

In Believing There Is Seeing

On the evening of Easter, the disciples of Jesus were gathered behind closed doors. The disciples are scared to death, and Jesus comes and stands among them, and he says, "Peace be with you." He says it three times here, you notice. My guess is they needed to hear it! It is an amazing moment, even more direct than Mary's brief encounter in the garden. He shows them his wrists, where the nails held his body to the cross. He shows them his side, pierced to prove to the Romans and the world that he was dead. No coma or swooning here to explain away his death and the reality of the resurrection. He challenges them with the great commission of the new era, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." He breathes on them the promise of power, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He sends them with words of forgiveness and reconciliation the world so desperately longs to hear. But, John notes, Thomas wasn't there. For whatever reason, Thomas missed it. He wasn't there to experience the joy of the day. He wasn't there when Christ appeared. He wasn't there when Jesus made himself known, as he promised, wherever two or three are gathered in his name. When Thomas found out about what had taken place, he was brutally honest with the disciples. He said, "Unless I see, I will not believe." Now just for a moment, put yourself in his place. In fact, I guess we are in his place. It is now the next week, the next Sunday, and all he has been hearing all week is about what happened last Sunday. Mary, over and over again, saying, "I've seen the Lord." John and Peter, telling and retelling the run back and forth and into the tomb, the location of the grave cloths, the stench of death and the evidence of new life. Cleopas and the others who encountered him on the road to Emmaus. Where they said that Jesus was made known to us in the breaking of the bread. I am sure Thomas had it up to here! He must have been ready to shout, "Enough already! I can't take it anymore. I don't want to hear any more about your experience with the Risen Christ. I will not believe until I see for myself." And in that sense, I want to say, "Right on, Thomas!" Don't settle for a secondhand experience. Don't believe it just because someone else told you. Because questioning and doubting, questing and seeking, it's all part of the journey of faith. So, Thomas waits. Thomas questions. Thomas doubts. Then, one week later, he is present in the upper room, and into the haze of his questions and the maze of doubt, comes the Living Christ, saying, "Here I am. Touch. See. Feel. Know. Be not faithless but believe." And in that moment, as he reached out to Jesus, he believed, and he saw.

You see, sometimes seeing is believing. But sometimes, believing is seeing. Like Thomas, when we finally come to the end of our searching, there comes the moment when we take the great leap of faith; when we reach out beyond our understanding to grasp a truth larger than our doubts; when, after asking all the questions, we take the step which leads toward the Risen Christ. And in that moment, we discover that believing is seeing.

You see, Resurrection faith is not true because you can prove it, like a theorem in your high school geometry book. It is not true because you've mastered it by trial and error. Resurrection faith is not true even because the women and the angels say it was so. Resurrection faith is true because something in this witness to God's way of working connects with your own experience in a way that says, "Yes, of course." Jesus affirms Thomas's desire to see in order to believe, but Jesus also affirms belief which goes before and beyond sight. "Blessed are those who haven't seen and still believe." He is speaking about you and me. After all his searching, all his questions, all his doubts, Thomas, when confronted with the mystery of the Risen Christ said, My Lord and my God. And oh, how I pray that you have moved beyond your doubts and declared like Thomas, My Lord and My God! For sometimes seeing is believing. Ah, but better yet, says Jesus, sometimes in the believing, there is seeing.