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February 8th: Genesis 38 & John 20

February 7, 2020



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Judah and Tamar. The resurrection.

Some passages referenced:

1 Samuel 25:2, 10 (Nabal and David); 2 Samuel 13 (Tamar and Absalom); Joshua 2 (Rahab); Ruth 4:12 (Ruth and Tamar); Leviticus 16 (Day of Atonement); Genesis 21-22 (Ishmael and Isaac); Judges 14-15 (Samson).

Exodus 25:10-22 (the Ark of the Covenant); Song of Songs 5:6—6:3 (the woman seeks her lost bridegroom in his bed of spices in the garden)

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 38. It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adolamite, whose name was Hira. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shewa.

He took her and went into her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his

name Ur. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah.

Judah was in Kezib when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Ur, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Ur, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan, Go into your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother. But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went into his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother.

And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter, Remain a widow in your father's house till Shelah my son grows up. For he feared that he would die like his brothers.

So Tamar went and remained in her father's house. In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shewa's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted he went up to Timnah to his sheep shearers, he and his friend Hierotheodolomite.

And when Tamar was told, Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's garments, and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

He turned to her at the roadside and said, Come, let me come in to you. For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, What will you give me that you may come in to me? He answered, I will send you a young goat from the flock.

And she said, If you give me a pledge until you send it. He said, What pledge shall I give you? She replied, Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand. So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adolamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside? And they said, No cult prostitute has been here.

So he returned to Judah and said, I have not found her. Also the men of the place said, No cult prostitute has been here. And Judah replied, Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at.

You see I sent this young goat, and you did not find her. About three months later Judah

was told, Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover she is pregnant by immorality.

And Judah said, Bring her out, and let her be burned. As she was being brought out she sent word to her father-in-law, By the man to whom these belong I am pregnant. And she said, Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.

Then Judah identified them and said, She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah. And he did not know her again. When the time of her labour came there were twins in her womb, and when she was in labour, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, This one came out first.

But as he drew back his hand, behold his brother came out, and she said, What a breach you have made for yourself. Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

Genesis 38 is perhaps one of the most remarkable passages in the whole book of Genesis. Many people have dismissed it, regarding it as a later insertion into the text, interrupting the flow of the passage. So in chapter 37 verse 36 we read, Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

And then you have the resumptive statement in chapter 39 verse 1. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. Now it seems very strange that we'd have this whole passage devoted to another story entirely, interrupting the drama of the Joseph narrative. What is it doing here? It seems to be a very odd thing in its context.

Properly to understand the presence and purpose of this text, we probably need to consider the musical character of text, the way that they're playing with particular themes, developing certain contrasts and other things like that. And as we see what the text is doing on this front, it'll become more clear that it belongs exactly where it is. Joseph has just been sold down into Egypt, and Judah was the leader of the brothers in the plan to do so.

Judah's plan presumed that Jacob would get over things fairly quickly, that Jacob would hear the news of his son's death, think of it as a great tragedy, mourn him for a few months, and then get over things with the love of his family. But yet that doesn't happen. Jacob is going to descend to his grave in mourning.

Indeed, there are three stories of descent alongside each other. There's the descent of the father to the grave in mourning, there's the descent of Joseph into Egypt, and then there's the descent of Judah. And Judah descends from his brothers to a different

location, maybe from the hill country to the plains, but then he also loses standing.

He's no longer among his brothers anymore. He used to be the leader of his brothers, but perhaps after the failure of the plan, he is reduced to a lower status and to a certain degree of exile. And as we follow the passage through, we'll see a different sort of descent playing out as well.

There are further connections between this passage and the passages surrounding it. There's been a deception of the father using a goat and a coat. We see a very similar thing in this story.

There's another goat involved. There's another act of deception and disguise. Judah is also being contrasted with the character of Joseph.

In the next chapter, Joseph will resist the advances of Potiphar's wife. But here in this chapter, Judah goes into a prostitute. There are many parallels between these stories.

In both cases, garments or items of possession are taken and later on presented as evidence. In Joseph's case, it's the garment that's taken from him and presented as evidence of his sexual advances to Potiphar's wife. And in the case of Judah, it's his signet, cord and staff.

And there are further connections with the previous chapter as well. Judah has been involved in an act presenting tokens, seemingly of Joseph's death to his father and says, please identify. At the end of this chapter, he's presented with tokens of his own sin and told, please identify.

As we explore such connections, it will become more apparent why this text is here. It's dealing with the themes of the surrounding texts. It's contrasting Joseph and Judah.

And it's also presenting the consequences and the outworking of Judah's sin in the previous chapter and showing how he might be involved in some sort of redemptive cycle. Judah descends from the brothers and he loses his status and his honour. But he also loses a number of members of his family.

He loses Ur, his oldest son. He loses Onan, his second oldest son. And then he ends up losing his wife as well, the daughter of Shewa.

Then after being consoled concerning her death, he has illicit relations with a seeming prostitute and he's divested of personal items, which are later presented as evidence against him. We might recognise some patterns here. In some respects, Judah is playing out the pattern of Esau.

Esau was one who married a Canaanite. He despises his birthright, the tokens of his office and rule, and he's deceived in a way that leads him to give up his title. After the

death of the wicked son Ur, Onan fails to perform the duty of a brother-in-law to Tamar, to raise up children for his brother.

And what happens is he violates and dishonours Tamar and his brother's memory. He refuses to have proper, completed sexual relations with her and the result is that he is killed by the Lord in consequence of his sin. But yet, Tamar appears like a black widow character.

The truth, of course, is that Tamar isn't at fault. It's the sin of Ur and then the sin of Onan. But to Judah's mind, Tamar is responsible for the death of his oldest two sons and he's in no hurry to give his youngest son, Shelah, to her.

Judah's wife dies and he is consoled. Now you may think about some of the contrast here. His father lost a son and could not be consoled.

And the previous chapter ended on this great note of mourning. But the chapter that follows is full of death and yet the mourning seems to be fairly brief by comparison. In addition to the contrast though we may see some of the pattern of poetic justice playing out.

A few chapters later Reuben will say to his father, kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back to you. Now Judah is responsible for the death, or the seeming death, of Joseph, at least as his father understands the situation. And now the chapter begins straight afterwards with him losing two of his own sons.

Maybe we're supposed to see some poetic justice playing out here. Judah goes up to celebrate sheep shearing at Timnah and Tamar goes to Enaim, meaning two springs. And maybe there's an intertextual connection with Dothan, meaning two wells in the previous chapter.

And she situates herself on the way to Timnah at this particular location. Tamar seems to know that Judah will take the bait of a harlot. And this certainly does not commend his character to us.

She doesn't seem to have to initiate anything on that front. And there's a strange part of this chapter where you have all these details of the negotiation with the harlot. The two stage negotiation.

First payment with a pledge and then the proper full payment when the pledge is restored. Now why on earth would the author of Genesis give us all these details about negotiations with the harlot? It just seems strange. But yet it seems to be part of the point of the chapter.

What has Tamar been waiting for? She's been waiting for Judah to give her a kid. And we can see throughout the book of Genesis there are associations with children and kids.

The kids should be presented but there is no kid.

In the previous chapter there was a kid, blood presented on the tunic to the father and someone divested of personal items and a goat being used. But Judah has failed to give her, Shelah, his youngest son. And so there's a certain poetry to what's taking place here as well.

The kid should have been given to her but no kid has been given. Judah as pledge gives his seal, his cord and his staff. And these are associated with signs of office.

They're identifying items of his rule. And you might compare them with his passport and his credit card but there seems to be something a bit more than that going on here. These are signs of authority, not just his ability to buy things and tokens of his identity.

They're something that signify his office. As in the story of Jacob and Esau, this is a great despising of the birthright. In this episode Judah, like his uncle Esau, readily gives up something that should be valued above everything else and he despises his birthright in that respect.

Let's step back and consider the movement of time in this passage. Indeed the span of time covered in this passage is one of the most peculiar things about it, especially as it's interrupting a narrative in which there is no temporal break. Think about what happens.

Judah goes down from his brothers. He goes with Hiram the Dolomite and he ends up marrying the daughter of Sheol. He then has three sons by her, one after another in different locations.

Then his oldest reaches the age where he can marry and then he marries Tamar. Then he dies. Then Onan takes Tamar.

Then he dies. And then Shelah grows all the way up and is not given to Tamar. And then Judah's wife dies.

He's consoled after her death and he goes up to Timnah. Now all of that span of time must take at least 40 years or so and yet it's in this particular point in the narrative. It seems very strange but what we should be noticing is how quickly all this time is passing.

About 40 years passing just in the span of a few verses in a narrative where there is generally a lot of text given to fairly brief spans of time. Judah's house is dying and he is wasting his life and it takes the action of Tamar to interrupt this freefall but not before bringing Judah down to his lowest point, the rock bottom point, where he gives away the last things that he really has to him. The goat that Judah sends in payment fails to reach its destination and this seems to be part of the point, both of Tamar's plan and of the textual meaning.

It is a symbolic playing out of Judah's sin from the previous chapter and also of his failure to give Shelah to Tamar. After the fact that Tamar is pregnant is discovered there is a rash judgment from Judah. Judah declares that she should be burnt and Judah could cover up but he confesses.

It's a you are the man moment. Tamar has been the scapegoat throughout the story to this point but now she is finally vindicated and Judah confesses. You should note that confession and praise are both associated with his name and he receives back his tokens of identity, the same expression please identify that's used of the tokens of Joseph's identity in the previous chapter and we should not miss the comparison.

He gains two children, Perez and Zerah. He's lost two children at the beginning of the chapter. At the end of the chapter he receives two sons back and there's possible connection here with Tamar being found at Eneim meaning two springs.

The two twins are switched in order. The scarlet cord twin is replaced as the firstborn, the kid associated with the red colour. Joseph's sons are also switched in order later in the story.

This might make us think more about the story of Jacob and Esau, the seeming Esau character is not the first one out in this instance. There's a reversing of that pattern. Other thing to notice Perez or Peratz breaking out, breaking away, pressing etc is a key term in the Jacob and David narratives.

So Jacob breaks forth in a multitude and he breaks away at the time of sheep shearing. In the story of Nabal in chapter 25 of 1st Samuel, Nabal talks about all these people breaking away from their masters at the time of sheep shearing. Again, sheep shearing and again Peratz.

In 2nd Samuel chapter 13, Absalom presses, same verb, David and Amnon to go to the sheep shearing festival that he holds to avenge his sister Tamar. So there are all these different connections that are worth paying attention to. There are themes here that also fit in with the larger narrative of Joseph.

There are sons lost and there's collateral given to someone in disguise. Joseph is lost to Egypt, then Simeon is lost to Egypt and Jacob must give Benjamin to the masked man in order to receive Simeon and Joseph back. In the same way, Judah must give Sheila to Tamar, give the kid to Tamar in order to receive back the lost sons.

So he gets two lost sons back at the end. Again, there's need for confession in order to receive that collateral back. The brothers have to confess their sin in order to receive back Simeon and Joseph.

You can think of parallels with the story of Lot and his daughters as they think that their father's line will die out in the world and they take action to rectify the situation as they

see it. Other things to note is women deceiving the serpent type figure. Judah is not the righteous person in this story and he's deceived by his daughter-in-law and that follows a pattern that we've seen more generally in scripture.

Michael deceiving Saul, Rachel deceiving Laban, Jael deceiving Sisera, Haman being deceived by Esther. In each of these cases there's a reversal of the pattern of the fall where the woman was deceived by the serpent. Now the serpents are being deceived by the woman.

Other connections with biblical stories. We might think of the story of Rahab, the prostitute. Tamar dresses up as a prostitute.

Jericho is called the city of palms and is burned with fire. Tamar means palm and she's threatened with being burned with fire. There's a scarlet thread in both stories.

There's a scarlet thread associated with the window and two spies rescued through it. Now is that connected with Tamar having two children? Perhaps. It's not one I put a lot of emphasis upon but it's a possibility.

Think of the story of Ruth as well. Two dead sons and a dead spouse at the beginning of the story. Returning to a father's house, returning to a mother's house in the case of Ruth.

Returning to a father's house in the case of Tamar. Faithful women performing levirate marriage to restore a house that's been brought down to death. A young woman taking the place of an older woman and an older man taking a place of a younger man.

Children being too young to be given for levirate marriage. The failure of the near kinsman to do his duty. Ruth is the Moabitess, a descendant of the woman who slept with her father to raise up seed and deliver the house of an unfaithful man from death.

At the end of the book of Ruth foregrounds Tamar. May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah. So in all these ways these stories are connected together and the exact full picture of the connection escapes me but there is very clearly something redemptive going on here.

That the story of Tamar is one that plays out later on in scripture. Tamar in the story of David is his daughter. She's associated with a multi-coloured coat.

She suffers a terrible fate and remains in the house of Absalom. There are events at the time of sheep shearing. Absalom like Judah has three sons and a daughter called Tamar himself.

So these stories are playing out again and again. Maybe think even of the day of atonement. The day begins in chapter 16 with the death of Nadab and Abihu.

The death of the two sons. Sending a goat by the hand of a suitable man. It's a day of mourning in the same way as Judah's story is one of mourning.

There's the divesting of Judah of his signs of office. The high priest is divested of his signs of office. There are twin goats.

One distinguished by a scarlet cord within tradition and you see that in William Holman Hunt's painting of the scapegoat. This would not probably be the first time that we encountered these themes in the book of Genesis. In Genesis chapter 21 and 22 you have two parallel stories.

One kid being sent off into the wilderness by the hand of Hagar and then one kid being presented on the mountain of the Lord, the Temple Mountain. It's a day of atonement pattern. See the same thing in the story of Esau and Jacob.

Two kids. One used to disguise Jacob as his brother Esau and the other used as food for the stew. In that story one of the brothers goes to the house of God and relates to God in that place where God goes up and down and then the other brother is sent away from the fat of the land into the wilderness as it were.

And so there are these day of atonement themes playing out in the story more generally. And the day of atonement is also a day of confession leading to restoration which is what we see in the story of So I suspect there are connections here. It's worth thinking about.

If you see anything more that fills these pictures out please mention them to me because I don't know how to fit all these pieces together but they are exciting I think. Two questions to consider. First of all what connections can you see between the story of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38 of Genesis and the story of Samson in Judges chapter 14 and 15.

And the second question. Why is Hira the Adolamite in the story? We don't read much about Adolam apart from the story of David and Hira the Adolamite is this friend who appears in three episodes in the story but he doesn't seem to have much significance beyond that. His role seems fairly incidental throughout yet he's on these three occasions.

Do you have any idea what he's doing here? Both of them were running together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first and stooping to look in he saw the linen cloths lying there but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came following him and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth which had been on Jesus' head not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in and he saw and believed for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes but Mary stood weeping outside the

tomb and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, woman why are you weeping? She said to them, they have taken away my lord and i do not know where they have laid him.

Having said this she turned around and saw Jesus standing but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener she said to him, sir if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him and i will take him away. Jesus said to her, Mary.

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, Rabboni which means teacher. Jesus said to her, do not cling to me for i have not yet ascended to the father but go to my brothers and say to them i am ascending to my father and your father to my god and your god. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples i have seen the lord and that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that day the first day of the week the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the jews Jesus came and stood among them and said to them peace be with you. When he had said this he showed them his hands and his side then the disciples were glad when they saw the lord. Jesus said to them again peace be with you as the father has sent me even so i am sending 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 withhold forgiveness from any it is withheld. Now Thomas one of the twelve called the twin was not with them when Jesus came so the other disciples told him we have seen the lord but he said to him unless i see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side i will never believe. Eight days later his disciples were inside again and Thomas was with them although the doors were locked 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 and put out your hand and place it in my side do not disbelieve 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 believed. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John chapter 20 is clearly one of the most powerful and moving stories within the whole of the bible. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early in the morning she sees that the stone has been rolled away and she runs and tells Simon Peter and the other disciple the disciple Jesus Now the disciple Jesus loved is later identified with the author of the gospel and throughout the gospel we see a number of points at which Simon Peter and the

disciple Jesus loved are connected to each other in ways that suggest some sort of contrast comparison being drawn between the two. At the meal in chapter 13 the beloved disciple is reclining at Jesus side in the meal and Peter has to ask him to ask Jesus a question.

The beloved disciple has a closeness to Jesus that is even greater than Peter's. In chapter 18 there's another disciple who accompanies Peter to the house of Annas the high priest and that disciple goes all the way in whereas Peter remains outside at the door. At the cross the beloved disciple is there at the foot of the cross and is given the care of Jesus' mother.

In the next chapter it's the beloved disciple who's the first to notice that it is the Lord on the beach and then at the very concluding episode of the gospel Peter looks around sees the disciple that Jesus loves and asks Lord what about this man to which Jesus responds if it is my will that he remain until I come what is that to you you follow me and so in this chapter right where we would expect this clear focus upon the story of the resurrection we find this strange incident of a running race. Why on earth is the gospel recording this? It seems to me that part of the purpose is to relate and to compare and contrast the witness of the beloved disciple and the witness of Peter and the leadership of Peter. Peter is the one who eventually goes in to the tomb first.

He leads the way in mission just in the same way as he will lead going out the boat in the chapter that follows but the disciple whom Jesus loves is the first to see. If Peter has a priority in mission the disciple whom Jesus loves has a priority in vision and also in proximity to Christ. The point despite the fact that there is a running race here is not to pit the two against each other but to show that they have different callings and they have priorities in those different callings.

When they come to the tomb the disciple whom Jesus loved looks inside and sees the linen cloths lying there. He doesn't go in but then Simon Peter gets to the tomb, goes into the tomb, sees the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth folded up in a place by itself. Evidence that this is not something that's happened in a hurry, a hasty rush to remove a body but that something very different has happened here.

When the other disciple, the disciple Jesus loved, comes inside the tomb he looks inside, sees around and believes even though they do not fully understand the meaning of the resurrection at that point. The disciples go back to their homes but Mary stays outside the tomb and weeps. Looking inside the tomb she sees two angels in white seated where the body of Christ had lain, one at the head and one at the foot.

Now what's going on there? I think we should notice that this is some sort of allusion to the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant where you have an angel on one side and an angel on the other, the head and the foot of that particular piece of furniture. Jesus has gone into the Holy of Holies, the tomb is that Holy of Holies and he's opened up the Holy

of Holies and now living water flows out into the world. This is the spring in the centre of the garden from which the spices and the water will flow and give life to the world.

And Mary coming to this is wondering where her Lord is. The angels ask her why she's weeping and she says to them, they've taken away my Lord, I do not know where they have laid him. Many people have seen in the encounter between Mary and Jesus in the garden a reference back to Eden and I think there is something of that here but I think there's something more.

I think the reference that I hear primarily is the reference to Song of Songs, the woman who opens to her beloved but her beloved is not there. I opened to my beloved but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought out but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I am sick with love.

Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you? My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He grazes among the lilies.

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus is the lover. He's the one who comes as the bridegroom. He's announced by the friend of the bridegroom.

He begins his ministry at a wedding feast. He speaks to a woman at a well, the place where the patriarchs met their wives. He has nard poured upon his feet in the same way as Song of Solomon chapter 1 verse 12 speaks about the nard filling the room with its fragrance while the king was at his couch.

He's laid to rest in a kingly scented chamber in the garden where it will be opened up so that the spices and the living water can fill the earth and bring life. And so now the woman comes to seek for her beloved, the one that she has seemingly lost, and she goes to the place where she last saw him and he's not there and she's desperate. She's looking for her lord and the one that she loves and he's not to be found.

And then in this powerful moment Jesus speaks to her. Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? And she thinks he's the gardener but yet he's not the gardener. He's the one that she loves and he declares himself by speaking her name.

My sheep hear my voice and I call them by name. He calls Mary by her name and her name may make us think of some other events in the story of scripture. Miriam who's there to witness the deliverance of Moses and then later on at the deliverance at the Red Sea.

There is another sort of deliverance here and just as there was a Mary at his first

deliverance of his birth, delivered from the womb, now there's another Mary to witness his delivery from the tomb. Our focus can so often be upon the theme of faith when we're reading the Gospels but yet John has a lot to say about love. John is the disciple that Jesus loved and we see in characters like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of Jesus, we see the love of the church for Christ.

Now the disciples go their own ways when it seems that the mission has failed. They scatter but in the case of Mary and the other women you see something about the love that binds them to Christ. They're attached not just to Christ in his seeming mission but to Christ in his person.

Mary of Bethany anoints his feet, the other women are present at the cross, Mary Magdalene seeks him at the tomb and then clings on to him. Now in this I think we're seeing something of the power of her love and that even when faith seems to have failed, love can hang on. Even on Holy Saturday and the darkness of that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene's love burns fiercely in the darkness refusing to grant the darkness its final victory and there I think we're seeing something about a different aspect of our relationship to Christ, something that goes beyond just faith.

There's something about the way that we should cling to Christ, that we should have a personal attachment to him which is exemplified particularly by the women within the Gospel. But yet Jesus has to go to his father so she cannot cling on to him forever. He has to leave at some point but she's sent to tell his disciples all the things that she has seen and that very evening Jesus appears to his disciples when they're locked in this room for fear of the Jews and he shows them the tokens of his crucifixion, his hands and his side and their response is one of joy.

He tells them twice, peace be with you and he gives them a commission as the father has sent me even so I am sending you. We can maybe think of the way that the son is in the side of the father and the beloved disciple is in the side of Christ. There is a symmetry between the church's relationship to Christ and Christ's relationship to the father and likewise between the missions that they are given.

Christ is sent by the father, the church is sent by Christ, we continue that mission and the role of the Holy Spirit is important here. Christ gives his spirit, he handed over the spirit on the cross, he will deliver his spirit to the church at Pentecost but here he gives his spirit to his disciples. This is part of the great commission as it's presented by John.

Jesus appears on a second occasion, eight days later and this time Thomas is with them. Thomas has doubted the appearance of Christ on the first occasion. We often focus upon Thomas's doubts but his confession is arguably much more notable.

Of all of the disciples it is Thomas who makes the great Christological confession of the gospel. He declares my Lord and my God. It's in this statement that we finally see the

disciples arriving at the full Christology of the gospel's prologue.

It's in the confession of doubting Thomas that we arrive at the definitive form of faith to which the evangelist is summoning us as his readers and this point is underlined in the summary verses that follow. The purpose of the entire gospel is to enable us to come to this point. In Jesus' response to Thomas it's as if the fourth wall is broken and he turns to address us directly.

Blessed are we who have not seen and yet have believed. A question to consider. Throughout his gospel John presents a number of different examples of faithful responses to Christ, of people receiving Christ in a good way and we've seen a few of these within this chapter alone.

Mary and her love, Thomas and his faith in response to the sight of Christ, Peter and obedience and mission, the disciple Jesus loved and his loving witness. What are some of the other examples that we're given to learn from within the gospel? Their positive, their negative features. Is there a particular character that you most identify with? What do you learn from their example?