

## John 20:19-31 - “Seeing is NOT Believing”

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Most of us are familiar with the events of our text from St. John’s gospel about “doubting Thomas.” Isn’t it interesting how Thomas has been singled out of the other disciples and labeled or tagged with the name “doubting,” when the truth is that all Jesus’s disciples were just as doubtful or disbelieving as Thomas when it came to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We heard in last Sunday’s gospel reading from St. Mark that instead of believing the angel’s Good News that “[Jesus] has risen,” and responding with the word’s “He is risen indeed, hallelujah,” the women “*fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment has seized them*” (Mark 16:8). And St. Luke tells us in his gospel that when the women told the other disciples what the angel had told them about Jesus’ resurrection, “*these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them*” (Luke 24:11). It was only after the disciples had seen the risen Christ that they believed this Good News. Why then is my theme for today’s sermon, “Seeing is NOT Believing?”

What I mean by these words is that seeing Jesus risen from the dead or hearing someone say that He has risen from the dead may give us knowledge, but these things by themselves can’t give us faith or enable us to believe this Good News. We live in a fallen world which has taught us, through things like “fake news” and crooked politicians with hidden agendas, not to trust everything we see or hear. And our sinful nature is fine with that, because that leads us back into ourselves—to trusting only in ourselves, making me, myself and I to be our triune god.

Therefore, if left to our own natural reason, which distrusts everything and everyone else (even God), we would either dismiss the whole thing about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as a hoax or come up with what we think is a reasonable explanation for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. For example, our natural reason might convince us that Jesus, through self-hypnosis, put Himself into a deep comma for a predetermined amount of time and, therefore, only appeared to rise from the dead.

So who enables us to believe not in ourselves and what we think but in the Word of God—to put the Word of God above our human reason? Only the Spirit of God who works only through the Word of God to give or create in us the new life of faith. It wasn’t simply seeing Jesus that enabled Thomas and the other disciples to put two and two together and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It was the Spirit of God, working through the presence and promise of Jesus Christ that He would be “*raised on the third day*” (Matthew 17:23), who enabled Thomas to say, “*My Lord and my God!*” For, “*No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 12:3). St. John tells us the same thing in his first epistle when he says: “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God*” (1 John 5:1).

The same is true when it comes to continuing to believe this Good News. I'm constantly amazed/ashamed of how easily the things of this world can dampen my faith and joy in Christ. Even after the high of last Sunday's Easter service, I still found myself getting down in the dumps later in the week when I was confronted with the lying, deceiving, hidden agenda's of my sinful nature and this sin-filled world.

It's only after God came into contact with me again through His Word, whether through my private devotions, or through others sharing God's Word with me, that God once again restored my peace and joy in Him.

That's what was going on in our reading from Acts. Not only were the Apostles "*with great power...giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,*" but all those who believed this Good News were sharing this same Good News with others, especially the family of faith, through their words and actions. And the Church grew as the Holy Spirit continued His work of creating and/or strengthening people's faith in Jesus Christ through the Word of God that they were sharing.

This same thing is happening in today's Divine Service. Not only did the Lord create new and eternal life in Elias through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism and strengthen this same eternal life of faith in you through His Word and the Lord's Supper, spoken and distributed by me as your pastor, but the Holy Spirit is also working through all of you as you share God's Word with each other through your words and actions here and in your various vocations elsewhere.

Simply your presence here this morning is refreshing to those who are spiritually weary. Even though some of us may not look spiritually weary, I know many of you are good at disguising your feelings. Therefore "*let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (Hebrews 10:24-25). For, blessed by God's Word and Spirit "*are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] Have you ever thought of yourself as a bell? This bell was made by someone, and each one of you were made by God. But when you were born, something was wrong. [Ring bell, making no sound]. We were born with sin in us that prevents us from making any music for the Lord. Instead we were only able to add to the noise of other people in this world who are fighting or disagree with each other, like we sometimes fight with our brother or sister, or disagree with our parents.

So what did God do for us? Through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism He washed away our sins and at the same time gave us His Holy Spirit and the ability to believe this Good News! So now we can all make music to the Lord because of the faith that God gives us in Jesus, who died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead to make us a part of His family now and forever.

While we can each tell people about Jesus on our own, it's best if we work together to let people know that Jesus' loves them. Let's do that now by ringing your bell when I point to you [playing "Jesus Loves Me"].