

Sunday, April 23, 2017

I Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Seeing is Believing?

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! As we continue in our celebration of Christ's resurrection in this season of Easter let us rejoice for Jesus is alive and His Spirit is with us now!

Spring is now in full bloom—with blossoms on trees and flowers beckoning their colourful heads to the sun. Depending upon where you walk and where these trees and flowers are- you might also be treated to the scent of flowers. But do you remember just a few short days ago how cold it was and how we each yearned for some signs of spring? Do you remember the robin you saw first—walking amongst the small piles of snow? Did you tell someone? And what did they respond? Really? I don't believe you—unless the poor little bird had a coat on!

What about others things you have seen and shared with others? For you who have traveled around the world—when you share your experiences with others do they always believe you about the marvels of this world? Mountains, desserts, amazing animals and plants do we always believe the stories of another's travels or vacations. We might still ask the question how big was that fish you caught, really? Or how hot was the dessert in mid-afternoon and you forgot your water bottle? People question the truth today and of course we know that there is two kinds of news today—real news and fake news. Public opinion or the opinions of news broadcasters is overshadows the real events which are the foundational story. Yet in today's technological and social media centred world we need to be careful about the news of the day.

There is a story about a couple (male-female) who were to seeking to conceive a child through in vitro-fertilization and through the process of DNA testing that they were fraternal twins. At the fertility lab it was noticed that their DNA was abnormally similar. Doctors asked whether the couple knew that they were related and their response was laughter. This story was carried by the Mississippi Herald and the Denver Inquirer. But one should note that both of these 'news' sources are fake newspaper websites set up for no other purpose than to spread fictitious stories or what is known as fake news.

But the news that was shared on the evening of that first day of the week was real news. The disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews and Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." He could have easily stated, "Don't be afraid. It's really me and yes I am alive just like Mary told you this morning. I am alive." But he said, "Peace be with you." You can calm down now- I am here and I bring you peace. Peace from God the Father and I give it to you."

Imagine the disciples and the expression on their faces. It's really Jesus here with us. And then of course all the questions they might have asked. How did you get in here? What did you experience? Can you explain death and life? But Jesus did not answer these questions, he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He breathed on them, and with this action, he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven, if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." They heard Jesus' words; they received the Spirit shared by Jesus and they were filled with joy.

We don't know how long Jesus stayed with them or what they talked about. All we do know is that Thomas one of the disciples was not present when Jesus stood amongst them. So when Thomas returned to the room where the disciples had been in hiding, they told him, "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas was ahead of his time—he thought the disciples were giving him 'fake news' or even just their wishful thoughts about Jesus. He wanted proof, he did not take them at their word just as he did not believe Mary's words from the morning. He was having a really tough time believing anybody and their story. Unfortunately for Thomas, he is now is remembered for his doubting and questioning capabilities of seeing Jesus the one who was crucified and buried alive again! He declares to the disciples, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." He just did not believe that Jesus was alive nor did he believe the statements of joy that the other disciples had shared.

Thomas and the rest of the disciples waited for a week. We don't know what Jesus or they did during that week which went by, but when they were in the house again and the door was locked will all of them present, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he turned towards Thomas and said, "Put your finger here- see my hands; Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas believed in Jesus and that he was truly alive again.

Jesus then spoke to him. You have seen me and because of this, you have believed. But those who have not seen me, yet believe are truly blessed. Are you blessed by Jesus because you believe in the Resurrected Christ? Are you blessed because you believe that Jesus died and rose again? Do you believe?

Christ's resurrection is attested by more than 500 eyewitnesses, whose experience, simplicity and uprightness of life could not have invented such a fable, and at that time it would have been difficult to deceive others and foremost had nothing to gain by passing on this story and everything to lose by sharing this story. Those who shared the story of Jesus' resurrection exhibited their conviction of what they believed. The synagogue and its leaders had done everything to prevent deception by hiring a guard to watch the tomb. Yet the official guard could not articulate what had occurred either. All they did do was ask the disciples, not to speak any more in the name of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to our faith but through this story God's justice is shown as Jesus is lifted up even though he had humbled himself to death (Phil 2:8-9) The resurrection of Jesus complete the mystery of God's plan for our salvation and redemption. With Jesus' death we are freed from sin, but because of his resurrection, we are to be reconciled with God. Jesus' resurrection is important to our understanding of faith because thousands and millions of people, Jews and Gentiles alive, believed the stories and testimonies of those who had followed Jesus. In spite of the all the disadvantages the church requires for its mere existence, the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Without Christ rising from death, the church would not exist. But do you believe in Christ Jesus?

Peter states that we "have been given new birth into a living hope because Jesus rose from death. What we shall inherit can never die, spoil or fade because it is kept in heaven for us. Peter continues by stating that your faith is what proves you genuine and real. For it is because of your faith that you may praise God and give glory and honour to Jesus. Even though you have not seen him you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy because you are receiving salvation. All this because Jesus breathed on the disciples and shared with them, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is with us, we just need to breathe and receive God's love. Peter tells us that to believe is to acknowledge Jesus' resurrection now so that we will have salvation that is a place of eternal rest after we complete this life on earth. This is why Jesus came—to give us an

abundant life on earth, yes, but also the hope and promise of our eternal life with him in heaven. And with this hope we need not have fear of what is to come, nor doubt whether Jesus really rose from death. We need only to praise God for raising to life our Saviour Jesus and to honour and give him the glory!

Thomas was expected to believe the stories of the disciples about seeing Jesus. But in many ways he was asked to lead the way for generations of the faithful to follow, who like us, would need to believe without physical proof. To have faith is to believe in Jesus as teacher, healer, friend and Saviour; it is to believe that he died and rose to new life for our sakes. Seeing and observing and listening to the stories of Jesus death enables us to fully grasp His message of peace. Let us rejoice together for Christ is alive and His Spirit is with us now. Thanks be to God.