

John 20:1 – 29
Second Sunday of Easter (B)
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

“Seeing, Hearing, Or Touching Jesus”
April 8, 2018
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Before the sermon:

I am honored to be here this morning.
Matt knows that my two favorite Sundays of the year are
the first Sunday after Christmas and the first Sunday after Easter.
I think of the people who worship on those Sundays as “Valley Forge” Christians,
Those believers you can count on no matter what!

Please excuse me if I move around a bit this morning.
I was a Chaplain at a U.S. Penitentiary for almost 20 years,
So I feel more comfortable being a moving target.

It is marvelous that God created us so diverse.
Each of us experiences the world in a different way,
With a different amalgam of thinking patterns, feelings, experiences.
Obviously, our Creator knows we will experience faith in differing ways,
Specifically, we will come to know the Resurrection of Jesus, the cornerstone of faith,
In differing ways.

The beloved disciple and Peter get the news from Mary Magdalene that Jesus’ tomb was opened.
They run.
The beloved disciple runs faster. He gets to the door of the tomb first, and peered in.
Peter is slower but bolder. He enters the tomb. He notes the location of all the burial linens.

Then the beloved disciple enters. He sees the same scene. He believes.
What does he believe? It is not stated or completely clear.
The only hint is the statement: “for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
That he must rise from the dead.”
The implication is, while this beloved disciple may not understand what has happened,
in his heart, he knows, Jesus’s body has not been stolen or resuscitated,
But transformed.

One might call the Beloved Disciples reaction “Simple Faith”.
I have met Christians who just believe.
Some cannot remember a time when they did not believe.
This “simple faith” may be a gift of God.
What it is not is “simplistic”. People with powerful intellects may have a “Simple Faith.”

Christians who simply believe are usually very active in living out that faith in concrete ways.

If you have a simple, straight-forward faith. If you believe Jesus is the Son of God,
who died for your sins and was raised from the dead,
the first-fruits of all who will follow Him into eternal life,
then rejoice.

Yet, this faith is not the only resurrection faith, it may not even be the most common.

Let us return to Mary Magdalene. She is hurting. She does not know what to do.
Jesus was her whole world, and he is dead.
So she hangs by his tomb.

She was the first one at the tomb, when it was zero dark thirty.
She sees the stone removed from the tomb entrance
And runs to tell Peter and the other disciples.

She returns to the tomb. Peter and the beloved disciple have left. She remains, weeping.
She peers into the tomb, and sees two angels, and speaks with them.

Mary then turns and sees the resurrected Jesus himself, but does not recognize him,
Her grief is so intense. Her belief that he is dead forever is so certain.

Mary's eyes fail her.
She begs for her Lord's body to be returned and she, herself, alone, will carry his it.

Jesus utters her name, "Mary". Mary hears the voice of the Good Shepherd,
The Good Shepherd who knows each of his sheep by name.
The Good Shepherd whose voice each sheep knows and adores.

Mary hears her name uttered by the one voice she loves the most, and her life is transformed.
Grief is whisked away forever. She is whole again

Jesus stresses to Mary that life will not go backwards,
to the way it was before, but forward to new life.
He gives her an important mission, to spread the Good News:
"I am going to my Father and your Father,
To my God and your God."

Mary moves with joy. "I have seen the Lord!"

Mary was suffering. Her faith was born out of suffering.

To have "Suffering Faith" is to understand what it means to love someone so much that it is like
Your heart beats outside your body.

Have you known a child, a grandchild, a spouse, a friend, a parent
Whose love and life gives meaning and purpose to your own?
When this special person is hurting from illness or disease, from mental strife or depression,
From life's disorientation.
You suffer. Truly, the loved one's needs are greater and more important than your own.

When we suffer, our eyes often fail us. We are not able to see what good may be in front of us.
We are in the dark night of the soul.

But hearing is the last of the senses to leave us.
So Jesus speaks our name, over and over. "Mary" "Matt" "Your Name"
When we eventually hear that voice and call upon the Lord our God, all things are made new.
We do not get to return to the past. To the way things were.
We do get a new future, with a new mission, and an eternal hope.

Some have Simple Faith. Many have Suffering Faith. But there is more.

Jesus meets with his closest disciples on that first Easter Sunday.

Jesus offers them Peace.

Jesus shows them that it is really him, scars and all.

Jesus gives them a mission and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. Wonderful.

Even more wonderful, to me, is that Thomas missed this initial meeting.

The word of his ten friends that "We have seen the Lord!" did not carry enough weight.

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

For Thomas, if he cannot touch it, he cannot believe it. Thomas has "Questioning Faith".

Thomas want, needs, empirical proof.

The Good News is, Jesus is fine with Questioning Faith.

On this Sunday, the Second Sunday of Easter, all those years ago,

Jesus entered a locked room and addressed Thomas directly:

Go ahead, Thomas,

"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.

Do not doubt, but believe."

The honest questioner gets his or her questions answered.

Please note: when Questioner has worked through his questions, and "owns" her faith,

This person often gives the deepest and most powerful testimony, like Thomas did:

"My Lord and My God!"

I thought I went to seminary to be a Presbyterian pastor,

But really, I went so I could be my son's father.

My son, Nathan, is a questioner.

At 8 years old he would ask me about the nature of the Trinity on the way to soccer practice.

I never could answer all his questions, but I could assure him that

"Doubt is the cutting edge of faith!"

The night before his confirmation, at age 13, Nathan read C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, again.

He reported in the morning that he could be confirmed in good conscience.

Nathan is asking his questions at Union Presbyterian Seminary now.

I am sure that there are many in this congregation who have questions for Jesus.

Ask him! Search and you will find. Knock and the door will, eventually, be opened.

In the 20th chapter of John's Gospel we are witnesses to:

The simple faith of the Beloved Disciple,

The suffering faith of Mary Magdalene, and

The questioning faith of Thomas the Twin

Clearly, God wants to meet us where we are.

We are not all of the same disposition, we rely on different senses to understand the world.

So the meaning and power of the Resurrection will reach us in different ways.

We see. We hear. We touch.

By God's grace, we will all accept and proclaim:

Jesus: "My Lord and my God!"

Amen and Amen.