

“Seeing Isn’t Believing” John 20:24-31

adapted sermon from Rev. Todd A. Peperkorn
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Our text for tonight is from John chapter 20, **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You all know the saying, “Seeing is believing.” When you have the facts right in front of you, when everything is laid out exactly in order, then – and only then – is everything ready to go. That is how things work in the world, and this season is no different than any other. I suppose that is a part of the mystique of Santa Claus and all of the hoopla about presents and gifts. You don’t believe it until you see it. You can want something, leave all the right hints, with all the right people, but is not until all the wrapping paper lies in a heap at your feet and the box is opened, and your own eyes tell you that you got what you wanted. You cannot even trust the box inside the wrapping paper, for the Play Station box could contain a 4-pack of Fruit-of-the-Looms.

It is St. Thomas, the Apostle, who really taught us about seeing and believing. He is often called “doubting Thomas,” because he did not believe the Word told to him by his fellow disciples. **I will never believe**, he said. He just could not handle the thought that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was unimaginable. It didn’t fit the world as he knew it, and so instead of trusting the word of God given to him by his fellow apostles, he chose not to believe.

This is, of course, how we often approach God. Unless God gives this to us in our way, laid out just as we want it, and in the right order, then we will not trust Him. Illnesses, family problems, money problems, personal problems, you name it. Unless God will deal with my problems in my way when I want it, well, then it just isn’t good enough. I will not believe. When God does not give us what we want, we claim He did not answer our prayer, we do not believe.

But thank God for St. Thomas. God used His doubt to show us the folly of our ways. Jesus answered Thomas’ faithless demand, even though He didn’t have to do so. AND, by answering Thomas’ doubt, He gives us His very Word and creates faith. This is what St. John is getting at when he wrote: **these things 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.**

This Christmastide is more than warm feelings or happy thoughts. When you hear the story of Jesus birth at Bethlehem, and how this birth will lead to His death and resurrection for your sins, those words create something in you that goes far beyond anything you can possibly imagine.

God is not satisfied to give you the “spirit of Christmas,” whatever that is. He is not satisfied in creating good cheer or happy moments with your family, as good as these may be. No, He has a much greater purpose for you, just as He did for St. Thomas. God gives you His Word so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But not just anyone’s Messiah. This one

came down into your flesh to be your Messiah. He is the Son of God, and when you believe that, you have life.

That is what Christmas is all about. It is about faith in the Son of God who comes into your life, into the mess of your world, whose hands will be pierced and whose very life will be poured out on the cross, so that eternal life may be poured into your dying body.

In fact, it was the wounds of the cross which were the evidence Thomas declared that he wanted to see. “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” He wanted to know that it was the Crucified One that they had seen nailed to the cross, the One who died in order to free them from sin, that they had seen alive and risen.

So, when Jesus appeared to them again with Thomas present, then Thomas confessed. “**My Lord and my God!**” You too may make the same claim, for yes, He is your Lord and your God. He is the God who comes in a manger, goes to the cross, and rises on the third day.

St. Thomas saw the wounds of Jesus, and confessed that reality to the world, so that all who would hear his preaching would have life in the Name of the one who came to save us all.

This is your God, who comes to save you.

You are baptized into His death and resurrection.

You are absolved in His name, His blood covering your sin.

You eat of His flesh, and drink of His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

And this is how your God comes to save you. No, you do not see Him. No, you do not touch the wounds in His hands or His side. But, He is present in the Word He has commanded to be spoken, and blessed by His presence. So you do not see, but you do believe – for He makes it so within you. Believe it, for His sake. Amen.