

Seeing the Risen Jesus

This being the only non-festival Sunday in the church year that has the same readings for every year of the three-year lectionary cycle, it gets hard to try to find a fresh angle from which to view this Gospel text. If we focus solely on Thomas and his doubts, we can draw parallels to our own lives and see where those edges of doubt take us. Even if we were to compare the doubt expressed by Thomas to the doubt Adam and Eve had in the story of the Fall, we see what is important is the response to doubt, that doubt itself is actually neither good nor bad. It is the response that we have that is important. Does it draw us closer to God or does it drive us further from God? I'm fairly certain that all of us would have heard sermons about the response to doubt and the importance of doubt to the growth of our faith in God. While Easter season is the time to see the different responses to the risen Jesus, we still need to remember that God is behind it all and wants us to draw closer to God.

At the end of today's Gospel reading, the author tells us that the reason for including the stories that they did in this Gospel account is so that we may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. John poetically opens this Gospel account in such a way as to evoke the images of the creation story found in the Book of Genesis. It is through the story that John tells that we come to see that God is making a new creation through Jesus. We see that the apostles are given 'life' when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on them, just as Adam and Eve were given life when God breathed on them.

Seeing the scars on Jesus from His crucifixion reminds us that God has not replaced the old creation with the new creation, but has perfected the old through Jesus' death and resurrection. That is, through Jesus our relationship with God is

restored and made whole again. It is through this renewed relationship through Jesus that we are given the promise of eternal life. All we need to do is to believe.

Another way to translate the Greek verb that we hear as 'believe' is to 'trust.' When we use trust instead of believe in these last verses, they take on a different tone to them. To illustrate: There is a story of a high-wire walker who was going to walk a wire over Niagara Falls. A slip and fall off the wire would mean a certain plunge to one's death on the rocks at the bottom of the Falls. As he was preparing to begin his walk, a young boy shouted out to him, "I believe that you can do it!" He then asked the boy if he trusted him. The boy replied that he believed the man could do it. After a couple of more exchanges of believing and trusting between the boy and the high-wire walker, the man said that if the boy trusted him that he could cross the falls, then the boy should climb on his back and he would carry him across on the wire. When we trust in someone or something, then we will be willing to back it up with action. Simply by believing, does not necessarily spur us to action. Trust could be said to be an emotional response while belief or faith could be said to be an intellectual response. Trust implicitly has a relationship aspect to it; there is more of a two-way street aspect where both parties will be doing something. By just saying, "I believe" or "I have faith in whatever" implies that we benefit from the actions of to object of faith with little or no involvement on our part.

So, if we use this concept of trust in the last verses of this Gospel reading, there is a change in perspective of the purpose of John's writing his account. Instead of just believing in Jesus, John wants us to be able to trust in Jesus, to go with Jesus where He goes. To trust that Jesus is who He claims to be and who others claim Him to be, namely the Son of God, the Messiah. But what does it mean to trust in someone who has not been seen? It doesn't seem that far-fetched,

since people are asking us to trust them all the time in many different ways. From our leaders to advertisers, others are continually asking us to 'trust them' in what they are telling us, sometimes contrary to what we have observed.

But that still leaves us with how do we know whom to trust? We can either be really gullible and trust whatever anyone tells us, because 'nobody would lie to us on purpose' or be so skeptical as to not believe anything except that which we can see for ourselves. One thing to help us is to know who is telling us to trust them. Do they have a penchant for stretching the truth, turning facts around so as to make themselves look better or to gain an advantage over others? Is what they are wanting you to trust them about for their benefit or for yours? Applying this criterion to Jesus, we see that He never told anything or did anything for His own advantage, it was always to help others and to point to God's glory.

John has carefully crafted his Gospel account to take us from being skeptical about Jesus, from concluding too soon who Jesus cannot be, to this point where we can trust who Jesus is. By showing us people such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man who was born blind and even Peter and the disciples and now Thomas, John reassures us that faith in Jesus is a process, a journey where there are forces that try to disrupt our journey with Jesus to God, forces that try to tell us that Jesus is not the one to be trusted. John also shows us that Jesus' response is a response borne out of love and compassion to each of these different expressions of doubt about Jesus. This response by Jesus meets us where we are, in the midst of our questions, in the midst of trying to reconcile the world as we see it with the world as God sees it and walks along with us, taking us to where we need to go.

Trust is a very fragile thing. It takes work to establish and can take a long time, yet it can be broken in an instant and may never be fully restored. When we trust in created things such as other people or concepts or anything else created, that trust is even more fragile. However, when we trust in the Creator, the Biblical record shows that we can trust in God and that God is true to God's word. John uses all those signs of what Jesus did in his Gospel account and tells us that we can get on Jesus's back and cross that high wire over to the other side of eternal life. Our calling, so to speak, is then how to use that trust, not for what we want, but to show others that they can trust in the same promises we do and that it does make a difference on this side.

May our trust in Jesus always remain steadfast and may we reflect that trust to others.

YouTube Links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/47DHM2hke3M>

Service: <https://youtu.be/tYZ5G4h3AEs>