

## Believing Is Seeing

Text: Acts 2:14, 22-32

1Peter 1:3-9 (Series A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter) Ps.16

John 20:19-31

*One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

Let us pray:

Put yourself in the shoes of Thomas for a minute. After someone whom you have loved dearly has died, you may have been there when this happened, and then some other friends come to you and say, "You know so-and-so who died yesterday? Well, we have seen him. He is alive; dead yesterday but alive today. Isn't that exciting?" If someone said that to you, how would you react?

Would you join them in their excitement? Or perhaps say, "That's nice", but think that the person has become a bit delusional, perhaps the result of the stress that comes with grief.

The Gospel writer, John, recalls the time when the disciples were hiding out of fear – they thought that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them. They were together in a room with the door locked. Somehow, Jesus passed through the locked door and appeared to them in the flesh.

The disciples told Thomas (who wasn't there on that first occasion) how seeing the wounds in his hands and in his side convinced them that this was the real Jesus and not just a ghost or a vision. Excitedly they told Thomas that there was no doubt about it – the crucified, dead and buried Jesus was alive. But Thomas couldn't believe what he was being told. Considering that there was no doubt that Jesus was dead, it was hard for him to suddenly believe that Jesus was now alive.

This defies all human reason. It isn't logical – when you're dead, you stay dead. Thomas doesn't want wishful thinking; he doesn't want to believe something that will turn out to be just the imagination of some over-stressed friends. **"Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe,"** Thomas said.

"I want to believe what you guys have seen, but I need proof. I won't believe it's true until I see the scars in his hands and his side for myself." Let's give credit where credit is due. Thomas doesn't dismiss the possibility that the disciples had seen Jesus. He could have said, "You're all mad. I don't want to hear another word of this nonsense."

Thomas wants to be convinced. He wants proof that what the disciples had witnessed was true and real and not just some trick. There are times when our faith in God is strengthened, and we become convinced, more than ever before, of God's presence because we have seen and experienced the hand of God at work in our lives.

Perhaps you have had a prayer answered in an amazing way. Or you have experienced a healing – someone had a wonderful recovery from a serious illness that could have taken his/her life. A family member or a friend, whom you have encouraged in their Christian faith, suddenly opens their heart to the saving news of the gospel, accepts Jesus Christ, and becomes involved in the church.

Some of you have had amazing experiences of the closeness of God at a time when you were feeling lonely or sick or grieving. At times like this, we are convinced that God is real and that his love and care for us could never be doubted. We have experienced his love and power close at hand.

On April 7, 2000 my niece, Ellen, was tragically killed by a motor vehicle in Regina. She was only nine years old when her life was snuffed out. I baptized her as a one-year-old, and, at nine, I stood at her brave side committing her lifeless to her creator.

This accident caused our family to wonder, even doubt, whether God knows us at all and if he is all that powerful. We all struggle to find the love of God when a child, who is just starting out in life, meets a tragic death.

We all struggle to find the love of God, when we lose our jobs; when we are broke; when a marriage breaks up; when a rebellious child causes parents terrible stress. How many people have prayed for healing but nothing happens? Thomas had experienced Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial; he had become confused about who Jesus was.

Like any of us in the face of a senseless tragedy, Thomas' experience of the closeness of God was at an all time low. Like any of us, most likely he too was asking where God was when all this was happening. Even when the disciples told him that Jesus had risen from the dead, he still would not believe until he had experienced this for himself.

Can we see a bit of Thomas in all of us? The strength or weakness of our faith often depends on our experiences, on the evidence which convinces us that God is real and that he loves us or, on the other hand, our experience tells us that God is distant and doesn't care.

We like to have positive experiences of God in our lives. We like it when our faith is solid by the clear evidence of the power of God at work in our lives. Thomas needed to experience it, to see with his own eyes the scars of the nails and feel the wound in Jesus' side. I see nothing wrong for wanting some solid proof.

I believe that's the way God made us to be – practical, down-to-earth people who rely on the experiences of this life. God has given us feelings and emotions, and these feelings and emotions often determine how we experience the **presence** or **absence** of God in our lives.

God doesn't ridicule or make fun of our wanting to experience first hand the resurrected Jesus. He invites Thomas, and he invites every one of us: ***"Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"***

Jesus goes out of his way for this one man and lets him experience the resurrection first hand. Jesus provides this experience to reassure the troubled and doubting Thomas that the disciples were speaking the truth. Thomas believes and exclaims, "*My Lord and my God!*"

This incident tells us clearly that seeing, touching, experiencing God in dramatic ways **strengthens** our faith, **confirms** our understanding of God, **reassures** us of the power and love of God but **is not the basis of our faith**. If our faith in God rested only on our experiences then our faith would be up and down every day, depending on whether our experiences or circumstances were good or bad.

If we depended on our circumstances and experiences of God to prove his love for us, then what would we do when the only evidence we see is sadness, tragedy, misery, suffering, and death?

You see, my beloved friends, there comes a time when we have faith in God in spite of the circumstances we are experiencing. Even when there is no immediate proof from our experience that God is powerful, in control, and that he loves us, we should continue to trust in him.

We believe, even though we can't see it. It is Faith that keeps on trusting in spite of the fact that we can no longer see God's hand at work. The book of Hebrews states: "***For without faith it is impossible to please God. He/she that comes to God must believe that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.***"

There comes a time when we believe, even though there's no immediate, obvious evidence that God is nearby. We believe, even though we can't see. ***Believing is seeing, seeing with our spiritual eyes.*** This is what Jesus was getting at when he said, "***How happy are those who believe without seeing me!***" Faith in the New Testament is just this – trusting and relying on God, even when our experience of God barely exists.

This is where Thomas became unglued. He should have believed Jesus' words; Jesus had said that he would rise again. Faith has to do with relying on **a promise, trusting a word**, holding on to what we know about God and believing that, regardless of what happens.

Faith believes that God is true to his word. He never deserts us. His love always burns strongly for us. Even when the circumstances of our lives might tempt us to think otherwise, faith holds on to believing that God knows what he is doing.

Jesus helped Thomas in his faith, just as he helps each and every one of us when we begin to wonder about God's authenticity. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us when our faith wavers.

He helps us trust God's promises, even though our experience tells us otherwise. As the covid-19 virus rages through our world, weeping may stay overnight but there is joy in the morning. Ships don't sink because of water around them; ships sink because of the water that gets in them. Friends in Christ, don't let what is happening around you get inside you and weigh you down. **He is not here. He is Risen, just as he said!**

He said that he would always be our helper and strength, and we need to simply rely on that promise. Jesus says to us, as he said to Thomas,

**"Do you believe because you see me?"**

**How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"**

**Amen.**

**You and your families are in my thought and prayers.**

**Stay positive and don't panic in a difficult situation.**

**Our souls find rest in God; our hope comes from Him (Ps. 62:5)**

**I love you all.**

April 19, 2020