

Sermon 040316 Doubt  
Scripture- John 20: 19-31  
Sermon Title- Seeing Truth

We can't really hear what the Bible stories are saying until we hear them as stories about ourselves. We have to imagine our way into the stories. We have to step into the sandals of the Bible characters. I don't know of any story in the Bible that is easier to imagine ourselves into than this morning's gospel story. The post-resurrection story commonly known as "Doubting Thomas" just pulls us into the room and into the sandals of Thomas.

Thomas is not present in the first part of the story. He is not in the room the evening after the resurrection. The door is bolted tight because the disciples are scared stiff that what had happened to Jesus would happen to them. Likely a dog barking or the rustling of trees made them fear footsteps on the stairs. You can imagine them speaking in whispers. That morning, Mary Magdalene had told them that Jesus was alive again but they surly had their doubts. Then suddenly Jesus *was there*. John's gospel said, "He came and stood among them." (20: 19) Jesus showed them his wounds, and breathed the Holy Spirit upon them.

The one disciple who was not there at that time was Thomas. As far as Thomas knew, Jesus was dead and buried. Yes, he had heard Mary's story, but he was a... doubting Thomas. Upon his return to the room his friends were telling him the same thing, but Thomas himself had not seen Jesus. The words he spoke to them had the ring of

unvarnished reason. “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.” (John 20: 25) Now, Thomas is called the “Twin” in the New Testament, and if you want to know whom the other twin is, I can tell you. *I am the other twin, and unless I miss my guess, so are you.*

How can we believe that Christ is alive when we haven’t seen him? I believe the sun rose this morning because it is in the sky above us. I believe that you are alive because we can look at each other. But when it comes to the greatest mystery of the Christian faith- that after his death Jesus returned to life and is alive to this day, how can we believe that? Doubt is a natural human impulse.

There are lots of things we can easily believe about Jesus. We can believe that of all the people who ever lived, he was the most giving and generous. We can believe that no one else in history embodied the love of God so fully. We can believe that although down through the centuries countless follies and cruelties have been committed in his name, that the beauty and holiness of his life remain untouched. We can believe that of all the leaders the world has ever produced that Jesus is the one most worth following. But when Thomas says that he won’t believe that Jesus is alive until he sees him, I think that in our hearts, we all know what he is talking about. The principle is clear: don’t believe something just because others told us it is so. Of course Thomas doubted, and so do we.

But wait! Here is another principle we hold as true. Our eyes are not all we have to see with. Our eyes may not even be the best tools we have. Our eyes tell us that the mountains are green in the summer and the colors of fire in autumn. Our eyes tell us that little boys have more of a knack for getting dirty than little girls, mostly. Our eyes tell us that in the last photo taken of Abraham Lincoln a few days before his death at age 56, he looked as old as time.

But these things that the eyes show us are only facts, and distorted facts at that. Our eyes cannot see truth. The truth about the mountains is... their great beauty and majesty. The truth about little boys and little girls is... that they are all precious and worth dying for if ever comes to that. The truth of Abraham Lincoln is that... in his humanness, so rich and deep, he gave his life to his country then died for his country. That truth makes it impossible to stand in the Lincoln Memorial without being moved to tears. The truth of our church is that the Holy Spirit moves here and we the people know it. It is not with the eyes of the head that we see truths in that way, but with the eyes of the heart.

Our story in John's Gospel says that it was eight days after Jesus' first appearance in that room that Jesus came back to see Thomas. Jesus invited Thomas to put his hands in the wounds and Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." (v. 28) Thomas through his words, "My Lord and my God," witnessed the truth of the Risen Christ. His heart saw the

truth. There was nothing more that he could say, “My Lord and my God.” Nothing more needed to be said.

Can we imagine ourselves into that part of the story? I think we can and I think we do. Have we ever come even close to seeing the truth of Jesus the way Thomas did just then? I believe that we have, more than we know. I believe that glimpses of the truth of Jesus, more than anything else, bring us to church Sunday after Sunday. I believe that we glimpse the truth of Jesus in the faces and the lives of people that we know who have loved and served him. I believe we glimpse the truth of Jesus in the pages of the Gospels when we imagine ourselves into the stories. I believe that we have caught sight of his truth in the experience of music, art, and beauty. I believe that we have caught sight of his truth in a moon lit night, or a look out at the sea. I believe we capture his truth in silence, prayer, and stillness. Most of all, I believe, we have seen him in our endless longing for him- even when we don't know who or what it is that we are longing for.

Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” Thomas had seen Jesus plenty with his eyes in the previous three years. He had seen the son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter. He knew Jesus the man of a certain height and weight with a certain color hair and color eyes. What Thomas had seen with his eyes had lead him to doubt. But in that room, Thomas maybe for the first time, saw Jesus- not with

his eyes but with his heart. Then, for the rest of his days, Thomas tried to live his life according to the truth now seen by his heart.

The last thing that Jesus said in the passage was, “Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe.” I think that, among others, Jesus was talking about you and me. We have not seen Jesus through our eyes the way that Thomas did. Oh, how that sight would have been precious. Yet, I wonder in the long run what difference it would have made. We don’t have to see with our eyes in order to see truth with our hearts.

To see Jesus with the heart is to know that in the long run His kind of life is the only life worth living. To see Jesus with the heart is not only to believe in him, but little by little, to become bearers of his healing love to each other. To see Jesus with the heart is to live this life abundantly as he calls us to. To see Jesus in the heart is to take heart. To see Jesus in the heart is to have loving hearts, true hearts, and brave hearts. That is my dearest hope and prayer for all of you and also for me. AMEM