



Seeing Is Believing

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

John 20:24-29

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with [the disciples] when Jesus came. So the other disciples told [Thomas], "We have seen the Lord." But [Thomas] said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

O, I know what you were thinking. At the beginning of this service when I announced that the closing had been set for the sale of our building, I know what you were thinking. You were thinking, "Here we go again." You were thinking, "I'll believe it when I see the check in your hand; I'll believe it when the money's in the bank." You were thinking, "With their track record of canceling, or not showing up, for the five previous closing dates - what makes you think this one will be any different?" You were thinking, "I doubt it!"

This time, I think it's different. This time, I don't want to doubt it. This time, I'm almost convinced. This time, I'm all but certain. This time, I'm just about a believer. But deep inside, there's still a little doubt.

How do you deal with doubt? Because, when you doubt, it means you're skeptical. It means you fear something is unlikely. It means you suspect things won't work out. It means you don't believe it.

When you say, “I doubt it,” what you’re saying is that nothing is resolved, that you don’t trust it’s going to turn out the way you want it to turn out. When you say, “I doubt it,” your soul is unsettled.

Sometimes doubt is a good thing, but other times doubt is just a hard thing to get around.

One of the worst things about doubt is that it creeps into your thoughts when you don’t want it there. Doubt even comes when you finally get the good news you’ve been waiting for, the news you want to hear; and doubt tells you that good news is just too good to be true.

Sometimes doubt creeps into your faith life - hinting that things aren’t as they seem, nagging at you to disbelieve what you’ve always held true, breaking down your resolve and your foundation.

So, what do you do when you start doubting your faith? If you have ever doubted God and Jesus, then you should feel right a kinship with the disciple Thomas, because Thomas will always be known as the one who doubted.

We don’t know where Thomas was on that first Easter. The only thing we know is where he was not. He was not with the other ten disciples when they met the risen Christ that day. Thomas was not there. So, Thomas did not see Jesus. Thomas did not talk with Jesus. Thomas did not have a first-hand experience with the risen Christ.

It was eight days later when Thomas finally showed up. Eight days after the resurrection Thomas finally hooked up with his fellow disciples. It was then that the other disciples shared with Thomas their good news. But when Thomas heard it, he just couldn’t believe it. The news was too good to be true.

His pals said Jesus was alive, but the last time Thomas saw the Lord, Jesus was dead. They insisted it was true, but Thomas responded, “Seeing is believing.”

And for that little exchange, Thomas has gone down in history, not as the disciple Thomas, but as “doubting Thomas.” He even has his own entry in the dictionary. I looked it up. In the dictionary on my office computer, a “doubting Thomas” is defined as “One who is habitually doubtful... one [who won’t believe] until after he had proof of it.”¹

¹ Microsoft Bookshelf Dictionary, 1994.

A “doubting Thomas” is skeptical. He wants some proof, and won’ t believe a thing until he gets the proof he wants.

Thomas said, “seeing is believing.” I suspect most of you agree with that. Seeing is believing.

Thomas wanted to see the risen Christ. The last time he saw Jesus, Jesus was dead. He saw that. He had no doubt about it. If he was going to change his mind now, he wanted tangible, touchable proof that Jesus was alive. He didn’ t ask for anything the other disciples hadn’ t already seen. He simply wanted to see it for himself. For the last eight days Thomas had had no doubt that Jesus was dead, so eight days later he had every reason to doubt that Jesus was alive.

I don’ t see any thing wrong or out of the ordinary with Thomas’ position on that. I suspect I would have had my share of doubt, too. And yet, for his honesty, he has gone down in history as “doubting Thomas.” Poor Thomas, he’ s had a bum rap all these years. He’ s remembered as the man who doubted the resurrection of Jesus. When we think of Thomas these days, we tend to have negative thoughts. After all, he’ s the “doubting Thomas” who didn’ t have enough faith!

I think that’ s unfair. I don’ t think it should be that way. Because, Thomas wasn’ t and isn’ t alone. For Thomas “seeing is believing.” All he wanted was to see.

History may have given him a bum wrap, but Jesus didn’ t. When you read the scripture, you’ ll see that Jesus didn’ t say a negative word about Thomas and his doubts. Jesus didn’ t scold him for his lack of faith. Jesus didn’ t berate him for his doubts. Jesus didn’ t condemn him or tease him or ridicule him. What Jesus did was to love him and say, “Come and see.”

Remember this: Thomas wasn’ t alone in his doubts. From the very beginning, the resurrection of Jesus was met by doubt and disbelief by most people:

- when the good Jews heard the news, they called it blasphemy,
- when the cultivated Greeks heard about it, they thought the idea of a dead body coming back to life was repugnant,
- even some of the earliest Christian followers, the Gnostic Christians, rejected the idea of the bodily resurrection.

For Thomas, seeing is believing. Without seeing it for himself, Thomas refused to believe. Thomas wanted proof that Jesus had risen from the dead.

How about you? That's the foundation for your faith. Do you believe it? Or down deep, do you, like Thomas, tend to doubt it?

If you agree with Thomas that seeing is believing, how can you believe something you can not see?

There's a difference between proving something is true and believing something is true.

If you want proof, you want the evidence laid out in front of you. You want to see the facts. It involves your intellect.

But if you want to believe something, you have to start trusting. You have to be willing to live with some uncertainty - even with some doubt.

Aside from the disciples, and the Marys, and a few other of the first followers of Jesus who got to see him, and talk with him, and have meals with him - nobody else has ever seen him since the resurrection.

So now, for you and me, when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, it cannot be a matter of "proving it." It has to be a matter of "believing in it."

How can you believe what you cannot see? How can you believe something you cannot prove?

You can't! That's why it's called a "leap of faith."

Lucky Thomas, he got to see. But when he saw Jesus, he didn't turn to the other disciples and say, "Gee, guys, you were right!" He didn't say, "Well, how about that, it's true!" He didn't say, "There he is in the flesh, I'll be darned."

Thomas saw proof, but he made a leap of faith. Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28).

That's a leap of faith that goes way beyond just not doubting what the other disciples had said. "My Lord and my God" is absolutely one of the greatest statements of faith found in the scriptures.

When the Bible is translated into other languages, sometimes a language does not have a word equivalent for our understanding of "God." When that happens, the translator has to try to convey the deeper meaning in his words. And this particular statement by Thomas has been translated into pagan tongues to read: "You are the one who rules over me, and you are the one whom I worship."

That's a leap of faith. That's what Thomas said. That's what he came to believe.

Thomas' statement of faith is beautifully translated from the original Greek text of the New Testament - where it's literal reading has Thomas telling Jesus, you are "The Lord of me and the God of me."

That's not something some man filled with doubt would come up with. That's a leap of tremendous proportions. It was more than any of the other disciples had said. It was more than anyone there was asking him to believe. And, it was certainly far more than the evidence of a warm body and nail holes in his hands could "prove."

Jesus responded to Thomas by accepting that amazing affirmation of faith. Then, Jesus went one step beyond. He spoke to you and me. Right there, in that room, two thousand years ago, the risen Lord spoke directly to you and me!

What Jesus said was, "Thomas, you, like the other disciples, have the privilege of seeing and believing... others will not see, but will still believe, blessed are those also."

Seeing is believing. The disciples and Thomas knew it was true. They saw, and they believed. Jesus knew that. Then, Jesus blesses you. You don't get to see him, but you make that leap of faith and believe.

Jesus knows how hard it is to believe without seeing. He knows that sometimes it's a struggle to believe. You don't get to see the risen Christ, but somehow you do come to believe, as best you can, in Jesus - and he blesses you.

He blesses you, and you can live your life certain of the love of God in Jesus Christ. He blesses you, and you can live your life unafraid - you don't even have to be afraid of death itself.

You can't see him, but you believe anyway. And he blesses you for your belief.

Isn't that good news to hear? Don't you need to hear some good news in this bad news kind of world? It's good news: you've got a savior who lives. You've got a God who sees you at your worst, but still knows you can give your best. You've got a God who always gives his love.

It's good news. Your God forgives you. He forgives and forgets all that stuff you and I never seem to forgive or forget completely.

But the good news gets even better than that! God doesn't need your permission to love you and save you. God doesn't ask for it before he does it. God loves you first. God loves you when you're unlovable. God loves

you when you don't love him. And, God forgives you even when you won't ask for forgiveness, or accept forgiveness when it's offered.

What Thomas could finally see, was something you can still see, something you can choose to believe: that Jesus is alive, and that he brings to your life forgiveness, and understanding, and a second chance.

There's no doubt about it!