

Believe and Not See (John 20:19-31)

We all have heard the comment “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Believe is to live as doubt is to question. We are curious people. Some of us are inquisitive while others just roll along in the stream of life. I don’t want to sound pessimistic because I sometimes wish that I could relax enough to just let go and accept what comes my way. But I cannot it’s in my nature to question. To question why, what, were, when. Sounds crazy doesn’t it. Why can’t I let go and let God. I need to work on that. Maybe today with our combined effort of prayer and singing praises to God, To Jesus and invoking the Holy Spirit, maybe you all can open that door with me. Maybe it will open other doors for you, too.

After Jesus was baptized by John and spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, Jesus went to Galilee to proclaim the “good news” of God. *“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* (Mark 1:15).

That is our belief. That is what we focus on when we worship but also when we live our lives as Christians, as believers, as lovers for Christ. So what then with this concept of believing and not seeing. We are visual people. We need to see things. We need to hear things. We need to hold things. We need to smell things. We need to taste things. That is what keeps us going. It enlivens us. After all we are a “curious bunch” as human beings who cannot understand that we all have the same basic needs for survival and yet we seek to conquer each other until the final prize is in hand. I don’t know about you folks, but I have a sense of a “call” to give what I can of myself without losing who I am and how I believe in a triune God. I see it. Maybe you do, too.

Our worldwide scientific communities live to seek out what is thought to be a part of our universe. Speculations, hypotheses and conjectures have been made in an attempt to answer questions about our creation, potential life beyond our planet Earth and the potential for life on planets within our own solar system. We want to believe that there is life beyond us but to date we have not seen any, at least the information has not become public. We know more about outer space than we do about our oceans. Those involved with this particular science live to find life other than ours. It’s their belief to explore and to find things that have not been seen and they keep on going and waiting to discover what has yet to be seen.

Today’s scripture text is an account by John describing the event when Jesus came back to prove that he is of God. As it was written Jesus would be killed and buried in a tomb and then he would rise from the dead to be with God and to give a promise; the greatest promise in all of history and time. Jesus forgives the disciples for abandoning him and he forgives us for abandoning him, too. His disciples lived with Jesus. They witnessed Jesus’ teachings and his awesome miracles. We believe

because we are taught about Jesus in Sunday school or by some other means. Later in life as we become of age we make a conscious decision to believe in God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. If we think about it, what faith we have, what treasure we possess, what joy we sing to show our love to God.

As this story unfolds, Jesus appears to the frightened disciples as they are huddled in a room with locked doors. They fear for their lives after Jesus was killed on the cross. They had deserted their leader and Savior not knowing where he had gone because he was not in the tomb.

Then out of nowhere Jesus spoke, *“Peace be with you”* in an attempt to relieve his disciple’s anxiety and fear. Jesus proves himself to the men by showing them the marks of the nails in his hands and also the piercing in his side. Jesus’ followers rejoiced at his presence. Then Jesus again affirms the traditional Jewish greeting *“Peace be with you.”* He explains that God has sent him and now he is going to charge them in kind. Jesus breathes on them in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit. The commission has been made. The disciple Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared the first time. When Thomas finally caught up with the disciples they told him of Jesus’ appearance. But Thomas did not believe them. He wanted physical proof. Thomas says, *“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.”* (25b).

After a weeks time the disciples reconvened. This time Thomas was with them. Again, all the doors were shut and locks secured yet Jesus appeared. He greeted them by saying once more, *“Peace be with you.”* Jesus speaks directly to Thomas and says, *“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”* Thomas replied, *“My Lord and my God!”* Then Jesus responds, *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet they have come to believe.”* (29).

That has been the epitome of our faith. We have not seen and yet we believe. We have not been a witness to the actual events and miracles that Jesus performed but still our faith and love encompasses all that we trust in and exalt to our God. Friends, it is by our faith and praise through worship both corporate and individual that our connection to the supreme God is real and was witnessed because of Jesus and his disciples. We know that Jesus spoke of love of self, love to your neighbor and love to those that persecute you. Jesus is our guide and our witness. His salvation continues now and forevermore until the great time of the second coming of the Lord. Do not doubt O, you faithful servants of God. There will be life, eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Friends, there have been many times in our lives when we have doubted things and circumstances. We sometimes need to see before we can believe. Years ago while attending a youth group retreat I was called to be an

advisor for them. It was more like being a watchdog. I was focused on my duty as we traveled to Mount Monadnock in Jaffery N.H. with two busloads of youths and other advisors. It was on that retreat that I met a gentleman by the name of Scott Larson. He was the music coordinator for that weekend. He would be providing music accompanied by a trio. Rev Bob, the pastor of our church suggested that I bring my guitar as he was bringing his bass guitar to sit in with Scott and the other musicians. This was a new horizon for me. I brought my guitar not knowing what would happen because I was not officially invited to play.

I met Scot and he was a very humble man and also a great encourager. He re-affirmed the invitation to sit in with the band. I had never seen or played with any of them, but I believed that I could do it. There was a moment of conversation when Scott talked about his up and coming ministry called, "Straight Ahead Ministries." He was working to obtain funding that would help him to reach out to the young men that were in prison for one reason or another. His passion towards these young men was compelling. He wanted to reach out his hand of love and faith to those he did not know; to those that felt like they were considered outcasts in society. They had been discarded in a system that assimilates the guilty to the abyss of a dark society. A place that fosters juvenile misbehavior.

Clearly help was needed for those that sought to be redeemed. Some of them wanted to start over again. Scott heard the testimonies of these young men and sought out to do something positive to help them. His work inspired some to write their thoughts and feelings. In a book published by Scott through Straight Ahead Ministries, Inc. entitled "*Doing Time With God*," (Straight Ahead Ministries Inc, Westboro, Ma 2003) an opportunity was given to the incarcerated youths that wanted to have their prayers and thoughts published. They were encouraged to share and so some of the young men did. Here is an account written in this book with the title, "*Believing is Better than Seeing*" (p.36).

"Sometimes I wish God would just show himself so I would know for a fact that he's there. It seems like it is much easier to know something than to believe in something. One time I was playing a computer game and on the screen it said, 'Not seeing is believing.' I had to really think about that. If you see something you know it exists; but if you don't see something you have to believe in its existence. That takes more work. How much easier it would be just to know that God's there than to have to believe and hope that God's watching over you all the time."

"When I look back, I realize that I have done a lot of dangerous and stupid things in my life – from home invasion to nearly shooting someone in the head. I could have wound up dead or seriously disabled, or taken someone's life. But I've been saved every time."

“Going through these things has helped me to believe in God. That belief has changed my life and how I live it. Yes, sometimes doubts still enter my mind, but slowly my belief is taking over more and more.”

This young man has a scripture passage below his words that reads:

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1).

So there was Jesus in a dimly lit room with locked doors telling Thomas and showing Thomas that he, Jesus, was the risen Savior. The proof was right there with Jesus. Thomas saw the holes in his hands and body. Thomas now believed because he saw these marks with his own eyes. He exclaims, “My Lord, My God” (vs. 28) NIV.

All the fear, doubt, guilt and grief had been removed by Jesus’ return to his friends and followers. Their charge now was to go out and proclaim that the Lord has risen. They paid the price and received the ultimate victory for their sacrifice eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

The Lord, although not with us in the flesh is in fact with us always. We can be confident and reassured that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. And yes, there will be times of doubt and uncertainty because of our humanness. But take courage in the words of this hymn:

*“What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.”*

(Hoffman, Elisha A: *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*, 1887.)

Author Carlo Carretto writes:

“Jesus is our salvation, the radiance of the God we cannot see, the unquenchable fire of love, the one for whom the angels sigh, the Holy one of God, the true adorer, the eternal High Priest, the Lord of the ages, the Glory of God.”

“Jesus is also our brother, and as such he takes his place beside us, to teach us the path that we must follow to reach the invisible. And to make sure that we understand, he translates into visible terms the invisible things he has seen-as human he acts as God would act; he introduces the ways of the family of God onto the earth and into the family of humanity.” (*“In Search of the Beyond”*: New York, NY Schuster, 2004 p158).

Friends, I pray that we continue to believe in what we do not see. Any one of you may have witnessed in one way or another the faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ who will bless us all with his forgiveness and unconditional love because we are believers of what we have not seen. Amen.