

**“BELIEVING IS SEEING!”**

John 20:24-29

Dear People of God,

Is everything back to normal? Has the Easter dust settled? You checked service times for this weekend and they're back to what you're used to. So that must mean Easter is finally over! Right? Wrong! Easter is way too big to limit to just one Sunday, so the church year devotes 6 more Sundays to Easter besides last week. And every year, the prescribed readings for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter always introduces us to the familiar post-Easter villain named Thomas.

A quick recall of disciples' names immediately mentions Peter, James, & John. We throw Judas in there because of his betrayal. But Thomas is right up there because of his episode a week after Jesus rose from the dead. We all know him as **“Doubting Thomas”**. But before we carry his **“villain”** label too far, there are lessons to learn from this disciple which help us in our faith as God's people.

Let's note the change of attitude Thomas has when the Lord Jesus patiently works on his heart to discover that...

**“BELIEVING IS SEEING!”**

1. BATTLE THE DOUBTS
2. SEE THE PROOF

**1**

When it comes to accepting facts about something, we tend to have the same mindset as the Missouri license plate that says: **“THE SHOW ME STATE”**, ie. prove it because: **“seeing is believing”**. If I told you I caught a 34”, 11# walleye – you might say “Really, let me **SEE** a picture”. If I claimed to give an organ concert at the *“Chapel of the Christ”* on MLC's campus last fall, you'd say: “Really, let me **HEAR** you play.” If I maintain that my wife's potato salad is the best tasting in Wisconsin, you might debate that claim by saying: “Really, let me **TASTE** it.” **Seeing – hearing – tasting...**you engage your senses to be able to believe something that seems unbelievable.

Ten disciples were huddled behind locked doors Easter Sunday night fearful that there were still Jewish leaders who might want Jesus' disciples silenced or better yet...**DEAD!** Fear kept them “imprisoned” inside and off the streets, except for Thomas. He was missing when Jesus suddenly appeared the 1<sup>st</sup> time to show that He was alive. He spoke **PEACE BE WITH YOU**. Oh, how they needed that. Jesus then showed them his hands and feet and gathered their senses of sight, touch, & hearing so they wouldn't have to **battle any further doubts** about the news of his resurrection. For them, **seeing was believing!**

But Thomas wasn't there for that appearance. Imagine that for a whole week, when Thomas & his 10 comrades got together, all they told him was **WE HAVE SEEN THE LORD! HE WAS RIGHT HERE – IN THIS ROOM! WE SAW HIM!** Thomas' reaction is not pretty. You'd think he might say: **“REALLY, what'd he look like? What'd he say? How long was he here? Is he coming back?”** Instead, Thomas earns his “villain” reputation of doubting. He doesn't accept the disciples' words. He spent the past week sticking to what he had seen: **Jesus suffering, Jesus crucified, Jesus dead, Jesus buried!** He knew what he saw. He knew Jesus was dead and he knew how that happened. He could not delete those images out his memory. They were singed into his mind and that mind told him, **“This can't be!”** For an entire week, Thomas gripped death in a buried Savior instead of life in a Risen Savior!

He was not convinced. His **battle with doubts** led him to want more proof: **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.** Seeing wasn't enough for Thomas. Seeing could be a mirage or a dream. He needed more senses involved. 1) I have to **SEE** the nail marks. 2) I have to **TOUCH** the holes in his hands. 3) I have to **PLACE** my hand into the gaping gash in his side. And unless I do that, I'm not changing my mind until I get the proof I need. **I WILL NOT BELIEVE IT** is much stronger in the Greek: **I WILL BY NO MEANS BELIEVE IT...NO WAY, NO HOW!** Thomas is now in an all-out **battle with doubt**.

Thomas had a Greek surname *“Didymus”* which means “twin”. Is it so far-fetched to see ourselves as Thomas' twin? Often times we are “doubting Thomases”, when our logic and our senses **battle the doubts**.

**When trials and troubles** club us on our heads in life, we ask “where are you, Lord? Why am I so sick? Why do I need another surgery- why wasn't the last one good enough?” **When we are ridiculed** for believing Easter, we crouch under such persecution and join Peter in claiming **“I don't know the man!”** **When the Lord says to remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy**, {Ex 20:8} **to offer your bodies as a living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God** {Rom 12:1}, and **in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord**, {1 Peter 3:15} do we follow our own will and say: **NO WAY, NO HOW?** **When we're so joyless**, so worried, so anxious, so stressed, so guilty, so angry, so burned up or so burned out, do we begin to doubt that God really cares or has control and conclude all of this is actually his fault?

And then when loved ones or friends around us die, do we run scared and hopeless not wanting to see it, deal with it, or feel it? We know death is the ultimate reality for each one of us, sooner or later. But then how many of us really want to jump in to the jaws of death with both feet? Could it be we are **battling our doubts** and the doubts are winning? Then we are the sorrowful Thomases who are sinning. In the strongest of moments, **we are weak**. In our finest of hours, **we are flimsy** and **we doubt God!** And if we cast him out of our hearts, he will surely cast us out of his heaven...and then where did the **I WILL NOT BELIEVE IT** get us? It got us Hell's fury forever and that's a losing battle.

Realize the battle we're all in. By ourselves, we are not up to the challenge. We are not able to **defeat the doubts**. Thomas didn't and as his twin, neither do we.

## 2

There has to be something better, someone stronger for us to turn our "**seeing is believing**" into "**BELIEVING IS SEEING**". There is and He is Jesus Christ our Lord whom we **see as the only proof we need!**

In my ministry, I've believed many times that things don't happen by chance. On Maundy Thursday, I made a hospital call on a member who was about to be discharged. Another 10 minutes and I would've missed him. Because it was M.T., I wondered if he'd be strong enough to attend that night and commune to which he answered "probably not". So I suggested we have M.T. communion right in the hospital room he was about to leave. I firmly believe God set up that visit to show His grace to that member at the time of need.

I believe Thomas' absence from the Lord's 1<sup>st</sup> appearance Easter night was not by chance. God used Thomas' attitude so we can view His grace in Thomas' life and ours a whole lot clearer. **ONE week later**, Jesus reappears to same audience in the same place, except there's one more in the room. **PEACE BE WITH YOU** comes from Jesus' voice to all the disciples. To Thomas, Jesus' gracious invitation stoops to his demands: "*You want to **SEE** nail marks? **SEE MY HANDS**. *You want to **TOUCH** the holes from the spikes? **PUT YOUR FINGER HERE**. *You want to **FEEL** my gaping gash? **REACH OUT YOUR AND PUT IT INTO MY SIDE**. *You want to see proof, Thomas? Here I am to show you. **STOP DOUBTING AND BELIEVE!******

What grace from a gracious Savior! He will go to any length to allow one soul to believe and not doubt. **What Jesus cares about is not whether we believe His resurrection because we've seen it. What Jesus cares most about is that we see His resurrection because we believe it's true.** He says so: **BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN ME, YOU HAVE BELIEVED; BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED**, i.e. **BELIEVING IS SEEING!**

By God's Spirit working through the Gospel, we know and believe that **Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** {Is 53:5} Our sins have been paid. Our guilt has been cleared. Our offenses are reconciled. Our paradise has been secured. Jesus has gone to every length to redeem us with his blood so that God sees the perfect righteousness of His Son covering us by faith. We can't **see** heaven, but it's there. We can't **tour** Paradise, but it's getting ready.

The blessing of our faith is that it doesn't depend on our senses; it depends on the Word of God as Peter writes: **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.** {1 Pet 1:8-9} The Hebrews writer said it best: **Faith is being SURE of what we hope for and CERTAIN of what we do not see.** {Heb 11:1} Paul was right on when he wrote: **WE LIVE BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.** {2 Cor 5:7}

Everyday, reach out and touch Jesus' wounds & **see them as proof** of your salvation. Go visit the empty tomb & **see that as proof** that you will live. Remember your baptism & **see that as proof** of the Spirit's miracle in you. Don't believe the doubts; **believe** the Gospel and you will **see** Jesus with your own eyes in paradise...with Thomas at his side...because after all: **BELIEVING IS SEEING! AMEN**