

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

Sermon for Easter 2A - The text: John 20:24-29 (ESV)

16/4/2023

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Many people say: 'seeing is believing'. In fact, they don't just say it, they live it. Perhaps you do too. This means if someone told you something remarkable, you'd want to see it for yourself.

Perhaps this means we reckon the sense of sight (and perhaps also the sense of touch) is the sense by which we judge truth. If we see it, or can touch it, we'll believe it.

But this may also mean we won't always believe what we hear (unless we can confirm by the senses of sight and touch that what we've heard is actually true).

But what if seeing is *not* believing? Or to put it another way: we often want to see things because we *don't* believe them.

For example, imagine you're Thomas. For some reason you weren't with the apostles on that night when Jesus came. You meet up with them later and they joyfully tell you of their experience of seeing the risen Lord Jesus among them. But you weren't there! You didn't see what they saw. So instead of believing the words of the apostles through your ears, you say you're not going to believe unless you see him for yourself. You don't believe your ears and want your eyes to confirm this truth.

In fact, you're not going to believe your ears and eyes unless you put your fingers on the nail marks on Jesus' hands and thrust your hand into his speared side. Until you see and touch this news you've heard, you're not going to believe. After all, don't people say: 'seeing is believing'!

But that's the twist. You want to see because you don't believe.

I wonder if you can relate to Thomas. Of the remaining apostles, he was the only one not there. But you weren't there either. You and I haven't had the chance to witness our risen Lord for ourselves and use our senses of sight and touch to confirm the good news of his resurrection. None of us were in that locked room and saw the risen Jesus standing among us.

This is why we have this story in St John's gospel account, because we weren't there. This true story was written down for all who, like Thomas, weren't in that room. In some ways, Thomas was fortunate in so far as Jesus came to him so he could confirm this truth of the resurrection eight days later, but what about us?

We still haven't been given the opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh and place our fingers into his wounds, and so we continue to struggle with our doubts and fears. No matter what we hear in God's Word, we still demand to see or experience certain things *before* we believe.

In this way, you and I are Thomas in this story. We're Thomas whenever we say or think such things like:

"Unless God answers my prayers the way I want him to, then I won't believe."

"Unless I get something special out of worship today, then I don't think this church is any good for me."

"Unless I feel something when I'm baptised, confirmed, or when I receive the Lord's Supper, then I'll question its validity."

"Unless I get what I want or expect, and can confirm it with my own senses of sight and sound and touch and taste and even with my emotions, then I won't believe."

But these types of questions or statements means we only want to meet God on our own terms. It shows we're struggling to believe. It shows we're like Thomas. So, while we may believe, we ask God to help our unbelief!

The strange thing about faith is it never stops in one place. While we'd like to think our faith will always increase and get better during our life; it doesn't. It often wavers between faith and doubt; trust and suspicion. Some people expect that once you're baptised, once you're confirmed, once you've made a decision for Christ, or once you've received faith, then everything's ok from that time on. But this isn't true. At times we'll be strong in our faith, but there will be times of doubt.

For this reason we can also learn a lot from Thomas.

When he doubted or struggled to believe, he didn't dismiss or ignore the fellowship with his fellow disciples. He didn't stay away, but came back into their little congregation to hear, see, and touch.

We're encouraged to do the same.

We're encouraged to *hear* the Word of God read and explained. We use our sense of hearing so we may listen for God speaking to us through the bible readings and the sermon.

We're also encouraged to attend the Lord's Supper where we use our senses of *touch* and *taste* as we receive our risen Lord's body and blood on our fingers, on our lips, and on our tongue. But, while our senses of sight and touch and taste will tell us 'this is simply bread and wine', the Holy Spirit will ask our sense of hearing to be the more powerful sense so we may believe what we hear: That this is Jesus' body and blood, given and shed for you and me.

The fact is, a faith which doesn't constantly look to our Lord Jesus Christ, and listen to him, will slowly die. A faith which refuses to come into his presence and receive his spiritual benefits will shrivel up. A faith which makes demands for proof of God's love outside of the written Word, the cross of Christ, and his holy Sacraments, is in danger of leading to despair.

This means if we want to see and experience Jesus on our own terms, or if we want to keep away from the place where his people meet, then we're becoming an unbeliever. Then, just like Jesus said to Thomas, he says to you and me, 'Stop doubting and believe', or literally, 'Stop becoming an unbeliever and become a believer'.

This is why Thomas, in his time of doubt, went to the place where Jesus promised to be – with his people.

In our own times of doubt we need to do the same, after all, we know Jesus promises to be wherever his people gather in his name. We know his Holy Spirit is present as we hear the Word of God read and proclaimed. We know Jesus promises to wash, adopt, forgive, and give new life to those who are baptised. We know Jesus promises that his true body and blood is present in his holy Supper.

Seeing isn't always believing, because the demand to see is a sign of unbelief. On the other hand, believing is seeing. Faith instead gives us a greater sight so we may believe what we hear, despite what we see and don't see.

By believing what we hear, we see Jesus is our Lord and our God. We stand beside Thomas and see Jesus is more than just a man. By faith, we see Jesus is also the Son of God who came to suffer, die, and rise again for us so that, by believing, we may have life in his name.

By believing what we hear, we can see God truly comes to us, hidden in times of simple worship to grant forgiveness, peace, and hope. He comes to challenge our unbelief and comfort us through his Spirit-filled words. He comes to wash us and claim us as his own people who will live with him forever. He comes and wraps his body and blood in humble bread and wine and offers them for us to eat and drink. He comes, hidden in the people joined to him through faith to love and care for us. He comes, sometimes despite our best efforts to lock him out.

Yes, Thomas was blessed to see his Lord and Saviour in the flesh and use his senses of sight and touch. On the other hand, blessed are those who haven't seen, yet still believe because they trust their sense of hearing.

You and I are blessed because we believe what we've heard. Jesus is our Lord and God even though we haven't seen him with our own eyes or touched him with our own fingers. And through faith in Jesus' word our bodies will also be resurrected and we will see Jesus in heavenly glory forever. Amen.