

Scripture: John 20:19-29

Sermon Title: "I'll Believe It When I See It"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

I'm sure we all have heard, at some point or another, the statement "I'll believe it when I see it" and probably, many of us have even said these words ourselves. This statement often comes in a moment of sheer disbelief – whether that disbelief is fueled by a sense of awe and a need to witness something for yourself or by a sense of skepticism at the possibility of something being true, no matter what fuels the need, there is, when this statement surfaces, a need to see something in order for belief to be confirmed.

Today, in our scripture reading, we hear of one of those biblical moments where Thomas essentially says, "I'll believe it when I see it." So this need to see something is not a new phenomenon. After the resurrection had occurred, as we hear today, Jesus appeared to many of the disciples and they were amazed at the sight of Jesus and rejoiced in their Risen Lord. But Thomas, was not with at that time, and so he heard these stories from his friends, stories that Jesus had risen from the dead and that they had seen him. And in that moment, Thomas experienced some disbelief fueled, as it would seem, by skepticism. How could this possibly be true? I mean, he knew that Jesus was crucified, he knew that Jesus breathed his last, he knew that he was placed in a tomb. He knew what death was and so he was skeptical. And essentially said, "I'll believe it when I see it." Therefore, because of this need to see, his desire to see in order to believe, Thomas is often deemed "Doubting Thomas".

Now, as we look back over the entire life and resurrected life of Jesus, we might want to shake Thomas and say, how didn't you know? Why didn't you believe? Jesus was trying, at a variety of times throughout his ministry, to tell the disciples of what was to happen. To tell them that he would die but death would not have the last word. He tried to tell them, so why did Thomas need to see Christ's hands and feel his side in order to believe? Why couldn't he believe based on what Jesus was trying to tell them all along? Why couldn't he believe because of what his friends had witnessed?

Maybe because what happened in and through Jesus was hard to believe. Maybe because, almost no one was ready to believe until they saw it to be true. I mean, think back on what happened. Mary Magdalene, who was at the tomb, weeping because she thought someone had taken the body of Jesus, clearly not rejoicing in the resurrection, and only upon seeing him after he spoke her name did she start to understand the glories that happened. In that moment of seeing, her grief and sorrow were turned to joy and victory. And, then, when Jesus appeared to that room of disciples, that we hear about today, disciples who locked themselves away because of fear and one may even assert uncertainty and disbelief that their Messiah was who they thought he was, when Jesus appeared to them, it was only after he showed them his hands and sides, that they really saw the truth of the resurrection and rejoiced. They didn't ask to see, but it was still only have they saw the wounds that they saw their Lord and rejoiced. And so, the only difference that happened with Thomas, was that he asked. And when you are expected to believe what seems like the impossible, does it really seem foolish to ask for a glimpse to prove it?

There is power in seeing. Mary Magdalene experienced that power when she saw Jesus at the tomb. The other disciples experience that power when they saw him in that room in which they were locked away. And Thomas, experienced that power when his request was granted. Yes, Jesus said "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" but he does not say the opposite that those who needed to see that they would not be blessed, for in the end, Thomas recognizes his Lord and what a blessing that is. After all, seeing was an important part of all the disciples' faith journey beyond the cross. There is indeed power in seeing.

But where would we look? We have the gospels which tell of these things, but where do we look to see Christ's hands and feel his side? It would appear that today in some ways, we have an even harder time than Thomas and that the words of Jesus spoken to Thomas feel more relevant today, as we are indeed asked to believe without seeing for

on this earthly journey, we will not see the literal hands of Jesus or put our fingers in his side, so do we not get to see anything at all?

In this earthly life, we may see dimly, but the seeing can still be powerful. And so, we get to see Jesus through the lives of each person who strives to follow in his ways. Who in your life has shown you Jesus? We get to see Jesus through the church that aims to be Christ's hands and feet. How have you experienced Jesus through this place? There is power in seeing a church that extends the love of God to any and all of God's beautiful people and celebrating that God's love is off limits to no one. There is power in seeing the hands of Christ extended by the church to those who are in need and alone. There is power in seeing the feet of Christ move through the church as the work of loving our neighbors happens day by day. There is power in seeing Christ through a church that is ruled by God's powerful love revealed in the Resurrected Christ rather than by fear.

Yes, in the end, faith is very much needed, believing without seeing the literal, resurrected Christ is needed, for on this earthly journey, we are not given such an opportunity. We need faith because what we see dimly now through the lives of God's people and through Christ's Church cannot possibly reveal the glories of Christ in their entirety and so, by faith, we know that the glories of Jesus are much greater than even what we could ever hope to witness on earth. Nevertheless, oh how powerful it is to see a church, to see people guided by the Holy Spirit, who aim to show Jesus to the world.

Beloved in Christ, oh how the world needs to see this? And the key here, if we can learn one thing from Thomas, is don't wait until someone has to ask. Show Christ to the world always. Show the world the hands that sacrifice of oneself. Show the world the hands that give out of an unconditional love. Show the world the hands that never stop reaching. And show the world the world the hands that never stop embracing. May your hands show the hands of Christ. And, with even just a little faith, may the world be transformed and come to believe. Amen.