

You Don't See. Do You Believe?
John 20:19-31

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week, in our Easter Gospel lesson, we heard that the women who went to prepare Jesus' body were told by the angel to go to the disciples and tell them He had risen, and wanted them to meet Him in Galilee.

From Luke's Gospel, we know they were excited when they told the disciples the tomb was empty. They informed the 11 of the words the angel had spoken to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Mary and the others repeated the words Jesus Himself had spoken, that "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." (Matt. 17:22)

What was the response of the disciples? I can imagine it, "Yeah, right! How could the tomb be empty. we saw Him crucified. We saw the blood and water flow from His side when the soldier thrust in the spear. There is no way that a body could have taken that kind of beating, die upon the cross, and then get up from the tomb and walk out." Or, as Luke's Gospel says, *But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.* (Luke 24:11)

In our text today, we see the terror that was gripping the disciples. They were in the upper room with the doors locked. If the Jews had gotten Jesus crucified, were their lives safe? Eleven men figured they were the next ones to go.

Ten of the eleven were locked in that room when Jesus appears to them. Doors locked and yet Jesus is there standing in the midst of them. He shows them His hands and His side. He blesses them, bestows upon them the Holy Spirit, and gives them the authority to forgive and to retain sins. But, Thomas isn't there.

When Thomas returns, the other disciples tell him that they have seen the Lord. Thomas' response? "Yeah, right! *Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*" (vs. 25) His best friends, that close-knit group who were the inner circle of Jesus disciples, those with whom he had eaten and spent the last three years with, he didn't believe. What was his problem? How come he would not believe? He needed to see in order to believe.

How many of us are like the disciples, like Thomas? We'd like to think that we are not, but are we? Were these the first men to have faith issues and doubt?

Let's face it, sometimes it is hard not to doubt. You and I struggle with faith issues at times. Where was God last week when things went down at YouTube? Where was God when my spouse died at such a young age? Where was God when my daughter or grand-daughter died? Where was God when this tragedy occurred?

All those tragedies happened not because God wasn't there, but because sin so corrupts mankind that illness and death are the by-products. Furthermore, evil men, corrupted by sin, add their own atrocities through their vile acts.

Where was God when His own Son died upon the cross. He was shedding a tear! A tear because He had to turn His back on His only begotten Son so that you, me, and all sinners might have the opportunity to join Him for eternity in His kingdom – and, on the last day, to do so with resurrected bodies – just like His. That is the glory of this Easter season.

Yeah, it is tough to go the graveside of a deceased loved one, even one who died in the faith, and not consider them to be lying in the cold ground. But why do you seek the living among the dead?

Though the Father allowed His own Son to suffer death, He raised Him on the third day. His resurrection is your hope and your glory. At the graves of our beloved, we need to remember the words of the angel, “why do you seek the living among the dead.”

You are not the only one to suffer and struggle in your faith. Throughout the Bible we see the same struggle. Many people look at the Bible and not think they had it good. God came and talked with them - live and in person. Jesus walked with them - how great was that. We like to long for those kind of relationships with God, we want to see Him and touch Him - live and in person.

The great father of the Jews, the wonderful man of faith, Abraham, also struggled with doubt. God had promised that He would make him a great nation, that his descendants would outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore. And yet, knowing this promise but still childless, He told lies about Sarah’s relationship to him twice. He feared for his life as they traveled, and so claimed that Sarah was his sister, not his wife. He did in fear of his life, so that they would not kill him.

We were reminded this past Lent about the fact that the whole people of Israel had great signs and wonders done too. God sent ten plagues so that Pharaoh would free them from their slavery and servitude. And when Pharaoh changed his mind and brought his army in pursuit, God opened a path through the Red Sea that the Israelites walked through on dry land. To keep Pharaoh’s army at bay, God was present in a pillar of smoke and fire that stood between them. Finally, God allowed Pharaoh’s army to pursue, and when they were all in the Red Sea, the waters returned to normal and the army drowned.

It was the third month after leaving Egypt that God came to the people on Mount Sinai, thunder, lightning, and smoke enveloped the mountain and the people knew that God was present. But in the forty days that Moses spends on the mountain with God receiving from His hand the Ten Commandments, the Israelites got impatient. In Moses’ absence, they have Aaron make a golden calf and they worship it. They had a problem, a serious faith issue. How could they doubt the reality of what they had experienced from God’s hand? Yet they did!

As much as many people today would love to have the presence of God in some similar fashion to His presence with the people of Israel they too had faith issues and doubted.

When we consider all this, maybe we need to ask something more important, do you really not have the presence of God coming to you?

In our text, Jesus comes again into the midst of the disciples a week later, even though the doors are locked. Thomas is present this time. Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”** It is only then that Thomas says to Jesus, “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus then talks about you and me, He says to Thomas, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

You know, you and I crave something more than what God does. You'd like what Thomas got – to see Christ's hands and side. You'd like to walk with God in the garden in the cool of the day. Personally, I'd like God to give me the answers to my questions directly, there is a white board in the meeting room at Zion, He could write it there. He has done the wall writing thing before.

But you know what, God gives us something so much greater. He says of you, **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

It is not seeing that works belief or faith. Pharaoh saw plenty; he didn't believe. The Scribes and Pharisees had Jesus, the very Son of God in their midst – He did miracles among them – He even raised the dead. And still

they didn't believe. Finally, after they crucified Him, Jesus rose from the dead. Even that was not enough evidence to make believers out of them.

Instead, you believe because Christ *IS* present and it is He Himself who works faith in your heart. Christ Himself promised, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20)

Christ's name is I Am, He is the eternal One, He is the Word of God. Christ is God, and where God's name is, Christ is. Where God's name is and His Word is spoken, Christ is present. He is that very Word of God.

Christ was present at your baptism. His name gathered people together on that day, His Word was spoken, and a miracle happened. You were marked with His name. When that name is invoked; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in a special way. He is the living Word of God that does miraculous things.

Although you may not see Him, Christ blesses you. Christ is present to remove sin when the pastor speaks the absolution. His Spirit builds faith in you, for Christ is the Word you hear read and preached. He unites His very body and blood to the mundane elements of bread and wine, He comes to you and grants forgiveness of sins in that Blessed Sacrament.

No, you may not see Him, but Christ is most definitely present. He is here, He blesses you and me with His gracious visitation. It is His presence which bestows and strengthens faith.

Yes, there are times you may doubt, times your faith may grow weak. In those times, Christ invites you to come into His presence to be fed, nourished, and strengthened in your faith by Him. He has commanded that His peace which passes all understanding, be dispensed to you in the means He instituted. "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you."

That's the same command to proclaim His Word that He gave to the ministers of His Word in the Old Testament. And in that Word He promises that He will be present and bless.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, "Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless you, and keep you: The LORD make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." (Numbers 6:22-27)

God promises to bless His people as He has always done! He blesses through His Word as He works and builds faith. It is not by sight, it is by your ear and your mouth that God comes to you with His own blessings. Today, you have again been blessed by your God – not seeing, but you are believing. Thanks be to His holy name. Amen.