

“Seeing Is Believing”  
John 20: 19  
April 27, 2014  
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Poor Thomas. His entire resume, indeed, his existence seems to be summarized in one statement, “*Unless I see, unless I touch, I will not believe.*” Thomas the Doubter. Is this really fair? I think not. In John 11 where Jesus is called to the home of Lazarus, who is sick unto death, it was clear that to come this close to Jerusalem was to march into the jaws of the enemy. Jesus, in fact, hints at this, suggesting that to go near Jerusalem is a call to self-sacrifice. And Thomas is the one who says to the other disciples, “*Let us go also, that we may die with Him.*” This is no wimpy, half-hearted uncertain follower of Jesus.

Maybe it would be better to call Thomas the “**thinking man’s theologian.**” Consider his skepticism as a reflection of his insight. If this was NOT the Risen Christ that his friends had seen... if this were some ghostly image that some highly suggestible men had imagined, then there was nothing! No power... no peace... no future. Like St. Paul said, “*If Christ is not raised, then our preaching is in vain, and we are yet in our sins.*” Without the resurrection you would have most likely never have heard of Jesus of Nazareth.

Think of Thomas as the one who was able to think through the implications, the significance of this event. He is saying, in effect, “*This has to be real, or we have nothing!*” And this is also real, “***Seeing is believing!***”

Is it? Is this the way it really is? Do we have to see to believe? In one sense, of course, this is patently false. None of us has ever seen the Risen Christ. We are among those whom the Lord called blessed, “*those who have not seen, and yet believe.*”

But there is another sense in which I believe it is quite true. We DO have to see to believe. Our faith rises and falls on the tangible reality of what we

experience. Unless there is some evidence of the power of the Risen Christ in and around our lives, unless there are experiences which give substance to our confessions of faith, then I suspect our faith would fade and quickly as the melting of a spring snow.

Now I don't want to be misunderstood here. I'm NOT saying that our faith is built on anything so flimsy as our personal, subjective experiences. No, our faith is built on the solid rock of the Risen Christ... on the historical, factual, life, death and physical resurrection of Jesus, son of Mary, raised in a little village called Nazareth and crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem, placed into the tomb of Joseph of Arimethea. Our faith rests on the Jesus who showed Thomas his wounds and ate breakfast with his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and also ate physical bread with the Emmaus disciples and showed himself to over 500 disciples at one time. Our faith is rooted and grounded in solid, historical evidence. No question about it.

What I am saying is that **Jesus continues to meet us where we are.** He continues to make his resurrection a tangible, experiential reality. I see signs and evidences of the Risen Christ right here today. And seeing is believing. This is my point.

One of the great comforts of this text is that **Jesus meets those disciples right where they are.** Where are they? They are living with high anxiety and suffering deep depression. They confine themselves to a locked upper room for fear of the Jews. They seem unable to remember the strong, comforting words of the Lord. They may as well have been in prison. In a very real sense they were in a self-imposed prison. And that's where the Lord came to them...in the need of the moment. And his presence transformed them, bringing peace, power and purpose to their shattered lives.

Thomas is told about this. Undoubtedly the words were spoken with great enthusiasm. You can imagine. But Thomas is in his own place, his own prison. He will need something more than the excited ranting of his friends. Seeing is believing. And that is where Jesus meets him, where his needs are. And having seen Him, Thomas changes... dramatically! His skepticism becomes an affirmation, "***My Lord and my God!***" I find it fascinating that he

doesn't even touch Jesus like he said he needed to, "*Unless I put my finger into the wounds....*" He didn't do it. What he sees is enough.

**I believe Jesus still meets us where we are...** where we need Him. Let me make this point very plainly, very bluntly. There are people here in this church, and I pray that I am one of them, who, not every day, mind you, but from time to time, become living, breathing, tangible evidence of the Risen Christ. People whose lives are changed. People who act in such a way as to give substance to the idea that the Risen Christ is among us...comforting us, sustaining us, motivating us.

When in our daily walk we rub up against people like that, people in their moments of spiritual strength, then we know that there is something real here, something tangible. And then we can believe with even more certainty and confidence, for seeing is believing, isn't it?

Let me make this still more pointed and direct. Many people here have come face to face with the ugliness and tragedy of sudden death. When death comes to friend or loved one, we are caught in a sort of terror-filled upper room, a sort of prison, if you will. Our thoughts are confused. We find ourselves angry, full of blame, and denial. We think only our loss and our emptiness. We think it is unfair. We feel we can't go on. We exhibit all the symptoms of the disciples in that upper room. And the Lord has a way of meeting us where we are, touching our hearts with His Word. He becomes our bulwark, our anchor in the storm. We give him thanks and praise. We talk about it.

I've heard people say these things in every congregation I've ever served, "*I could never have made it without the Lord's help. I sensed his presence and his comfort so vividly, so powerfully.*" "*My faith has never meant so much to me as in these dark days.*" "*It's amazing how the Lord gives us the strength and confidence to move ahead when our needs are so overwhelming.*"

Have you ever been with people who talk like this? Have you yourself ever talked like this? Well, seeing is believing, isn't it?

**You see, I've of the conviction that Thomas would have eventually come to believe even if he had never had that opportunity of seeing and**

**touching.** If he was around the rest of those amazed disciples long enough, if he had the opportunity to see how their lives evolved, how they were totally transformed, his doubts would have surely faded away. If he had seen a cowardly, Christ-denying Peter willing to preach boldly to the crowds, turning aside the threats of the Jews, insisting that, “*we must obey God rather than men,*” obviously willing to go to prison and die for the sake of the crucified and resurrected Jesus...if he had seen all that he would have surely known that Jesus was raised from the dead. Seeing is believing! People’s lives don’t change like that for no reason. People don’t find strength and courage like that out of thin air. This is faith with substance!

**Do you think for a moment that the Christian faith would hold any attraction for people if there were nothing to see??** If there were no churches built through the sacrificial offerings of believers? If there were no hospitals or charities inspired by the love of Christ? If there were no mission endeavors in which brilliant, talented people sacrifice their lives in order to share the Good News of the Risen Christ with people living in the darkness of fear and superstition? If there were no people who revealed in their lifestyle and conversation that their lives had been totally changed...that they were totally converted, turned about, marching to the beat of a different drummer? If there were no people who found strength to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving at funeral services?

**How long would this faith of ours last without any of this happening? Seeing is believing, and the evidence is overwhelming.** Christ is alive in our world and he has never ceased making himself known to people in their moments of deepest need. Jimmy Carter builds Habitat houses and he never tires of declaring that, “*Jesus really builds these houses!*”

This idea carries with **it a great challenge... and a great comfort.** **The challenge, of course, is that we are each called upon to become visible, tangible evidence of the Risen Christ.** We who believe it are to declare it...make it known and believable. As a skeptic once put it, “*I can’t believe in your Savior until you act a little more saved!*”

To be sure, our loving, our caring, our testimony cannot make someone believe. But we can give evidence of what we believe, and thereby make the

Gospel a little more believable. Seeing is believing! We each must ask ourselves, “*What is there about my life and conversation that would cause someone to say, there must be something to this! What else could motivate a person to live like that? To trust like that? To sacrifice like that? There has to be something to it!*” This is quite a challenge.

**But the comfort is also great.** Contemplate how our Lord continues to meet us where we are... how he continues to intrude on our self-designed prisons of fear and grief and bring us face to face with the evidence of his power and strength. Again and again he touches us with his powerful Word, “*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*” Again and again he brings into our lives persons whose faith and courage is an inspiration, people whose words and deeds are clear evidence that Christ is risen, risen indeed.

Understand it well, “*These things are done and spoken that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the victorious Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*” Amen.