



## St John Lutheran Church

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John 20:19-31

"Just Wait. You'll See"

**So ... How hard** should we be on Thomas? **Apparently, pretty hard:** He's been called "doubting Thomas" for a long time now.

**Along with the** other ten disciples, Thomas has heard the angel's news from the women that Jesus is risen from the dead; **of course**, none of them believe it at first. **That night, however**, Jesus appears to the disciples. **They're in a** locked room so that nobody can get in; **and** suddenly, Jesus is there in their midst. **He declares peace** to them and shows them His hands and His side. **He breathes upon** them and gives them the Holy Spirit, and declares that they will preach "**His Word to forgive and retain sins.**" **The disciples know** that Jesus is risen-body and all. **They've been in** His presence. **They've seen Him** and heard Him. **Unfortunately for Thomas**, he isn't there.

**When the others** tell him what has happened, Thomas is still the skeptic. "**Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.**" **The problem with** Thomas is that he's a pragmatic man: **Seeing is believing.**

**After eight days**, Jesus returns to the disciples, and this time Thomas is with them. **Jesus again declares** that He comes in peace, and then speaks directly to Thomas: "**Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it in My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.**" **That's enough for** Thomas: **He's seen the** risen Savior. **Along with that**, the Savior has spoken His Word to Thomas and told him to believe. Thomas declares, "**My Lord and My God!**"

**Jesus is not** quite done with Thomas yet, and a gentle rebuke follows: "**Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**"

**It's easy to** pile on Thomas, the doubter: **He wouldn't believe** until he saw, and the Lord gave Him the luxury of seeing. **We don't get** that luxury, but that's okay: **God's Word is** what gives faith. "**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,**" says St. Paul (Ro. 10:17). **We walk by** faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). **Thomas has had** the Word: **Before** the crucifixion, Jesus declared that He would die and rise. **After the resurrection**, the women and the disciples declared to him God's Word that Jesus is risen. **Thomas had the** Word of God: **He had as** much to go on as you and I have. **Maybe that's why** we frown on Thomas quite a bit: **It's not fair. When he** doubted, he got to see Jesus. **All we have** to go on is the Word.

**So we frown** at Thomas and his motto, "**I'll believe it when I see it.**" **But is that** motto really so bad? **Why do** we live saying, "**Seeing is believing?**" **The answer is** simple: **People are sinful. Many of them** are intentionally deceptive and dishonest. **Even those with** good intentions will still fail to live up to their promises. **This is not** a world of handshake deals where you take people at their word, because people don't live up to their word. **You have to** hold them accountable so that they don't cheat you. **That's why you** get the contract and make sure that all of your rights are protected by law.

**Simply put, if people were honest and always kept their commitments, we wouldn't have to demand proof first. We could take them at their word. But people are sinful, so we doubt their word. Seeing is believing. So maybe we've been a bit hard on Thomas for acting so naturally.**

**On the other hand, if we want to go light on Thomas, maybe we aren't hard enough on ourselves. And this is where we come back to Thomas and his sin of doubt. "I'll believe it when I see it" makes sense when it comes to people. But when Thomas doubts, he's not questioning the honesty of another sinful human being like himself. He's questioning the honesty of God.**

**This is the real sin at work here. To demand proof of God's promises up front is to doubt God's honesty. It's to say that the Lord is dishonest or untrustworthy or that sometimes He fails to come through. To doubt God's Word is to question the integrity of God. To question the integrity of God is to question His holiness, His righteousness and His perfection.**

**But the integrity of God is not at issue, because He always speaks the truth and always keeps His promises. No, let God be true and every man a liar (Ro. 3:4): The problem lies with those who say, "I believe" and recite the Creed, and then demand signs in a demonstration that they don't believe it. If we demand proof from God, we are treating Jesus like any other man.**

**Dear Christian, rejoice in this: God's Word is sure. He keeps His promises. You don't need any further proof, because there is nothing untrustworthy about the Lord who has redeemed you.**

**But be warned: Sinners, you and me included, always want to see before we believe. There is demand today that God would prove His existence and love by signs and miracles and wonders: "If He makes the blind see or the deaf hear or the lame leap today, then I will believe," say some. Or, more commonly is a panicked prayer, "Lord, if You show Your power by getting me out of this mess, then I will believe in You. When I see that, then I will believe."**

**But you don't need such signs and wonders....why? Because you have the Word. And in the Word, you hear the miracles that Jesus has performed... that He has made the blind see, the deaf hear and the lame walk. You have His honest testimony that He has done, and is able to do, such things. You have His promise that He will deliver you in His time. More importantly, you have His Word that He has already delivered you from the "mess" of your sin and eternal condemnation; what need have you of further proof that the Lord delivers you? After paying the price of holy, innocent blood for your redemption, do you think that He will be faithless now? The Lord can certainly work such wonders today; and when He brings sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf, we give thanks to Him. But you do not base your faith upon the occasional miracles that you might see; you believe because you have heard the Word of Jesus, who was crucified for your sin and raised for your eternal justification.**

**The Lord doesn't have to prove Himself anymore. He already has, proved Himself and He tells you about it.**

**We give thanks to the Lord for all good things, of course; but we do not believe in Him because of some deliverance we see. We believe in Him because of the great thing He has already done for us...for all of us: His redemption of the world on the cross. We need no further proof. We need no further great thing to convince us, because He declares in His Word that He has already delivered us from sin, death and the devil.**

**No, instead of demanding to see more miracles, we rejoice that we have God's Word on it. His Word brings us to faith...whether proclaimed in the Absolution, added to water in Holy Baptism, or spoken over bread and wine in Holy Communion. It is by these means of grace that the Lord brings us to faith. But once again, we**

face trouble: **We are often** tempted to push the means of grace aside for some other program or sign where it "looks" like God is really working. **We are tempted** to believe that we should trust in God because of what we see, or what we feel, or what we experience. **But this brings** us back to the sin of Thomas, does it not? **It teaches that** God **has not done enough** to earn your trust and so He'd better keep on doing more spectacular stuff. **And so it is** good for us to hear the Savior gently chide, "**You believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.**"

**In this world, "seeing is believing"** is an excellent axiom because people don't live up to what they say. **However, the Lord** always lives up to what He says. **He has died** to live up to His Word. **His Word grants** faith and forgiveness. **Therefore, hearing is believing.**

**So hear this** Word of the Lord: **The Lord Jesus** Christ has died for you and **every other untrustworthy, wavering, deceptive, failure-prone soul.** **As we heard** in the accounts of His Passion, those who crucified Him were consumed by all of these sins and more. **Because of these** sins, and because of all sins, Jesus remained on the cross: **The One called "Faithful and True"** (Rev. 3:14) suffered for all the sins, the faithlessness and lies, of mankind. **He has paid** the price for all of your sins there, too. **This is most** certainly true, because God says it to be so. **This is the** Word of the Lord.

**Furthermore, the Lord** Jesus is risen from the dead so that He might share His eternal life with you. **Risen from the dead,** the living Word-become-flesh speaks to you in His Word and tells you exactly where and how He comes to you. **This Gospel lesson** is an excellent start, because here Jesus breathes on the disciples, sends them as His ambassadors, and tells them that they are to forgive sins by speaking His Word. **Likewise, when you** hear the pastor declare the Absolution, you can be certain that you are forgiven-**as certain** as if the Lord Himself were speaking the words to you. **This is most certainly true because it is the Word of the Lord.**

**Likewise, the Lord** promises that He is present with forgiveness in the waters of Holy Baptism. **You only see** water in the font; **but the Lord** declares that He shares His death and resurrection with you there, **so that** you have forgiveness and eternal life. **Likewise, the Lord** declares that He is present in, with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, "**for the remission of sins**" and "**to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith until life everlasting.**" **The Lord is** present to forgive, as present as He was with the disciples in the locked room. **Thus, as He** declared "**Peace be with you**" to the disciples, the pastor echoes His Lord and says, "**The peace of the Lord be with you alway.**" **This is most certainly true because this is the Word of the Lord.**

**Be warned, you** Thomas-types: **You will** still want further proof. **At times when** you hear the Absolution, you won't feel like you've been forgiven and will conclude that you are not. **In other words,** you will say, "**God's promise isn't good enough, because I don't feel any proof.**" **At other times, some** will scoff at the idea that the Lord could be present in bread and wine for your salvation. **This is simply** a foolish argument: **We are speaking** of the same Lord who was present on earth in, with and under human flesh for 33 years or so. **We're speaking of** the same Jesus who arose from death and the grave. **We are speaking** of the same Lord Jesus Christ who suddenly appeared in the midst of the disciples even though the door to the room was locked. **The Lord can** be present in bread and wine if He says He is, and He says. **So He is. This is the Word of the Lord.**

**Furthermore, Jesus declares** to you that the kingdom of heaven and eternal life are already yours because He has died to make it so. **You don't see** heaven yet, **but you have** His Word on it. **However, the devil** will throw all sorts of tribulations your way and then whisper, "**Do you SEE? Jesus can't be trusted.**" **By what you see** with your eyes, the devil's argument may seem to have merit. **But where the devil** says, "**You see that Jesus can't be trusted,**" **you respond,** "**Ah, but I hear that He can. And the Lord never fails to keep His Word.**"

**All of this** is true for you, because the Lord says it is. **He has died** to redeem you and risen again to give you life. **He comes to** you in His means of grace to give you forgiveness, faith and salvation. **He promises that** you are His beloved child and that heaven is yours. **Do you see it? No. Is it true? Yes, because the Lord says so.**

**We have a** sure prophetic Word, and the Lord declares to you forgiveness and eternal life. **For now, you** only hear of these things; **and you** walk by faith, not by sight. **But just wait: You'll see. God will keep** all of His glorious promises. **Blessed are you** who have not seen and yet believe; **for by the Word of God, you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen**

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Rev. Eric M. Christiansen

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