

The title for today's message is: **Believing Is Seeing**

Jesus said: **"Peace be with you."**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I would like to ask you to think about this question. "If Jesus Christ would appear, what would your reaction be?"

Think about it for a while. Would you panic? Would you run? Would you hid in fear? Would you doubt? Would you ask for proof?

Or, would you cry out in love, "My Lord and My God?" "Would you disbelieve because you weren't there when He appeared?"

In our gospel lesson this morning, we have two different reactions to the appearance of Jesus to the disciples just three days after He died.

First, let's get a feel for the situation. The disciples were crowded into the place called the upper room.

And it was there they heard that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb, that the women had been told that Jesus had risen.

But the disciples didn't believe, they still had their doubts. Now, John and Peter went to the tomb and checked it out for themselves.

There Peter saw the tomb empty, but he couldn't put it all together. John too saw, but unlike peter he believed.

So, I would imagine that he went back and spent the rest of the day trying to convince the rest of the disciples what he saw.

The empty tomb, the folded linen clothes, the head piece sitting by itself, all of which is a sign that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

Can you imagine the conversation that took place during that day? It's clear that the disciples were too afraid of the Jews and the Romans, to go out and look for Jesus.

So what did they do? They sat in the upper room sulking, praying, arguing, pondering, and recalling the words of Jesus.

It was John leading the conversation and Peter was boldly trying to make sense of it.

And the women, especially Mary, was trying to convince the rest, of her conviction that Jesus had risen.

Because she had traveled the long road of doubt and despair and had come to the conclusion, the realization, the belief, that Jesus had indeed risen.

Here they were all talking, praying, arguing, and then in an twinkle of an eye, in an instance, and in a flash, Jesus stands in the middle of them.

Now when this all happened, they might have said, "Is it really you Lord?"
"Have you really risen from the dead?"

I say this because our text says: He shows them his hands that bore the marks of nails and his side where the spear was thrust into Him.

And then our text says, "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." They believed it was him. And they celebrated with great excitement.

You can almost see them dancing around, hugging each other, tears flowing from their eyes, as they realized that John and Mary was right, He has risen.

That Jesus was telling us the truth when he said that: after 3 days he would rise again."

The joy, the excitement, the wonder, the thrill of it all. Here they were wondering and hoping, but they doubted, yes, they had their doubts.

They were afraid of being disappointed if Jesus had not risen. But when they saw him standing before them a burden of despair had been lifted from their hearts and souls.

It was the sorrow of the previous Friday that had turned into excitement, joy and fulfillment of the resurrection promise.

Then according to John's text, Jesus gives the disciples the power of the Holy Spirit, but this isn't the central point of today's text. No!

The central point of today's text is our Lord's appearance. Now Jesus leaves as quick and quietly as he came, and before the return of Thomas.

As our text says: Thomas had not been with them in the upper room, that he was off alone, because he was full of grief, despair, and loneliness.

So much so that he couldn't stand to be with the others just yet. He was like one of the daughters in the following story.

A Christian mother died, and her two daughters discussed whether they should attend church the next day since it was Sunday.

One daughter said, she thought people might think it strange that they would appear in public so soon after their mother's death.

Besides she said, I don't want people coming up to me trying to talk and I wouldn't know what to say.

She continued; I would rather stay home alone with my grief, and my sorrow. But the other daughter said she was going to church.

She said she was going because she needed the support, the encouragement, and the comfort of her Christian friends.

So she went to church. Now, Thomas was like the first daughter. He couldn't see any value in staying with his Christian friends as they grieved the death of Jesus.

Instead, Thomas went off by himself, probably because He wanted to be alone and because of this, he missed seeing Jesus.

Now were told that Thomas was indeed present when Jesus appeared the second time to the disciples.

But before the Lord appears, Thomas finds the disciples full of cheer and joy. Not crying, mourning and sad.

And when Thomas arrives the others there wait no time to tell him: "Thomas, we have seen the Lord." He has risen from the dead.

Can you imagine what his reaction was? For him, Jesus, his friend, his master, his teacher, the one whom he had placed his entire trust, faith and belief in, is dead.

His despair was great. And now he decides to return to his friends and mourn with them, and they tell him they have seen the Lord.

He must have thought they were all mad in their grief. So, he dismissed what they were saying.

Instead he said: I'll believe that when I see him myself, when I stick my finger into the holes in his hand, and thrust my hand into his side, then I'll believe and not before.

Can you sense his utter despair, and his hopeless anger. And then he had to endure a week of waiting, and wondering if Jesus will return again.

And once again, just like the last time, Jesus reappears and shows him His hands, feet and his side where the spear had penetrated.

The only thing Thomas could say was: "My Lord, and my God!" Yes, Thomas believes.

But Jesus, once again teaching His disciples says to Thomas: Have you believed because you have seen me?"

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." My friends, this is the same message to us here today.

That's right, we too are to believe without seeing. Now, somehow I think Thomas has taken a bum rap here, we call him "Doubting Thomas".

Thomas was probably angry, and didn't know how to control nor express his grief, yet I would think he didn't ask for anything more than Jesus showed the other disciples a week earlier.

But for some reason it seems he wouldn't or couldn't believe the testimony of the others.

I wonder if most of us would have had the same reaction as Thomas, if we weren't there when Jesus appeared to the disciples. Maybe, maybe not,

Jesus does tell us that we don't need signs, or wonders, but only the testimony, the witness of others.

The witness of the church, the Sacraments and the promises of his words as recorded in the Bible, that's truly all our faith needs.

Peter says in his first letter, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were no people, but now you are God's people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

So, what would your reaction be to the risen lord appearing to a group of people? It would be, "Yes, we have seen the Lord," "My Lord and My God."

And the power of the resurrection is alive in each of us to bear his fruit. My friends, God chose us.

He called us, he has forgiven us, he has cleansed us, He has made us his people, and his children.

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.