

The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 23, 2017

Text: John 20:19-31

Theme: “Doubting Thomas?”

There is a drawing in your service folder near the end. It is one those illusion drawings. You may have seen it before. I’ll just point out part of it to you at this time. If you look in the middle here in the area of the bottom third you will see a chin. Here’s a mouth, nose, eyes, hair, and a scarf. This looks like an older woman.

Now there’s more to it, maybe you see it already. But you can be stuck on one to such an extent you are prevented from seeing the other. So it was with Thomas. He was stuck on his perception of reality and it was not good. It was rather hopeless. Just what was his problem? Why could he not believe the witness of the others? The other apostles may have been having these very thoughts.

Thomas was still stuck where the others had been—still in shock and despair. Jesus was dead. There was just no doubt about that. Had Thomas’ words recorded earlier in John (11:16) been prophetic? When Jesus announced it was time for them to come out of seclusion and go back to the region of Jerusalem to tend to their friend Lazarus, none of the Twelve thought that was a good idea; after all; the Jews had just being to kill Jesus back there. Thomas had replied, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Not a question that Jesus had died. At the beginning of the week it seemed that no one could lay a hand on Him in Jerusalem. All attempts to discredit Him had been discredited. But it changed so quickly—the garden, the soldiers, the arrest. They had all fled. Jesus had been condemned, handed over, beaten, scourged, ridiculed, crucified, dead, and was buried. How much of this had Thomas witnessed directly? Whether he saw it all with his own eyes or not, the testimony was unanimous. He was dead. The Romans were very good at crucifying. And of those crucified, dead, and buried, well, they were all still dead. The dead do not come back. And now maybe the second part of Thomas' words would still happen. They would die with Him. So the doors were locked for fear of the Jews.

But suddenly, hallelujah! There was Jesus. There was no knock, no opening of the door, but bam (and there was no bam), He was there standing among them. He spoke calming words, "Peace be with you." (vs 19) Now what had been horrific sights become assuring sights. He shows them His hands and His feet. It was the same hands and feet pierced by nails, now the nails were gone, but there were still marks where they had been. He also showed them His side, that side pierced by a Roman spear. And it was His voice speaking. His voice, His body, Him, really there, somehow, right there with them!

He speaks empowering words. "Peace be with you," once more, but still more words, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (vs 21) He breathes on them, a holy breathing, and says, "Receive the Holy

Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” (vss 22, 23) It’s really the same instruction as that found in Luke 24, that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. (Luk3 24:47) Then, “poof,” (but I don’t think there was a poof) He was gone.

Wow, what a moment. What a change! But Thomas was not there. But they tell him. Maybe he was the first person that got to testify to. If so, it will be their first encounter with the Gospel being met with unbelief. We can imagine they told him more than once. They probably could not stop talking about it. They must have repeated the words of Jesus, described His sudden appearance, the look of His hand, feet, and side. Peter and John could testify how they had been in the empty tomb, had seen the grave clothes lying there, empty. And was there not the witness of Mary Magdalene and the other women? What was wrong with Thomas? Maybe they just wanted to shake him. Maybe they were doubting Thomas sanity.

All he could see was the view of death—just the old woman. Thomas was firm in his conclusions. Dead people do not live again. Maybe they pointed to the recent example of Lazarus. That dead man was still walking around, no longer dead, raised. Yes, but Jesus had done that. Where was the Jesus to raise Jesus? There wasn’t one.

No Thomas was sure Jesus was dead. He now had a week to ponder things. Sure the tomb was empty, but maybe someone had taken the body,

trying to play a cruel trick. Did Thomas know about the Roman guard at the tomb? Maybe so, maybe not, but if he did, he might reason that the guard had not been posted immediately. The Jewish officials did not make their request until the next day. Was there not a window for lifting the body? Someone had to take it. Corpses don't move themselves.

He didn't know who or what the others had seen. Maybe it was just someone who looked like Jesus. Did Thomas have a little life experience with mistaken identity? He is called "Didymus, "the Twin" (vs 24). Had he been taken as his twin or his twin as him a time or two? Was there someone out there who looked like Jesus, not his twin, but having a strong resemblance, enough, at least, to fool grief stricken, grasping for straws, hopes down the drain followers. That was unlikely, not probable, but possible.

No, no, no, it could not have been Jesus. The vision of Jesus was a specter of death, not life. "Unless, I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will not believe." (vs 25) No, not even seeing would be believing for Thomas. He demanded tactile proof. There was no attractiveness in what had happened, no life, only death. It was just the perspective of the old woman.

Do we know a few doubters, more than a few? They may think the Jesus business for us is our business, if we want to fool ourselves with that sort of things, but not for them, not buying it. If you can't hear it, see it, smell, it touch it or taste it, than it's not really. It's only matter that matters.

We are saddened. They don't know the fullness of life, actually missing the core and in the end will not have life, no it will be death, despair, damnation. We are saddened, or are we? Do we think that in the end, though they may be losing out on some good stuff now, in the end, they will be okay? Do we have doubts about the despair for doubters?

But back to Thomas. Yes, he was focused on the unattractive view, that of death. Yes, the tomb was empty, but we considered what his reasoning may have been. Let's consider his consideration. We spoke of that window of opportunity between the burial and the guard being posted the next day. The Sabbath started at sundown, 6 pm for us. The Sabbath would have begun shortly after Jesus' burial. That's why they were in such a rush to finish the burial. For the Jews everything shut down on the Sabbath, everything. Could it be the leadership wasn't worried about anything happening on the Sabbath, grave robbing included? Still it probably was a restless night for the Jewish leadership. You would hope their consciences would have been bothering them more than a little. But that night gave them time to do some more thinking. He did speak of rising on the third day. Right after would not have been the time for grave robbing, but the Sabbath day would soon be over; the day after would be the third day. So now on that day, would be the time for the disciples to steal the body away. They might snatch the body and claim that he was risen. So they break the Sabbath themselves by going into the presence of the Gentile ruler, Pilate, to make the request. They wanted to keep a lid on this thing. The request is granted, the guard is posted. It would not be

unreasonable to think that the guards took a look inside before they sealed the tomb to make sure what they were to guard was indeed there.

So the week goes by. Thomas is doubting and maybe the others are doubting Thomas. They are gathered together once more, Thomas with them this time. Suddenly the same man is with them as one week before. After His initial words of peace, he speaks back to Thomas words reflecting exactly Thomas' request. "Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe!" (vs 27) Thomas responds. "My Lord, and my God!" (vs 28) Thomas has a whole new view, the beauty of life. Look at the image once more. See the nose as the chin, come up on the page and there is a dainty little nose, then an eyelash. It is a side view of a young woman. We are given eyes to see.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us the eyes to see Jesus as my Lord and my God. He lived for me the perfectly, suffered for me, and died for me as a perfect offering for my sin. He has arisen for me, ascended and reigns for me. One day He returns for me. It is God Himself, God the Son in this man, Christ Jesus. Brother and sister, fullness of life with Him now is His promise, the fullness of serving Him in love. We have been given witnesses who have seen and heard and touched. We read in 1 John 1:1, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands." Actually, Thomas' doubting is used as a tool to reinforce the witness. The response of Thomas shows he now has no doubt. He did not doubt that the same

man crucified, dead, and buried, now stood risen, alive and speaking before him.

What about those we know who don't seem to know the Lord and God truth about Jesus? Well, have we told them that truth? Do our lives give the appearance that our faith makes a difference, all the difference, or does it appear to be an indifferent affair? Do we remember our connections with others are an opportunity to love them with the love we know and experience in our risen Lord? We do what God has put before us to do trusting Him to do the work of giving faith, a work that only He can do.

We read at the end of our text for today, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (vs 29) This perspective, the eyes of faith to trust in the testimony of eyes that beheld in the flesh. We see the beauty of life that overcomes the struggle of death, life now and forever. For Jesus' sake.  
Amen