

**“Unless I See...” (John 20:25-29)**

For Your Life in Christ the Second Sunday of Easter

Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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**Introduction: “Doubting Thomas”...Not Quite.**

- A. Perhaps one of the most common mischaracterizations about a person in the Bible.
- B. In two respects:
  - 1) In one respect, too critical and unfair.
  - 2) In another respect, not nearly critical enough.

**Part I: SOMETIMES Seeing *Is* Believing!**

- A. *All* of the disciples were skeptical, so to be fair we should say, “Doubting Andrew, Doubting Peter, Doubting Philip, Doubting Nathanael, etc.”
  - 1) Luke 24:11 describes how the disciples reacted after the women told them that Jesus was risen. The women saw the stone rolled away, they saw that Christ’s body was gone, and they witnessed two angels in the tomb with one of them actually proclaiming the resurrection! So the women take this amazing news to the disciples, but how did they all react?

**Luke 24:11: “...but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”**

- 2) In fact just one week before Christ appeared to Thomas, the other disciples were literally hiding in fear convinced that their leader was dead and they were next (Jn 20:19). And this was happening *after* Peter and John had verified that the tomb of Christ was empty. So, let’s not be too hard on poor Thomas!
  - 3) We must grant that “the faith of all the disciples...was the outcome of sight...Jesus himself intended to furnish the fullest sight to these disciples in order to equip them as his witnesses...(Lenski, 1391).”
- B. Sometimes we just need evidence: e.g. signs of faith.
  - 1) What we do (Mt 7:20) & 2) What we say (1<sup>st</sup> Jn 4)!

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**Part II: SOMETIMES, Seeing *Is Not* Believing!**

- A. On the other hand, Thomas’ situation was much more serious than we realize.
- B. In spite of the unanimous testimony of his devout fellow-disciples, he set himself against them all. He was not simply doubting, but openly unbelieving. Then he demanded two lines of evidence:
  - 1) Not only did he insist on seeing the mark of the nails in Christ’s hands, but also;
  - 2) He needed tactile evidence as well. He wanted to feel with his own finger and hand the holes in Jesus’ hands and the gash in Jesus’ side.
- C. That is, Thomas demonstrated the terrible condition of unbelief. He was buried in skepticism. No matter what the others said, he was prepared to come back with his own criterion and in pride and stubbornness *nothing was going to bring him around*.
- D. Here he was not “Doubting Thomas,” but “Rebelling Thomas”...he was fighting against God and he was fighting against faith.
- E. That is in our flesh and in our sin, there are times when seeing is not believing; even touching is not believing.
  - 1) We know that even our senses can be deceived or be inaccurate.
  - 2) German physicist Werner Heisenberg offered in 1926 what has come to be known as *Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle*: we can know the path an electron takes as it moves through a space or we can know where it is at a given instant, but we cannot know both. Implications? Our senses cannot track quantum mechanics; that is, we can never predict where an electron will be at any given moment and until it is observed, it must be regarded as being “at once everywhere and nowhere.” Once Heisenberg was

asked how one could envision an atom, he said, "Don't try." (Bryson, *A Short History...*, 188-9)

- 3) In Las Vegas Criss Angel and David Copperfield are among the great head-lining magicians. These guys are so good at what they do their magic seems inexplicable even if you were to test them with sight *and* touch!
- 4) Moving from Texas to California, my children witnessed a mirage in the desert. They wanted to know why there "was that water out in the middle of nowhere."! Their eyes were deceiving them!
- 5) I thought my eyes were deceiving me one time. There was a little boy whose family lived in Northern Cal. He was so sick with his cancer he had to come down to Children's Hospital near Hollywood. My parishioner in Covina was a friend of the boy's family and asked me if I could visit the child. I asked about him and found out that his favorite super hero was Batman so I went down to Children's Hospital with my Batman costume (the rest of the story including Batman's hero shared). Anyway, the boy left the hospital and my parishioner moved away. Years later, my former parishioner came back home for a funeral they asked me to perform. At that funeral, I saw the mother of the little boy and started to brace myself for the sad news, *but...at first, I didn't believe my eyes!*

### Part III: The Lord Calls Us To Faith!

- A. Yes, the first disciples who were commissioned to establish the Church, *they needed to see, but once they did they would have so much power in their proclamation, faith would no longer be based on sight. The Word took over!*
- B. Our faith now does not depend on what we see; it depends rather on what creates faith.
- C. I will never forget my friend Rick Justice who was dying of a brain tumor. He was a total skeptic and agnostic (and a very intelligent engineer). When he was in the hospital, he

started laughing when I walked in his room. He reminded me where he was in his skepticism towards God and told me in no uncertain terms that just because he was sick, he wasn't planning on changing his position anytime soon. We ended up becoming very close friends and we talked about the faith and I listened to all of his skeptical objections and though he was dying, his mind stayed sharp and he continued to listen as well. Then one day it happened...I felt a hand come over my hands while I was praying!

- D. Let's remind ourselves of what our Lord Jesus Christ ultimately said to Thomas: they were words not so much to chastise Thomas for not believing, because after-all Thomas came to believe, but rather they are words to us all that we would never reduce faith to mere seeing, because the Word is indeed powerful, so powerful that we are blessed without seeing!

**John 20:29: "Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"**

- E. But how is this possible?

**Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."**

- F. Faith is so powerful it goes beyond unreliable sight:

**Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**

- G. I watched the news intently one time this week and it wasn't for the royal wedding. The scene was Tuscaloosa, AL. The president of the United States spoke, then the governor of Alabama spoke, and then the lowly mayor of Tuscaloosa, Mayor Walt Maddox, spoke last. He had just seen his city decimated by the monster tornadoes, he came up to the mike and quoted Romans 12:12: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." *That's faith, that's power, let us also put faith over sight!*