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"God of The Second Chance"
John 20:19-31

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 20:19-31.

The night after the morning that Jesus rose he appeared to his disciples in the Upper Room. Ten disciples were there. Thomas wasn't one of them. He missed his first chance to see for himself that Jesus was alive.

They say you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Thomas' first impression was that what his friends said couldn't be true. But this morning's passage tells us that when a first impression is wrong it is possible to "stand corrected" when you get a second chance. Hear the word of the Lord from John 20:19-31

Let's pray.

Lord we are gathered here, once again to hear you speak to us through your Word. Thank you for John who passed on this part of the story that only he and those gathered there experienced. As we meditate on what it might have been like to have been there, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

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Yesterday was Earth Day. I spent part of the beautiful day enjoying Earth, listening to Cuban music and Aztec dancers at the Willow Water Hole in Houston. There were Science Marches around the globe. I saw a poster that one person was carrying that had a picture of a telescope with words "Come and Take It. Yesterday I read that Pope Francis said that the Big Bang Theory and Evolution are real.

A junior high school teacher was telling her class about evolution and how the way everything in the world was formed proved that God doesn't exist. She said, "Look out the window. You can't see God, can you?" The kids shook their heads. "Look around you in this room. You can't see God, can you?" The kids shook their heads. "Then our logical conclusion is that God doesn't exist, does He?" she asked at last, certain that she had won her audience over.

But one girl from the back of the classroom said, "Miss Smith, just because we can't see it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. We could do brain surgery and investigate the parts of your brain and we could do a CAT scan and see the brain patterns in your head. But we couldn't prove that you've had a single thought today. Does that mean that you haven't thought anything today? Seeing is believing, but just 'cause you can't see it doesn't mean it doesn't exist." 1)

Actually, according to our gospel text today seeing is recording. Seeing is reporting what was seen. **Not** Seeing is believing.

Thomas said, "Unless I see it I won't believe it. Because of that statement he has been saddled with the nick name Doubting Thomas. I have always felt sorry for Thomas. One incident, one remark, after a particularly traumatic experience ... the murder of his master ... has tarred him ever since. It makes no difference that the rest of his life was marked by faithful service to his Lord. Thomas became doubting Thomas, and his name has been used ever since as a euphemism for the skeptic.

We know more about Thomas than we know some of the other disciples. We also know that he had a second name. According to John's Gospel he was also known as Didymus. (which means "The Twin")? We don't know if he was an actual twin or if he looked enough like another one of the disciples or maybe even looked like Jesus.

Unlike some of the disciples, Thomas has a few "speaking parts" in the gospels. From the three times that we hear Thomas speak we can deduce that he was much more than Doubting Thomas.

First, from them we learn that he was not a coward. Earlier in John's Gospel when word came to Jesus that Lazarus was quite sick, a dilemma presented itself. Lazarus' home was in Bethany which was in Judea. The religious authorities in Judea were already threatening Jesus' life. It was risky for Jesus and the twelve to travel back there. Jesus, however, was determined to make the journey. It was Thomas who spoke up and said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (11:9) Certainly he was not halfhearted in his commitment to Christ. And certainly he was no coward. He wasn't afraid to die.

Second, we learn that Thomas not only wasn't afraid to die, he wasn't afraid to speak up. Go back with me to the Last Supper. Jesus is speaking some of the most beautiful words ever recorded. "Let not your heart be troubled," he says to the twelve. "Believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going."

It was Thomas who spoke up and said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" (14:1-5) Thomas was not uncommitted. He was simply intellectually honest. He knew that many people have been misled by false religious teachers but he was determined that he would not make the mistake himself. Thomas was uncharacteristic in that he was a man who asked for directions. Because he did, we have recorded the most uncompromising claim of Jesus' ministry. In answer to Thomas request Jesus says, "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by me."

I saw that this week a series on the life of Albert Einstein starring Geoffrey Rush will begin. The story is told about Albert Einstein, the brilliant physicist of

Princeton University in the early 20th century. Einstein was traveling from Princeton on a train, and when the conductor came down the aisle to punch the passengers' tickets, Einstein couldn't find his. He looked in his vest pocket, he looked in his pants pocket, he looked in his briefcase, but there was no ticket. The conductor was gracious; "Not to worry, Dr. Einstein, I know who you are, we all know who you are, and I'm sure you bought a ticket."

As the conductor moved down the aisle, he looked back and noticed Einstein on his hands and knees, searching under the seat for his ticket. The conductor returned to Einstein; "Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. You don't need a ticket, I'm sure you bought one." Einstein arose and said "Young man, I too know who I am; what I don't know is where I am going."

Steven Molin writes "That is the good news of Easter; that we know where we are going. We have been told by the Savior that his life and death has promised us life eternal. Unemployment doesn't change that promise. Neither does divorce, or bankruptcy, or cancer, or depression, or felony, or failure. Through elation and deflation and every emotion in between, this truth remains; we know whose we are and we know where we are going, because the Son of God has promised. And this, my friends, is faith. 2)

Third, we learn that Thomas wasn't easily convinced. When it came to believing what others had seen Thomas ... doubted. Thomas was not being difficult. He was being consistent with his own character. He was a cautious man, a man of integrity, a man who did not plunge in without all the facts.

Thomas hadn't seen the scars. He thought his friends had gone off the deep end. For seven days the ten who had seen the scars tried to convince the one who hadn't that Jesus was alive, but to no avail. And so, seven days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again and said to them and to Thomas, "Peace be with you."

It was a high and holy moment when Christ appeared to Thomas. We can imagine Thomas kneeling in the face of incontrovertible evidence and declaring with a strong and solemn voice, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus told them to be at Peace and then he showed them his scars. His resurrection body was real, one that could be touched. It was raised up from the cold slab in the tomb, but it still bore the scars.

I read a modern-day illustration of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. One woman was waiting for a tennis match to finish and she was relating how badly her knees hurt. She had a brace on each knee. The person sitting with her pointed to the open hole of her knee brace and asked if her scar was from knee surgery. She said, "No, it's from my son, and I actually have an identical scar on my other knee."

Several years ago she scooped up her toddler son from the swimming pool and began to walk towards a lounge chair. As she stepped onto the tiled patio, her foot slipped on the wet slick surface. She was also seven months pregnant, and it was one of those moments where you feel like you're moving in slow motion but there's nothing you can do to stop the fall.

Within a split second, she knew her momentum was toppling her forward, and she could either face-plant and land on top of both her son and her unborn child, or she could fall on her knees. She chose to fall on her knees directly onto the unforgiving concrete. Blood went everywhere. She ended up needing stitches, which resulted in scars, but her son and unborn child were both unscathed. 3)

Jesus had scars. Even though he had a resurrection body, it still bore the scars of his death on the cross. Jesus forgave those who gave him those scars. The scars will still be there, but new life is possible and eternal life is assured.

We will never experience such direct confirmation, with a second chance like Thomas had. We are left with a choice, "Will we believe even though we haven't seen?"

Let me tell you about another Thomas. Thomas Jefferson ranks as one of our nation's greatest intellects but he rejected the notion of miracles. When he approached the scriptures he could not tolerate those passages, which dealt with the supernatural. So what did he do? He wrote his own bible. In the Thomas Jefferson Bible you will find only the moral teachings and historical events of Jesus' life. No virgin birth. No walking on water. No feeding of the multitudes. No raising of Jairus' daughter. No raising the son of the widow of Nain. No raising of Lazarus. And, no resurrection. Here is how his bible ends: "There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone at the mouth of the sepulcher and departed." Now that's a Doubting Thomas!

It is easy to rewrite history; to say, "that did not happen." There are some who deny the Holocaust happened. We will be Marching today to refute that claim. Thomas Jefferson is in essence calling the disciples liars and that they continued throughout the first century, for 70 years, to propagate those lies. Furthermore, Jefferson's Bible has been robbed of its power. I am convinced that the church does not accomplish 2000 years of life inside the walls of a closed dark sepulcher. There is no power in that dark place; rather, the Church is alive because He is alive forevermore. 4)

Notice what does not occur in this passage. No one criticizes or rebukes Thomas for his lack of faith or for his skepticism. Thomas says he won't believe until he can see for himself that Jesus is alive. Jesus immediately appears and meets his demands! When Thomas saw Jesus face to face he had no choice but to believe. Having seen and believed Thomas had his doubts cast aside and he spent the rest of his life exhibiting the courage to speak up, to go take the gospel to India and to die there for his faith, martyred by a spear.

There is a story about a pre-civil rights African American community in Florida. The story says that during times of political elections, this community would rent a voting machine and go through the voting process. Now, they knew that their votes would not be counted, but they voted anyway. When asked by members of the white community why they did this every year, they replied, "Oh, just practicing. Just practicing."

Believing in what is not yet seen means we practice or behave as if it is already exists. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." This is what leaders and visionaries do. They believe in something bigger than themselves and they begin to act as if it is so. 5)

If Jesus didn't chastise Thomas for doubting the resurrection, He certainly won't penalize you if you if you still have questions. Jesus did not criticize Thomas for wanting physical evidence, but rather blessed those who believe without it.

There was something that Jesus said to Thomas though that was aimed directly at us this morning. Jesus was able to look forward in time thousands of years in time and visualize each of us sitting in this sanctuary this morning. In the Upper Room talking to Thomas, Jesus pronounced a blessing on us. Jesus said to Thomas, "Thomas, now you believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

He's talking about us. He's calling us blessed. Because we believe without seeing we are able to face life with a quiet confidence that is not shaken by life's storms. Because we believe without seeing we are able to make other hard decisions. We may never have the absolute knowledge that Thomas had, but we will have something more precious: We will have a mature faith that grows as it is tested under fire in the laboratory of life. 6)

They say you never get a second chance to make a first impression. You and I are proof positive that because of God's grace even if one has a wrong first impression one can "stand corrected" of that false first impression. Why? Because if at first you don't succeed....try, try again. Because God is THE God of ...second chances.

Let's pray. Thank you Lord for giving Thomas a second chance. Thank you for giving us multiple chances to grow in our faith. Thank you for each person in this room that you blessed when you said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Unlike Thomas or the disciples gathered in that Upper Room and unlike Saul on the Road to Damascus who had a supernatural appearance we have not seen you, but we believe. We have seen what you can do in the lives of those around us. We have seen what you have done in our lives. We hope to see many more evidences of your life coursing through their lives and the life of our church.

We join our hearts in prayer for those who are in need, whether the need is for healing, for provision, for inspiration, for comfort, for employment, for friendship for correction or reproof. We pray for the places around the world where people are grieving, whether it be the loss of a loved one or loved ones, or the places that have been devastated by war, by loss of life by loss of property and housing due to the hurricanes and mudslides and floods

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- 1) Seeing Is Believing, by Carla Thompson Powell
- 2) Steven Molin. ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., , by
- 3) Scars of Hope, by Christi O. Brown
- 4) Brett Blair ChristianGlobe Illustrations
- 5) Must We See to Believe?, by Wyvetta Bullock
- 6) Lectionary Tales for the Pulpit, by David E. Leininger