

John 20:19-31

Some things are very difficult to **believe**, but not for **all** people. A young **child** will believe just about **anything** he is told. An **evolutionist** has no trouble at all believing that the world and everything in it came about merely by **chance**. On the other hand, a **Christian** has no trouble believing that God **created** the world out of **nothing** in six normal days. **What Does It Take To Believe?** For different people it takes different things. Some need only to be **taught**, others need to be **eyewitnesses**, and still others need to have their **scientific** minds satisfied in one way or another. When we are talking about the **faith** which **saves**, namely trusting that only Jesus Christ can deliver us from the bondage of hell and Satan, rest assured that the Holy Spirit makes use of **all** these methods in bringing people to faith through the **Word** and **Sacraments**. In our text today, St. John gives us two examples of **What It Takes To Believe**. He shows us that **seeing** is believing, and he also shows us that **hearing** is believing.

Our text today actually spans an **eight day** time period. At the **beginning** of our text, the disciples had gathered together on that **first day** of the week - Easter Sunday evening. But by the time we reach the **end** of the text, that **first day** of the week had rolled around **again**. You see **one** of the disciples - **Thomas** - had **missed** Easter the first time around. But Jesus couldn't allow that to continue. Jesus loved Thomas so much, that He wanted to be sure that he didn't miss out on Easter **forever!**

The phrase "*the first day of the week*" is placed **first** in the sentence, in order to **emphasize** it. It's a phrase we run into quite often in the Bible. **One** of those places is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. There he wrote, "*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.*" Do you know **why** that phrase is used in connection with **giving**? It's because the **first day** of every week should remind us of **Easter** - of that **first day** of the week when Christ rose **victorious** from the grave. And so, when we bring our gifts to Jesus, God would have us remember the gift which **Jesus** gave to **us** - the gift of **eternal life** - a gift which He earned through His resurrection from the dead, on the **first day** of the week.

On that day, the disciples had gathered together. Although we don't know **where** it was, perhaps it was in the home of **Mary**, the mother of St. Mark. Since the disciples had gathered there in the **past**, and since they **continued** to do so in the **future**, it would seem to be a **logical** choice. At any rate, **wherever** they were,

the disciples were not **alone** - **others** were assembled **with** them, including the two people with whom Jesus had talked on the road to **Emmaus**. It would appear that the disciples had met for several reasons - the **first** of which was to compare **notes**. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb - Jesus Himself had appeared to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, and also to a group of women. What did all these events **mean**, and what should they **do** about them?

The disciples had probably assembled for **strength** too. Notice that the meeting took place behind **locked doors** because they were afraid of the Jews. So, I would assume that **prayer** was **also** a part of their meeting - prayer for **deliverance** from persecution, or for the strength to **bear** whatever might happen to them. This was the **group** to whom Jesus appeared in our text. The locked doors were **no problem** for Him. He was the same Jesus who had walked on water, and who had now risen from the dead. Since **death** and the **grave** couldn't hinder Him, why should a simple **locked door** cause any difficulty? Without warning, Jesus suddenly stood there in their midst - and listen to His **message**, "*Peace be with you!*" Luke tells us that the disciples were both **startled** and **frightened**. They thought they were seeing a **ghost**. But John goes on to tell us, "*After He said this, He showed them His hands and side.*"

The marks of His cruel death still remained in His body, as a testimony to the **reality** of His death. These were the **battle scars** which Christ had secured in His fight against the old evil foe. They were **proof** - not only that He had **fought** the battle - but the fact that He was **alive** again to **show** those scars was proof that Jesus had won the **victory**. This was the **answer** to the disciples' prayers. They had been **afraid** and **confused** and **uncertain**. They didn't know where to **go** or what to **do**. But then **Jesus** came to them **bodily**, bringing them inner **peace**, removing their **doubts** concerning His resurrection, as well as their doubts about what to do **next**. It was **obvious!** They would have to go and tell **everyone** that Jesus was **alive** - that He had **risen** from the dead, just as He had **said** He would.

How **could** they do it? Were they **worthy** to do it after the way they had **doubted** Christ's word? Jesus set aside all their **fears** by telling them, "*As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you,*" and in order to **support** them on their mission, He **also** gave them His Holy **Spirit**. Obviously their commission was not equal to **Christ's** commission in its **scope** or **power**, but the disciples would still be doing the same **kind** of work as their Lord. They would be witnesses to the **truth**, and they would be winning **souls** for eternal life in **heaven**.

Because the disciples had seen the Lord **alive** again, they **believed**. For them, **seeing** was believing. But on Easter Sunday, **Thomas** had not been **present** to see the Lord. No doubt when he finally **returned** the others said, “*Guess what, Thomas. The **Lord** was here! We **saw** Him with our own eyes, and He **talked** with us. It’s really **true**, Thomas. The Lord has **risen** from the dead! We wish you had been here **too**. He made us feel so much **better** again.*” Certainly with that kind of testimony, we would think that Thomas would **also** have believed and rejoiced - but he **didn’t**. It was the word of **ten** of Christ’s chosen disciples against the doubts of **one**, but Thomas **also** had to **see** before he would believe. Thomas hadn’t **seen** the message, because for one reason or another, he had **missed Easter**.

How about **you**? Did you **miss Easter** last week? Although our attendance was much better than it is on a typical Sunday, **many** of our members still were **not** here. Hopefully, some who missed Easter **here** still experienced its **joy** and **reassurance** at one of our **sister** congregations as they were visiting friends or relatives in other locations. Yet, even if you missed Easter **entirely** - Jesus loves you **so much**, that He doesn’t want you to miss it **forever** - so **today**, He’s **back** again!

Just as it was in our text, it was a whole **week** before the Lord **returned**. Imagine what Thomas must have gone through during that week. The others were so **certain** - they were so **happy** - could it be **true**? Perhaps Thomas was almost persuaded - but then **one** day became **two**, and **three**, and then **four** - and the Lord wasn’t showing up. It had to be a **hoax**. And what about the **other** disciples? They had **started out** with great certainty, but by the **end** of the week, they were back behind **locked doors** again. Their boldness had **disappeared**, and their **fears** had returned. Maybe it had all been **too good** to be **true**.

But just when it all began to seem **hopeless** again, the Lord **returned**. His message of **peace** was still the same - nothing had changed, except that they had to realize Jesus wouldn’t be talking with them and teaching them **every day** as He had in the **past**. They would have to depend on the **Holy Spirit** whom He had given to them for their **strength**. I think it’s important that Jesus turned His full attention on this **second** visit, to **Thomas**. Compare the **demands** which **Thomas** had made to the **commands** which **Jesus** brought. Thomas had said, “*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.*” One week later Jesus walked up to Thomas and said, “*Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and*

*put it into My side. Stop **doubting**, and **believe**.*” Jesus answered his every demand, point for point. Thomas must have been extremely **ashamed** of the way he had acted, but the Lord had **forgiven** him. Jesus knows that for **some** people, **seeing** is believing.

But Jesus **also** said, *“Blessed are those who have **not seen**, and yet have **believed**.”* These words reach out in **two** directions. First, they apply to the **Old Testament** believers who were never **privileged** to see the Messiah in the flesh, but who nevertheless, faithfully kept on **waiting** for His arrival. They had only **heard** the promises - yet for **them**, **hearing** was believing. But those same words also reach out to **us**. Some of **us** were perhaps a week **late** in learning about the **joy** of Christ’s resurrection - and there are still many **unbelievers** in this world, even in our own **community**, who are far **beyond** a week late. Yet, **we** don’t have the opportunities which **Thomas** had. We are **unable** to see the nail prints in our Savior’s hands on this side of Judgment Day. But then again, we don’t **need** to see them. We have the **words** of God Himself, **inspired** through eyewitnesses like St. John. For us, **hearing** is believing. And it doesn’t even **matter** how **late** we are in getting the message. What matters is that we **hear** it, and **believe** it. For **us**, **hearing** is believing.

After Easter, Jesus’ disciples had evidence to **spare** - proof in **abundance** that Jesus was alive and well. They were so completely convinced that they repeatedly risked their own **lives** in order to tell **others** about Jesus Christ, the **living Savior** from sin. And in **addition**, they **wrote** - not for their **own** profit, but rather for **ours** as John said, *“These are written that **you** might believe, and that by **believing**, you may have **life** in His name.”* Because they **told** us about these events, we have **What It Takes To Believe**.

Dear friends, Easter Sunday has **passed** once again, and it’s time for the Church to get **on** with its mission. Since we have **What It Takes To Believe**, we need to continue to **nurture** our faith by faithfully **hearing** God’s Word, and frequently **receiving** the Lord’s Supper. As we **do** that, we too will be filled with the boldness and confidence which Jesus’ disciples experienced - and like them, we will **share** our faith with those who still have **questions** or **doubts**. You have been privileged to **hear** the Word of God - now **believe** it, and **share** it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.