

“Not Seeing Is Believing” - John 20.19-31 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

On Easter morning we left Peter wondering and the rest of the disciples disbelieving the women who had claimed to see angels and hear the Good News of the Resurrection. This story in John’s gospel takes up where the other story from last Sunday left off as it picks up later on that first Easter day. It is only when the resurrected Jesus comes to see them that evening that they finally see and believe. Well, all except Thomas who was late and missed it. (That is why you should try to never be late – you might miss something!) Poor Thomas, he missed it. He didn’t see, so he just wouldn’t believe.

So, here we are a week after Easter when we pick up on Thomas’ story and this time he is present when Jesus comes back again so that he can see and believe. But the writer (John) points out that the meaning of the story is really for you and me and all who will read the gospel and come to see and believe. I see lives that are changed: Doubters becoming Believers. In a couple weeks we will tell the story of the Apostle Paul who starts off trying to wipe out the early church, but then is completely transformed by the Living Lord to become the one who adamantly spreads the Good News and grows the church wherever he goes.

On Easter morning the disciples at first did not believe the women. Thomas at first did not believe the other disciples. In your faith journey, have you been such a doubter? Then this story is for you, and also many others we all know. The story ends that way in the gospel as it points out that the story is for those who do not have the privilege of “Seeing and Believing” but of “Not Seeing and yet, still Believing.”

I don’t believe in an either/or of doubting or believing, but rather that there is a progression of belief at work underneath this story for Thomas and to some degree in each of our own stories. The disciples with the women and their unbelievable story of angels at the tomb, and Thomas encountering this newfound faith of his fellow disciples at first could not believe. Perhaps it goes this way:

Double Doubt - *I don’t believe, and I don’t believe you.* This is where Thomas and Paul were. I hear this a lot in politics. Whether one party or the other or one candidate versus another candidate and even within in one or the other political parties. We hear how one does not believe the other’s concept of reality nor his or her rhetoric. It’s not just red or blue. It is your blue is not really true blue, or your red is not what pumps through the veins of all red-blooded Americans! (I should have been a political speech writer!) At some point something for some may shift, but unfortunately some are so set in their ways, they may never shift.

Dubious Doubt - *I don’t believe, but I believe that you believe.* This doubt at least acknowledges that the other has a valid opinion or belief even if it is drastically different from one’s own. In this doubt there may be skepticism but there is also a glimmer of hope. Here even sworn enemies can sit down at the table and work out cease fires and peace agreements. Here we can agree to disagree.

Daring Doubt - *I don’t believe, but I wish I could believe what you believe.* Jesus would try to teach us that we need to have faith like little children in order to enter the kingdom of God. If we could just have that kind of trusting faith and non-cynical belief, if we could

be open to the possibility – we can be ready to respond to an invitation to walk through that door from doubt to belief.

Timid Faith - *I believe, but I don't want to share it with anyone.* This may be where a number of church goers are. The original ending to the gospel of Mark in chapter 16 verse 8 ends with the women too afraid to tell anyone. I can identify with that and many of you who are believers may still be at that place. I believe, but I do not want to share it with anyone because I may get laughed at or ridiculed or... It reminds me of the response from the man who wanted Jesus to heal his son. He said, *I believe, but help my unbelief!* (Mark 9:24)

In Your Face Faith - *I believe, and I want everyone to know.* Then there are some who are so on fire they want everyone to know and so they tell everyone. It sometimes happens immediately after a powerful conversion experience. Not everyone has this conviction or reaction to their life changing experience of faith, but I am guessing we have seen and heard from others who have been forceful in sharing their faith. Or we might have eaten at a great restaurant or seen a movie and just had to tell everyone about it.

Faithful Faith - *I believe, and I want to live so others will want to believe.* For me this is the mature faith that I would hope we each could and would grow into. I want us to have a faith that is expressed not only in words but in faithful actions that demonstrate our changed lives. Actions speak louder than words. It is my hope and prayer that we would be this type of faithful believer and practitioners of our faith.

Do you know people who as yet, do not believe? Can you live your faith that they might see something attractive and life-changing in you? In this story as Jesus comes to the first disciples, he offers 3 things: **Peace**, **Belief**, and **Forgiveness**. Share them this week with friends and even strangers, and just see what happens. Invite someone to join you on the journey of faith. Alleluia and Amen.

Like Thomas We All Have Our Doubts

Jeffrey B. Childs 4/24/2025

(Tune: Old 100th UMH 621)

Like Thomas we all have our doubts,
With fits and starts and cries and shouts.
Faith in Christ our worst fears relieve,
Doubts turn around when we believe.

When there are things we cannot see,
We doubt and think, this cannot be.
Were stuck in doubt and can't conceive,
How life can change when we believe.

As you share faith with those who doubt,
And profess what faith's all about,
Through you what might the Lord achieve,
As you help doubters to believe?