

Second Sunday of Easter, April 12, 2015, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31

***"Believing is Seeing"***

It has often been said "Seeing is believing" but I think believing is truly seeing!" This should remind us of Jesus' own words "*Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.*" (John 20:29) Hearts are changed through belief – through faith! Today we find the Apostles hiding from the Temple leadership, in the Upper Room, out of fear. These are really not the same Apostles who followed Jesus around for three years, and they are most certainly not who they would become on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would bless and empower them beyond even their wildest beliefs. Scripture tells us that the doors to the Upper Room were shut "*for fear of the Jews.*" The Apostles, who had run the other way from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was arrested – were still in hiding, and they were terrified, in spite of the fact that they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. It wouldn't be until the Holy Spirit was given to them they would boldly begin to profess their faith, - no matter what the situation or the threats that would be facing them.

All around the world today there are Christians who are gathering to worship the Risen Jesus, just as we are doing this morning, and studying the Word of God, along with other believers. Some are gathering in secret - in hiding, because it is unsafe or even illegal to be a Christian in the land that they live. People like you and me are jailed, tortured, beheaded, and far worse – simply because they love Jesus Christ. We have been witness to this on the news, when ISIS and others would take Christians out into a field and have their way with them. Marilyn and I have made the decision to be intentionally praying for the Persecuted Christians around the world. All of us need to be in prayer for them and to celebrate the courage and strength that the Lord has given them throughout their ordeal.

While we celebrate the fact that the early Christian church grew rapidly - many of us don't really stop and think about the persecution that took place during the early church – and this Gospel reading takes place only two weeks since the Crucifixion of Jesus. Those who were persecuted were sure of their faith in Jesus, or they would not be willing to stand up for Him.

The Apostles were overjoyed that they had seen the Risen Lord – but not so much that they were getting up and leaving that Upper Room. That was their

stronghold, their safety net. They strongly believed – and that included Thomas, but Thomas was jealous that he was not there when Jesus visited the others. Can you just imagine what that might have been like? That last Sunday we had a special visitor and you came in today and we said “you missed him!” That would sort of be like Thomas. Because Thomas asked for absolute, empirical proof – I think he has gotten a bad rap - he was labeled as doubting Thomas.

I would like us to take a closer look at Today’s Scripture reading from the Gospel of John, as we read today ---“*Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”* (He gave them His shalom) *After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*” The disciples apparently didn’t receive Shalom, or peace from Jesus’ initial greeting, because they didn’t rejoice until after He proved who He was. It very well could have been because the door was locked, and Jesus’ suddenly appeared inside. They might have been stunned and afraid, - until Jesus showed them His wounds. When they recognized Him in that “locked” upper room, their joy became so great it just could not be contained. They had received the joy that Jesus had promised them in John 16:22. He told them when He was speaking of His impending death: “*I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*”

I want to suggest to you that this joy was not only because of what they saw, but it was also came from what Jesus had to say to them. Jesus had just given these disciples their marching orders – He had just commissioned them:

- They received their call to ministry: – Jesus said “*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*”
- They received the power to forgive sins: - Jesus told them “*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*”

Not only had the disciples seen the Risen Lord, received their call to ministry, and the power to forgive sins – but they themselves, received new life in the Holy Spirit – breathed upon them by their beloved Master.

- They must have been ecstatic.
- They must have been giddy.
- They must have been so very excited, and that is putting it mildly.

*But one of them was not there! And that was Thomas.*

Thomas comes back, through that locked door and gets met at the door by his brothers with: “*We have seen the Lord!*” They go on: “He was here, and He gave us the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins.” I tell you what, Thomas has my deepest sympathy. Can you just imagine missing out on that?

*How many of us can relate to Thomas at this point?* The rush of emotions:

- Excitement,
- then disappointment,
- sadness,
- concern,
- disbelief,
- or --- Doubt?

It wasn't until eight days later – on the following week; Jesus came back to that same locked room and said “*Peace Be with you!*” “*Shalom!*” Thomas is there this time, and Jesus goes right to Thomas and directly addresses him: “*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*” Jesus goes right to addressing each one of Thomas' concerns,

- his disappoint
- his disbelief
- and most pointedly his doubt.

Thomas doesn't even have to touch Jesus. And Thomas' reaction is **like no one else's reaction in all of Scripture** – it is one of wonder, of awe, of humility and amazement - **He says: “*My Lord and My God!*”** I can just picture Thomas in my minds' eye as dropping to his knees, bowing before Jesus, pretty much falling on his face, and saying: “***My Lord and My God!***”

We are truly blessed with these words – we are given here, a very special insight by the Apostle John in this Gospel. He was there! He was in the upper room – an eyewitness. Thomas proclaims Jesus as “*My Lord and My God!*” Here, near the end of John's Gospel, we hear the only disciple to actually announce Jesus as God.

- Others had declared Him the Son of God,
- Others had called him the Messiah,
- And Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of Man.

John brings us full circle in His Gospel right from the very first words in John 1:1. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

The faith of Thomas steps right up to the plate and clarifies beyond question the identity of Jesus – and he does it for all generations that will follow him. His faith proclaims Jesus Christ, the Risen Savior, He is God Incarnate – God made man – God -the Living Word: *“My Lord and My God!”*

After Jesus speaks of Thomas’ belief in having seen the Risen Lord, Jesus then speaks of other believers and their faith: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”* My brothers and sisters in Christ – here it gets personal! **Jesus is talking to you!** He is talking to each one of us - *Blessed are we!* Blessed are we who believe, even though we have not seen! Jesus is telling us that believing is seeing.

It has been almost 2,000 years since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, walked upon this earth, took on our sins, and then suffered, died on the cross, then triumphantly rose again from the grave, and appeared to Thomas and the rest of the Disciples in that locked upper room– and yet Jesus’ words come to us today – personally, meant for each one of us to hear and to feel - as remarkable encouragement for our faith as believers in Him – in Jesus Christ as Lord and God.

How wonderful it would have been to be there when Jesus walked the earth – or would it have? What would we have done if we stood at the “way of the cross” as Jesus carried His cross? Would we have boldly jumped in to try to help like Simon of Cyrene? Or would we have hidden our face like the disciples? Oh! It would have been wonderful to have seen Jesus talk in His ministry, to have seen Him personally heal person after person who sought His mercy; to have had Him touch us like He touched Thomas and the other disciples; to have personally seen Him or to possibly have touched His robe, or even just the hem of His garment. But we weren’t there! We can read about it, sing about it, dream about it, and

hear about it in church - and yet here Our Lord Jesus **calls US blessed!** We are indeed blessed - having not been there, having not seen Him – we believe in the One who died for us! We have faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ, whose Resurrection we celebrated just last Sunday – Easter Sunday – and every Sunday! We believe that we will one day share in the joy of His Resurrection when we meet Jesus face to face. We can see why Thomas boldly spoke “*My Lord and my God!*” Believing is seeing!

We CAN see Him when we read and meditate on the complete story of God’s hand in the salvation history of humanity, found in all of God’s Written Word – the Holy Scriptures. We can see Him when we freely worship, and come together with other believers, just as we are doing today, we can see Him when we repent of our sins and know that we are truly forgiven – because of Jesus dying in our place. We can see Him when we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus “feeding in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving” in the Holy Eucharist, in complete and total freedom. We can show Him to others by spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to others. We can live the words of the Apostle Peter who wrote in his first letter, chapter 1 verses 8 and 9: “*though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*” You see today’s Gospel message is about believing in the Resurrected Jesus and sharing His love with others. John reminds us in his words given at the end of today’s Gospel message: “*so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name.*” Believing is seeing!