



## Sermons from St. Marks United Church of Christ New Albany, Indiana



### Living in a 'Seeing Is Believing' World

**Text: John 20:19-31**

**by Rev. Lori Lewis**

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I like the story of Thomas - Doubting Thomas as he's known because he's so real and I can relate to him. Jesus has died, everyone is in incredible grief including Thomas, they can't quite figure out how they're going to go on, how they're going to feel happy ever again and then while Thomas isn't there, Jesus appears to them "he stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he showed them his hands and his side. Then as if that wasn't great enough, Jesus speaks again and says "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Then he breathes on them and says "receive the Holy Spirit."

If I were Thomas I would have been just like he was "what do you mean you got to see Jesus. I wanted to be there. I'm not going to believe it unless I get to see him too." Think about it, how many of us would have said, "Oh, Jesus appeared to you, O.K. I'm so happy for you. " No - we would have felt cheated too -

I missed it, come one, come back again. We always assume that Thomas didn't believe the disciples, but I wonder if he believed them, but he just wanted to have the same experience with Jesus that they got to have.

It's kind of hard to believe that when all of his closest friends are telling him the same thing about Jesus that he would realize they're not going to make that up - that's too serious of a thing for a practical joke - surely he believed them.

It seems like he just needed to see it to really believe - to make it his own experience and not just one he heard about. And then the best part of the story is that Jesus comes back and lets Thomas see him and touch him too. Jesus didn't say, too bad, you missed me.

He comes back and appears and speaks to Thomas. Of course he does get that little remark in there about how blessed are those who believe without seeing.

It is a blessing to believe without seeing and there are many things in life that we have to believe in without seeing, but Jesus must have also realized that it's hard to do that when we live in a "seeing is believing" world

Think about it. We want to see things to really believe them and to really feel like we've even experienced them enough.

From the time we are little, we ask our parents, "Watch me" "Look at me kick the ball" "look how high I can jump" "Watch me make a basket".

And if parents don't see kids do those things - if you turn your head for just a moment, they have to do it again to make sure that you see.

Think about traveling. We don't just want to hear about the Grand Canyon and the Eiffel tower and the mountains and the ocean and the desert and all the great sites around our country and our

world, we want to see them.

When we're driving in the car and someone says "Oh look at the deer or look at the rainbow" - we want to see it too.

Sports fans don't just want to hear about the touchdown or goal or play that won the game, they want to be watching it when it happens.

We live in a "seeing it is believing it, seeing is experiencing it" kind of world.

It's true of painful events too.

Everyone has different ideas about what they want at the time of death - believe me, I know - in my family alone, we have 6 different opinions going on, but obviously a lot of people take comfort in seeing the person who died at a viewing. Many people talk about needing to see the person to believe it, to have closure, to make it real.

When the terrorists flew into the World Trade Center Buildings, it was awful how many times the news channels showed the buildings going down, but I kept watching because I think I was trying to make it more real by seeing it.

I had been to the top of the Twin Towers when we lived in New Jersey and a couple days after 9-11, I got the terrible news that my boyfriend from my Junior year in H.S. - my Junior Prom date, Patrick Murphy had died in one of the towers. And still today I want to go back to New York City and see ground zero thinking that seeing it will somehow make it more real.

And what about with our faith. Don't we all yearn to believe more deeply.

How many times have God's children like you and me, wished that "just once God speak out loud to me"

Just once God let me see your face and be sure. Just once God do something like setting a bush on fire, something we can see - some kind of visual proof that you are who we think you are.

"Just once give us some awesome sign that leaves no doubt in anyone's mind"

We all have periods where we wish that God would do something supernatural for us. Maybe you like I remember being kids and having seances and doing levitations and playing on wegee boards - hoping and praying to see something supernatural.

And when we go through difficult decision making times, how many times have we thought, "God, just give me an answer loud and clear, don't make me work for it". So why doesn't it happen like that - plain and clear.

The answer I think is because God is not revealed to us in the ways that we demand, but rather, God is revealed to us through ways that God chooses.

This seeing is believing world of ours has also taught us that you can't even believe what you see all the time anyway.

We've all seen the tabloid papers with the head of some celebrity pasted onto the body of someone else - just because you see it doesn't mean you can believe it.

I just read this story in Readers Digest. It said that on April fools day in 1957, the British Broadcasting Corporation tried a startling trick on its news show.

A journalist showed viewers a "spaghetti harvest" in Switzerland.

He said that the last two week of March are an anxious time for the spaghetti farm and a family was shown plucking strips of pasta off of trees.

He went on to say that there was a chance of a late frost which could impair the flavor. The story concluded, "For those who love this dish, there's nothing like homegrown spaghetti."

After the report ran on TV, the BBC was flooded with calls from people asking where they might get a spaghetti tree.

They were told to “place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best.”  
They saw it and believed it and they were totally fooled.

Kind of appropriate story since we’re having a pasta dinner today after church.

The reality is that if Jesus appeared in the flesh in our living room some night, no one would believe us anyway. We depend to see things to believe them, but even when folks see things, it doesn’t guarantee believability either.

The great thing about the story of Thomas though is that #1 he makes us realize that it is only human to want to see some proof and so it’s O.K. when we go through doubt and questioning and frustration at not being able to have proof of the various beliefs of our faith. But even more importantly than that in the story is Jesus’ reaction. Jesus didn’t say “Too bad for Thomas, he missed it” He simply comes back and gives Thomas what he needs to believe and when we are patient and quiet enough, God will give us what we need to believe too - it just won’t necessarily be in the exact manner in which we demand it - it will be in God’s own way. The other wonderful reminder from this story is that the most meaningful things in life can not be proven and maybe that’s what makes them so wonderful. Think about love, hope and faith. You can’t prove any of them but they give life meaning.

Finally, another thing to note is this: Thomas had separated himself from the disciples and therefore, in his solitude, missed the resurrection appearance.

Even when Christ appeared to Thomas, it was in the presence of the others. Everytime Jesus appeared to his followers, there were at least 2 or 3 gathered and he said it would be so  
“Whenever 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there with you.”

I think that John is suggesting to us that Christ appears most often within the community of believers that we call the church, and when we separate ourselves from the church we take a chance on missing his unique presence.

The following was found after WW II written on a cellar wall in one of the concentration camps. It was also written into a song that I believe the Youth Choir sang a number of years ago.

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.

I believe in love even when I feel it not.

I believe in God even when he is silent.

The easy answer is that there is no easy answer.

In this seeing is believing world, we are called by God to believe in much that we can not see.

God gives us signs and messages through other people and God gives us insight when we read a Bible passage again in a new way, and God lifts us up when we can not make it on our own.

I can’t prove God’s love, but I have experienced it.

Having faith does not mean having no doubts, or no questions,

In this seeing is believing world, we are called as Christians to believe to see, for seeing through the eyes of faith, we see a whole different world - a world full of hope.