

4-15-12 - Ashes to Fire – Week 8
Believing is Seeing – John 20:19-31

JOKE: Your Duck is Dead ...

SCRIPT - PASTOR: Once again this week, we will use our imaginations to wonder what it might have been like to be an eyewitness to one of the greatest events in human history. It's good for us to remember that this telling of the story is imaginative. It is not a verse-by-verse reading of the story, but from the perspective of an observer. There are two goals here: (1) that the telling of this story would inspire you to dig deeper into the scriptures it is based on, and (2) that the way things are told in this story would help you to use your own imagination to think about what it would have been like to see and touch Jesus, someone you'd watched die only a week earlier.

READER / ACTOR: Apparently, Jesus had appeared to some of the disciples earlier in the week. They were hiding in a house, doors locked, fearful that they would be arrested and killed just like Jesus. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side. And the disciples were happier than anyone could imagine.

But Thomas was not there. And neither was I. Who could blame us for struggling to believe? But was I about to doubt some of my closest friends. Accuse them of making it up? It's not that I didn't want to believe, not that I didn't trust them. Something in my brain would just not let me believe unless I could see. But I wasn't about to say that.

Instead, Thomas did. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into them and into the wound on his side, I will not believe."

I thought silently, "Me too, Thomas. Me too." Yet, I said nothing.

Then, a week later, Thomas and I were with the rest when he appeared again. I was scared out of my mind because the doors of the house were shut and locked, but Jesus suddenly appeared standing among us.

"Peace be with you," he said

Then, he called to Thomas. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Did Jesus know I doubted too?

At that, Thomas shouted out, "My Lord and my God!"

I wanted to yell it out myself. I certainly felt it inside of me. But I was scared to admit my doubt. Why? Jesus did not seem angry at Thomas for doubting. Without any hesitation or condemnation he showed Thomas his wounds, just as he had the other disciples.

But Jesus floored me—floored us all—with what he said to Thomas next. And these are the words of Jesus that I will never, ever forget:

"Have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

(pause)

"Blessed are those who have not seen me, and yet have come to believe."

doubt

verb (used with object)

1.
to be uncertain about; consider questionable or unlikely; hesitate to believe.
2.
to distrust.
3.
Archaic . to fear; be apprehensive about.

verb (used without object)

4.
to be uncertain about something; be undecided in opinion or belief.

noun

5.
a feeling of uncertainty about the truth, reality, or nature of something.
6.
distrust.
7.
a state of affairs such as to occasion uncertainty.
8.
Obsolete . fear; dread.

Our text for today comes right after the events we read last week. It is from the same chapter of John's gospel and it is the same day as the Resurrection. It is Resurrection Sunday evening.

READ: John 20:19-31

Well it's been a long, busy, emotional day for all involved. So far Jesus has revealed Himself in risen form to several people. We get this information from reading all the gospels. Jesus revealed Himself to Mary first – at the grave site. Then somewhere during the day He appeared to Peter and to the two men walking to Emmaus, and to 500 others at one time. Now it's evening on that first day.

Mary had visited the disciples earlier to tell them she saw the Lord, and Jesus had a message for them... HE was "returning" to their Father and His Father, to their God and His God.

There must have been some doubt in their minds about the risen Jesus, because they remained barricaded in a room together behind closed doors in fear of the Jews. Look what just happened to Jesus. He was arrested and executed. He was their leader, their master, the one they thought would deliver them from the Roman oppression and their religious leaders, but something must have gone wrong. They are confused. They are panicking in fear. Certainly they would be next. There was probably a group looking for them, waiting for them to try to leave town and **nail them** – literally. Wouldn't you be scared too? What were they to do next? They must not have really believed Mary.

They are huddled together in a locked room, and suddenly Jesus is with them. Their hearts must have leapt for joy. It's the Lord! How did He do that? It's the Lord. But the doors are locked shut. It's the Lord – Boy are we glad to see you... but how...? They forgot about their fear. Jesus says, "Shalom Aleichem" – Peace to you. This is why he came to them – to allay their fears.

Then – so there would be no doubt – He showed them the wounds in his hands and side. Whatever the properties of Jesus' body, that He could pass through solid matter, change His appearance, and whatever else, He bore the scars from the nails and the spear and retained them as proof it was really Him. He reassures them again by saying, "Peace to you." And they were going to need it from what He says next to them.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." WHAT? What does He mean by this? How can we do this? The Father sent Him, but He's Jesus. How can he expect us to go out there and do what He did and be like Him out there? Their minds must have been racing and some of the fear and doubt instantly came rushing back to them.

But Jesus follows up by breathing on them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Well that will make all the difference to them as it does to us today. Without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. They were to be to the world what Jesus was to the world. In order for them to be sanctified (set apart for this huge undertaking), they would need the Spirit just as we do. Each of them received the Spirit personally that day – at Pentecost the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all who believe, but he is still received personally.

Jesus was Holy, and the disciples needed to be Holy. Therefore He gave them His Spirit of holiness.

In their new assignment, they would be bringing the gospel of the good news of Jesus to the world. Their message was and still is a message of forgiveness. By believing this message there is forgiveness in His death and resurrection. Our sin nature is no longer a barrier between us and God. We can know Him, love Him, serve Him, and grow in Him. By believing we can SEE Him and understand the truth. However, the choice is up to every individual. The disciples were the conduits of the message of forgiveness. They have no ability to forgive in and of themselves. They can only declare forgiveness in their gospel message. If anyone accepts the message and believes, they are forgiven. If they reject the message, they are not forgiven and remain in their sin and spiritual death.

Thomas (Didymus – Twin) was not there when all this happened. The others told him they had seen the Lord, just like Mary had told them earlier that same day. We don't know where Thomas was, but maybe he was sneaking around out there and may have even heard some of the buzz about Jesus rising from the dead. When his friends told him what they had seen, Thomas snaps at them all. He wanted proof; he wanted to touch Jesus for himself or he would not believe. He gives some specific criteria for believing. He wants to see the scars and put his fingers into the wounds and his hand into the spear hole in His side. His statement is so strong that it had earned him the title: Doubting Thomas - to this day. Do you doubt?

A week later – the next Sunday – nothing much has really changed. They are all together in the locked room as before, but this time Thomas is with them. Jesus suddenly appears just like last week, and says the same greeting – Peace to you. Without hesitation, Jesus repeats Thomas' criteria as if He heard him say the words a week ago. "Thomas. See the wounds. Put your finger in the nail holes and thrust your hand into my side." If that's what you need to believe, then go ahead. Just stop doubting and believe already. A more literal translation would be, ***don't continue being an Unfaithful one but become a faithful one***. Believe!

Thomas' mouth dropped. He doesn't boldly touch Jesus at all. He had his moment – his encounter with the risen Jesus. He says to Jesus – "**My Lord and my God.**" He correctly ascribes to Jesus the title of God. ***Jn. 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... 14 – The Word became flesh (in Jesus) and made his dwelling among us (or pitched his tent for a while in our camp). We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

Mary heard Him speak her name and had a personal moment with Jesus. John saw and believed – had his personal moment. Peter was visited by Jesus and had his personal moment. The disciples saw Him and believed. Now Thomas is convinced, and the realization of Jesus' deity comes in force. He had his personal moment – and encounter with the risen Jesus. What about you? Have you had your personal encounter with Jesus yet?

God became a human being. This is the major theme of this book – God came to us to be with us and become one of us to relate to us, and ultimately to die for us. He was full of humanity while also full of deity. He is the One who heals, loves, serves, waits, blesses, and rises again – this is the ultimate human being, and this is God.

Because you have seen Me you believe – blessed are those who do not see and yet believe.

Jesus is not far from any one of us. If we believe, we will see. You can't see without light. After hearing the gospel, we must believe and then the light will come on for you personally. Do you believe?

Believing is Seeing.

John then states that there are many more things Jesus did among them that are not recorded in his gospel account. He carefully selected what he included because these should bare undeniable truth about who Jesus is and convince us that we need to believe.

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

We all want to live – and we seek life above all else. Jesus is the key to life – life eternal. When we come to the end of our search for life, we find Jesus waiting for us with open arms. He is the goal of our searching and He makes us all we were designed to be.

The Gospel of John doesn’t just inform us about this Jesus, nor does it merely inspire us. It confronts us – It makes a demand on us – It requires a response. With this knowledge, what will we do with Jesus? We will either both accept and acknowledge Jesus for who He is or not. We either worship Jesus or reject Him. There is no middle ground! God, who made the universe, came to us and died for us (in our place) on a lonely hill in Palestine. How can we not feel our hearts drawn to worship Him? Do you Believe this?

We sing the Hymn:

**And can it be that I should gain
An interest in my Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing Love, how can it be...
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

Charles Wesley

That is true worship – recognition that Jesus is God, and that God has submitted Himself to death on our behalf! True worship leads us to action, to service, to obedience. The Hymn continues...

“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

When our hearts are filled with true worship, when our hands are engaged with true service, we are united with the one who made the entire universe, the one who is the great “I AM.”

And that is the message of the Gospel of John. **Belief. Believing is Seeing. Do you Believe?**