

“What Your Eyes See”

There is a lot of drama going on in the world today, and that drama is no fairy tale or make-believe story. The world’s eyes are focused on what is taking place in Afghanistan after the biggest bomb was dropped in the fight against ISIS and terrorism. ISIS has retaliated with an attack in France. The world’s eyes have also been focused on North Korea, the Middle East, and Syria.

People in our own country have been gripped by fear, locked in their rooms with the uncertainties of the future, the political climate of our government, unemployment, and the future of college graduates to get employment. Rising food prices, gasoline prices, and other expenses are topics that tell us that this is no dream. Spring time weather brings threats of tornadoes and other storms with damaging winds. This is reality.

The world was no different for the disciples. They, too, were locked in fear. They were fearful of the political climate as they saw what happened to their Teacher, Jesus, and were fearful that since He was captured and killed, the same fate was awaiting them. They were dependent on their Rabbi to provide for them. And on that first day of the week, the third day since Jesus’ death, one of them was missing. Where was Thomas? What happened to him? His being absent from the rest of the disciples was no dream. The disciples had to deal with the reality that one of them was missing.

Jesus knew they were dealing with these realities. Jesus knew their fear. He had seen it on the storm tossed boat. He had seen it as they were in despair when He told them to feed a crowd of more than 5,000 people with only a boy’s lunch. He saw their emptiness as they saw a dead girl’s body and her weeping parents. Jesus knew their fears as they fled when He was betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified.

That was no fairy tale, but real life. It followed deception, evil, fear, and dread. Pestilence, famine, and sword would not stack up to the intensity

of this event. The devastation of numerous tornadoes and wild fires and floods that struck our nation in recent times could not compare to the wrath and anger displayed on one person.

Jesus, the Son of God, was the direct target of God's wrath and displeasure, having taken on the sin of the world and bringing it to the altar of the cross. Atoning for the sin of the world, Jesus was sacrificed for us. He died for us to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He rose on Easter to give us life. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia! He lives, no more to die. Death must now serve Him as Lord and God.

But the drama of Easter continues. Probably the one story that has the most recognition is the story of Thomas. John's Gospel, traditionally read on this Sunday, tells the touching account of how Thomas, who missed church that one Sunday, had failed to be with the disciples to see Jesus. During the week, the disciples would seek for Thomas and tell him, "Boy, Thomas, you should have been at church. We saw Jesus!"

Thomas, as we quickly learn, was skeptical about such news. **"Unless I put my finger into the print of the nails on His hands and put my hand into His side, I will certainly not believe."**

So the next week, Thomas is with the disciples, gathered in fear, gathered in a locked room, and then in comes Jesus, coming through the locked door and standing in the midst of the disciples. After greeting the disciples with His peace, He walks up to Thomas and says, "Put 'er there, Thomas. Put your hand in the hand of the Man who stills the waters. **Don't be without faith, but believing.**"

Thomas stands there, stunned and surprised by our Lord. Being shown the nail prints in Jesus' hand and seeing His spear-cut open side. Thomas' response is simply, **"My Lord and my God."**

Thomas, who was earlier identified as "The Twin," stands as our representative on that day one week after Jesus' resurrection. We are the

twin of Thomas, who also desires to see and touch and feel. Thomas, like us, saw the hard reality of Jesus' death—the cold steel nails, the hammer, the wood of the cross, the blood, the anguish, the death. Thomas, like us, heard the news that Jesus had died and was laid into the tomb. See the place where He was laid. He would not, however, trust the report of the woman who came back from that tomb.

**“Have you believed because you have seen me?”** Jesus asks.

**“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Jesus speaks this beatitude for all the Thomases in the world, including you and me, who couldn't be in that upper room the day Jesus appeared to His disciples.

The disciples hid in fear of what the Jews would do to them. That's the sad description in the Gospel account, and it would seem that they didn't want anyone to interrupt their fearful solitude. It was just like being in the grave.

So many people are locked in fear of others that they cannot break free from that prison. Jesus knew the prison that the disciples were in, so He enters the room then enters their lives. **“Peace be with you,”** He says. Without that announcement of peace, of Shalom, they would remain fearful. The words, “Fear not,” express a similar kind of response, spoken both to the woman who gathered at the tomb, as well as to the shepherds the night Jesus was born. “Good tidings of great joy I bring to you! Your Savior is born and you will find Him in a manger,” was spoken to the shepherds. “Your Savior is risen as He said; you will not find Him here in this or any other tomb,” was spoken to the women.

**“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** Peter's words, written to fearful people, also give hope beyond words. Peter was recalling this event in the life of the disciples shortly after Jesus' resurrection. He remembers brother Thomas who doubted, but now believes. The moniker

‘Doubting Thomas’ has since been replaced with ‘Believing Thomas.’ Thomas can now believe in Jesus even as He is raised from the dead, has ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity.

Today, my friends, you are called as Thomas’ Twin to confess as he did that Jesus Christ is your Lord and your God. You are given the same Holy Spirit, breathed upon the disciples the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Your sins are forgiven. You are sent as Jesus was sent, by the heavenly Father, to be His people. You are baptized to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that will not perish, spoil, or fade away. It is kept in heaven for you. No tornado on earth can destroy it, no financial collapse or government will make it lose its value, no ISIS enemy can break in and steal it from you.

Before Jesus gave His disciples the Holy Spirit, they met in fear. They were huddled behind thick walls and closed doors. They whispered so no one could hear them. But Jesus barged into their lives. He does the same for us today. He does the unexpected, not only to get our attention, but to release us from what has held us bondage. Jesus didn’t have to ask these people the first evangelism question that was asked of the first man and woman as they were also hiding in fear: **“Where are you?”** Jesus knew exactly where they were. They were in sin. They were in fear of other people; they were afraid of God! They were in fear for their very own lives.

**“Peace be with you!”** Jesus shows them His hands and side. The disciples were rejoicing having now seen the Lord. The Holy Spirit is breathed into them and they become living souls, just as the first man had become. They are given authority to forgive sin. This forgiveness, earned on the cross, is now given for the disciples of Jesus to give to others in the name of Christ, to be breathed on those who sin against them. Jesus gives you His forgiveness today, breathing forgiveness upon you through Word and Sacrament to breathe on those who have sinned against you. The forgiveness of sins makes you pure in heart, and this

recalls another beatitude spoken by our Lord, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”** Have you seen Him?

Today, you are encouraged to remember your vows of faithfulness to the Lord as you hear the words of our Psalmody. **“Like newborn infants, long for, crave, pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good”** (1 Peter 2:2-3).

The Apostle Peter encourages us to live that new life we have in the resurrection of our Lord. The continuous reading from the Book of Acts recounts the message of Jesus’ resurrection as the Early Church was blessed to proclaim. You, my friends, are also blessed to proclaim that same message. You are blessed to make the same confession as Thomas, looking to Jesus, the Author and perfecter of your faith, who set aside His glory to go to the cross, scorning its shame, to suffer, die, and be raised again. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, yet being with you always with His power.

You are also blessed to share in the work of bringing the other absent Thomases that there is still room. The empty pews in the church are where those Thomases need to be. That is reality. Those brothers and sisters in Christ are locked in their rooms of fear. They need to hear the good news that their sins are forgiven, that they have life in Christ’s name, and that they have the certain promise of eternal life in heaven.

You may know someone who is locked in their room of fear. You can tell them that Jesus would invite them to return to hear the forgiveness of their sins and to be assured that He is Lord and God of their lives. You can tell them that Jesus has peace for them. Easter is not over...the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting are part of this Easter message!

Others, like Thomas, also need to see and feel and touch. They are like infants in that respect. Jesus holds out His crucified-stained hands and His spear-cut open side for us. We place our hands into them, placing our finger in His holy Word, the Bible. We stretch forth our hand to

receive His Body in the Sacrament. We hear His words, **“Do not be without faith but believing! Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

**“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”** Having faith in our Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus, you can face those trials. You can rejoice that you are more than conquerors through Him who loved you. By the Holy Spirit’s breath upon you, you continue to live and move and have your being in Christ. You endure those trials by His grace and overcome the temptations and fears in your life.

But when you fail, when you sin and flop-fall on your face, you can return to Jesus and receive His forgiveness. When you have made a mess of your life, you can come, running, even with the pig-smell of sin like the prodigal son, and know that your heavenly Father waits for you with His open arms to forgive you, cleanse you, and seat you at His table. He will again breath His life back into you, teach you, feed you, and then send you, walking with you, guiding you on the path of righteousness for His name’s sake. By that guidance, you know the destination where your Lord and your God will lead you: To that room in your heavenly Father’s house, where Jesus will always come in and greet you, saying, **“Peace be with you.”**

The certain hope of the resurrection is also yours just as the Patriarch Job said, **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”** (Job 19:25-27 ESV)

**“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

You, like Thomas, are blessed with the eyes of faith that can say with Simeon, **“Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.”** Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia.