times when we need to be alone with ourselves and with God. In the first few centuries after Jesus' death, when followers were starting to form settled faith communities, Thomas Christians tended to live a more wandering, even at times solitary lifestyle. Thomas may have needed first to go off by himself into the desert and wander around lost for a while.

Then, when he was ready, he came to his friends. There, he first found Christ through their testimony, but his struggle continued because he hadn't personally experienced the resurrected Jesus. We know all about this. We may be taught what to believe, but we come to know God by discovering the Spirit within us and recognizing the signs of God in our everyday lives. That is what Jesus in the

gospel of Thomas urges us to do.

Doubt goes hand in hand with the seeking, searching, questioning element that keeps our faith alive and passionate. Thomas seeks, finds and is troubled. Then he recognizes, he knows the resurrected Christ right there with him—and the Holy Spirit within him as well--and he is amazed. Then, according to John, Thomas believes: *My Lord and my God!*

I love the poetry of the gospel of John; the words and stories of Jesus both touch me and challenge me as a Christian. I am also drawn to many of Jesus' words in the gospel of Thomas. Through Thomas, Jesus is revealing to me—and hopefully to you as well--- that it's OK to be found and still feel kind of lost; that Jesus calls us to keep on seeking; that moments of amazement bring us closer to the kingdom of God inside us and outside us; that seeking to know ourselves can be a holy journey and not just navel-gazing; and perhaps most importantly of all, that the resurrection we tend to wait for has already come, but we do not recognize it.

*Whoever has ears to hear should hear!* Pay attention, take the time to recognize the divine light, the little Easters inside you and all around you.

You know, maybe this life really is a holy game of Hide & Seek; God hides and we seek, we hide and God seeks, taking turns seeking and finding, being troubled and then being amazed. Each turn, the divine light shines a little more brightly from the core of our being. Each turn, our understanding is deepened, our understanding of what truly makes our hearts sing and what makes the world shine.

Imagine—no more Hide and Seek!  
Only amazement and life filled with the love and goodness of God!

Hallelujah! Amen.

### **Sources**

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