

Pastor's Message – 4/24/22  
John 20:19-31

Are you aware that your feet generate sweat? In fact, our feet perspire more than our armpits. Don't believe me? Everybody, take off one of your shoes right now and pass it to your neighbor on the left. Take a whiff.

You don't actually have to do that; just the thought, I suspect, is enough to gross some people out.

Smelling is believing, or is it? Seeing is believing, or is it? Some will see and believe. Some will see and not believe. Some will not see and still believe. Some will not see and not believe. Believing isn't seeing and seeing isn't believing.

With all of that in mind, let's consider the story of the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples when Thomas was not present. When Thomas later arrives, his colleagues tell him what they've seen, but Thomas is not convinced. He's hearing eyewitness talk from no fewer than ten of his friends, all of whom have spent a lot of time with Jesus and certainly shouldn't have any problem identifying him.

But Thomas is nobody's fool. People don't get up and walk around after they're dead and buried, so the eyewitness testimony, no matter that it's unanimous in claiming Jesus is alive, isn't enough to sway him.

I have heard it said that there are two kinds of people in the world: cynics, who will never believe what you tell them, no matter what you do or say, and skeptics who are willing and waiting to be convinced.

Most of us are skeptics but only a little. We want to and we usually do believe what people tell us. Even complete strangers. We have to in order to survive in the world we live in.

If the car coming toward me has its turn signal on, I believe that car's going to turn, right? Or left? Whatever. If the menu says that the deluxe cheeseburger is \$8.00, I believe that when I get my check, I will be charged \$8.00. If the label on the bottle says "aspirin," I believe that the bottle contains aspirin.

But what the driver doesn't know his or her turn signal is on? What if the waiter accidentally gave you the lunch menu when you should have been given the dinner menu? What if there was a mix-up at the factory and the bottle labeled "aspirin" actually contains strychnine?

We need a little bit of skepticism in our culture and in ourselves if we are to be safe, Skepticism makes for good science. Scientists don't believe even their own hypotheses. Not at first. They test them. A little skepticism makes good drivers. They don't pull out in front of another driver just because they see a turn signal blinking. They wait to see if the other driver really is turning. That is especially important to me when I'm out on my bicycle.

Sometimes skepticism is just disbelief. Sometimes skepticism can be dismissive, sometimes skepticism can be challenging, sometimes disbelief can be hostile.

In a debate that I read about the existence of God, one hostile member of the audience asked, "What proof can you give me that God exists?" The rebuttal came back,

“What proof would you accept?” There is a profound difference between cynics, who mock and belittle believers, and skeptics who are open to being persuaded, sincerely open.

On Easter Sunday, after worship and as I was beginning my preparations for this worship service and for this Message, my phone alerted me to a group chat which I thought dovetailed nicely with our Bible story today and the idea of seeing and believing. I suspect that some of you, perhaps many of you have faced this situation before, so I wanted to discuss this group chat with you. I’ve color coded the participants so you can sort them out more easily.

8066: *Happy Easter! He has risen!! Be blessed ...*

9388: *Oh did my dad rise from the dead as well, I haven’t heard from you in about 5 months. Praise Jesus*

2989: *Happy Resurrection day!! HE has risen indeed!!!*

6427: *God bless*

1370: *Who the &%!& added me to this group I don’t know anyone take me out*

7425: *Nice mouth! Maybe that’s why “you don’t know anyone”!*

9388: *You can thank the sender of this text;*

9388: *The most “godly man”*

0885: *Let’s keep him/her in the group!*

1370: *(Voice message) now you guys can take me out of this group chat I ain’t with all this god s—t. okay that’s you guys that’s why I don’t talk to you guys you guys have your own group I’m not part of this group none of you guys know my \$^&\*#\$ name. just take me out*

1370: *(Voice message)*

*Add the m\*%\$#(r%&\$\*s from your church in your group – not random \$%^ people*

7425: *I don’t care who sent it and really don’t care. It’s a special day for all and that should be respected! Have a great day!*

1370: *Well who ever created this group chat can celebrate this day and respect this day with the people who feel the same way so take me off the chat*

7425: *I don’t listen to voice messages!*

2989: *Like “Let’s keep him/her in the group!”*

9388: *You guys sure like forcing religion on people that don’t want it.*

*7425: I don't know you and will likely never talk with you either however; let me share that I did not initiate the text and I don't force any person to do things they are not willing to do in any capacity including religion so as a Christian let me apologize if you feel forced to seek religion based on a group text. I will just say that many people start off as no believers until they have a life situation that becomes difficult and too hard to handle and then decide to turn to Jesus for strength! You're not alone with our opinion so don't feel forced just know God works in amazing ways and you may come to realize he is nudging you to let you know he is there for you when that time comes or sooner!  
Wishing you the best of luck in your life!*

*2989: "Loved above"*

*9388: I'm ...'s son. It's been pushed on me my whole life.*

*7425: Sorry buddy! That only means people love you so don't feel offended!*

In the group chat, we have believers (8066, 2989, 6427, 0855), and we have a non-believer (1370). I'm not sure about 9388. The non-believer and 9388 seem to have some baggage and may be more than skeptical, and even hostile. How did the believers handle the situation? Was it with Christian love? I expect that you who are parents certainly want your children to believe and have a Christian faith, how would you have responded to 9388 and especially 1370? What was helpful about 7425's response? What about 0885?

It was philosopher Blaise Pascal who wrote, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ." Is that true? Are most people longing to have that God-shaped hole filled with the presence of Jesus? Are you ready to see? Are you ready to believe? There are times when we'd settle for just a glimpse of the presence of God...

When we're laid off at work  
 When our application is rejected  
 When we're faced with a debilitating illness  
 When we struggle with family problems  
 When we're burdened with the sheer boredom of life  
 When we're caught in a financial crisis  
 When our spiritual well has run dry  
 When we have no emotional strength, nothing left to give  
 Just something ... anything.

There are two kinds of people in the world: cynics, who will never believe what you tell them, no matter what you do or say, and skeptics who are willing and waiting to be convinced.

Sometimes, all we have is our personal story. How Jesus entered my life, through my church, through a family member, through a friend, a health care provider, a buddy, or through a group, a choir, a Bible study, a Sunday school class, a softball team, whatever.

All we need is the story of how Jesus came into my life and the impact that has had on me. Those are things we can share to influence another to believe.

We can offer, firstly, the **peace of Christ**. Four times in the Bible reading today Jesus says, "Peace be with you." On one level, this is a conventional greeting -- a basic building block of community. But the repeated mention of it here is a reminder of something that Jesus had said to his disciples earlier: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (14:27). The peace that "the world gives" is peace that seeks to alleviate fear by relying on the security of wealth, the protection of armies or the isolation of a locked door. But there's really no peace in these things, because, all of them will eventually become useless and do not lead to peace. The peace that Jesus offers, however, is an eternal peace made possible by his resurrection from the dead.

Secondly, we can lean on the ongoing **presence of Christ** in our lives. Jesus "breathed" on the disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit, the very presence of Christ in their lives (v. 22). The Spirit would give them the power to do "even greater things" than Jesus had done (14:12) and provide the comfort, advocacy and peace that enabled them to carry out God's mission in the world.

When doubt and fear creep into our lives, we must rely on the witness of the Spirit to remind us that our lives matter and have purpose in Christ. It's the Spirit that enables us to be people who forgive sins, who speak boldly and who demonstrate the character of Christ (v. 23).

Finally, what doubters like Thomas (and us) need to remember is that our faith isn't in an idea, or a concept or a principle -- instead, our faith is in the **person of Christ**. Jesus shows up in person a week after the Resurrection, when Thomas is present, and invites the doubtful disciple to touch his wounds. It's a touch that's only possible if Jesus is more than a concept, but a person who was "in the flesh" like us; who suffered as we suffer; who was tempted like we are tempted; who dwelt among us and gave his life for us (1:14). Thomas finally believed because he saw Jesus -- not just on that day, but on all the days he had spent following Jesus around Judea. He knew what kind of man Jesus was, that he was worthy of Thomas' trust and faith, that he never backed down from a promise even when he was nailed to a cross. Now, with the risen Christ standing in front of him in the flesh, Thomas' faith went from a blueprint to a building block he would never forget.

It is when we rely on and remember that believers have the peace of Christ, the presence of Christ, and the person of Christ in their lives that they are the ones who are called "blessed" by Jesus. And then, with that blessing as our foundation, believers can be a blessing to others who still long for and are open to receive that blessing.