

## **"Seeing Jesus"**

Second Sunday of Easter  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

Sunday, April 11, 2010  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 5:27-32; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

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

Neighbors of my parents were grandparents who often cared for their highly verbal and somewhat precocious granddaughter. When she was in kindergarten, they would pick her up and bring her to their house until her parents finished work. The grandparents happened to be devout Christians. Their talking about Jesus was as natural to them as breathing.

They also believed in something else—good hygiene. They were absolutely fastidious about keeping the little girl healthy, insisting that she wash her hands liberally and regularly. So, my mom shared with me the story her neighbor told her—that one day their granddaughter became a little frustrated with her grandparents. She was about to play something really fun when they told her to go wash her hands. To which the girl replied, "All I hear around this house is 'Jesus' and 'germs' and I haven't seen either of them!"

There. That's Thomas. He's the disciple who replies with bluntness and honesty, and perhaps a bit of frustration: "All I hear around here is the risen Jesus this and the risen Jesus that...and I still haven't seen him!" His fellow disciples tell Thomas they've seen Jesus, that Jesus is alive. In fact, John uses a particular verb tense here in his gospel, referring to how their action is continuous. In other words, the disciples keep on telling Thomas the story that they saw Jesus. Well, no wonder! Should we meet someone raised from the dead, we'd certainly be talking a blue streak about it. So, just how many times must Thomas be forced to wrestle with the incongruity, the impossibility of it all? That a dead man lives? Should he swallow their story hook, line and sinker?

You have to admit Thomas has a point here. After all, not much has changed in one week. Rome remains in power, ready to clamp down on its people if they do anything that smacks of revolt. The disciples remain behind closed doors—maybe they still worry about being vulnerable if they venture beyond them. In many ways, their situation is no less precarious and no more certain than it was the day Jesus died. Thomas has to wonder if the story about Jesus appearing is more wishful thinking than physical reality.

Sometimes we are like Thomas. We know the story of Jesus crucified, died, and raised to new life to bring us into new life. We've heard that story countless times. But there are those days when we figure, if Jesus really is raised from the dead, really is present with us now, breathing his life-giving Spirit into us, bestowing his endless peace upon us, then wouldn't things be different in the world? Or at the very least, wouldn't things be different in the church? Or at the very, very least,

wouldn't things be different in our own lives—the lives of individual disciples? Wouldn't they? Because Thomas couldn't see that anything was different. That's why he wanted—no, demanded—to see Jesus, specifically Jesus with his wounds. Only then would Thomas know that something was different! His Lord was alive and fully present with him.

What did that precocious granddaughter say? "All I hear around this house is 'Jesus' and 'germs' and I've never seen either one of them!" Boy, for not being able to see germs, we sure do spend our time acting as if they exist. They command our constant attention, particularly in this past year of H1N1 fears. Can't see 'em, but our time is consumed by washing and scrubbing and disinfecting our houses and bodies and anything else we think might harbor them.

Well, maybe we should do the same with Jesus. I don't mean disinfect him! What I mean is we ought to **act** as though Jesus lives. That's what we proclaim. That's what we believe. So let's start making obvious in our daily journey that the Risen Jesus is more than wishful thinking—that, in fact, he's the world's joyful reality. If Jesus really is our living Lord, he ought to command our attention and consume our time.

What Jesus gave to the disciples that first evening, and to Thomas one week later was exactly what they needed to make obvious in **their** daily journey that Jesus lives. First, he gave them an abiding peace to quell their fears—the kind of peace that he said would be part and parcel of life in his kingdom. Then Jesus breathed his Spirit upon them. That word for "breathed" is a word similar to the one we find in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, when the God breathed into the nostrils of the first human being, giving him life. Here is our Risen Jesus, bestowing on his friends the life-giving breath of God. Here is Jesus preparing them for real Easter life! Not just so they can **tell** others **about** Jesus—that's easy. But so they can go **do** what Jesus does, **do** Jesus' ministry in the world.

The way I see it, **Matthew's** gospel might shed a little light here on John's gospel. In the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, there's a description of the end times with Jesus sitting in judgment, and saying to those before him these words: "*... I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.*" Funny, the people who had done these good things didn't realize that by doing them for others they were doing them for Jesus. They hadn't exactly seen Jesus, yet he was there, in the faces of the suffering. He had the marks of the wounds, right? It seems to me we **will** see Jesus when we look, really look at and then minister to the wounded around us. It also seems to me others **will** see Jesus and believe in him when we **do** the ministry of Jesus in this world.

*I was in prison and you visited me.* Well, this afternoon several of us are leading worship with male inmates at Dauphin County Prison. Jesus will be there. We will see him in one another. *I was a stranger and you welcomed me.* Someone here is a visitor, new to this church or new to this town. I'm hoping that another of you

will welcome them. And that means Jesus will be here, and you will see him in each other. If some folks say, "All I hear with these Christians is 'Jesus this' and 'Jesus that' but I haven't seen him!" then it is about time we who are Christ's disciples and friends **act**, with all his power that he gave us, and in so doing, turn a needy world's wishful thinking into joyful reality.

Melissa Sevier, a Presbyterian pastor from Kentucky, told this story on her blog: Several years ago she spent a week in New York State chaperoning a youth mission trip. The kids were re-roofing cabins at a church camp. At week's end, they took a day trip to New York City. None of the youth had ever been there. Each carried a brown bag lunch supplied by the camp. Taking the subway, they got off at Grand Central Station—18 youth, all novices to city life.

They were struck by the sheer number of homeless people living on the streets, constantly asking for handouts. The kids couldn't get over the homeless sitting there on sidewalks and in alleys, and most people just walking by them. City folk were used to this, maybe hardened by it. But not these 18 Kentucky kids. The youth asked Melissa if they could give their bag lunches to the homeless: "Is it OK if we give our lunches away? They say they want money for food. We have food we can give them." Melissa replied, "Look, lunch is expensive here in the city. If you give them your bag lunch, you might not have enough money for lunch, let alone souvenirs."

The kids said, "That's OK." So Melissa watched as her 18 young friends gave away their bag lunches. Some of the homeless took the food gratefully, even giving the young people a blessing. Some said nothing as they received. Some refused, and the youth moved on to someone else who would accept the bag lunch. Some of the young people shook hands with the homeless, or sat down to talk with those now eating their sandwich.

Finally, it was time to go, but the kids walked more slowly, noticing every person they passed by. As Pastor Sevier reflected on that day, she realized that all along she had expected to see Jesus at the church camp where they labored all week. Instead, she noted this: "...that day, 18 teenagers saw Jesus in people they met on the city sidewalks. And I saw Jesus in 18 young people I already knew."

I know Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." But maybe, maybe there is a way to see. **AMEN.**

Copyright © 2010, Nancy R. Easton. All rights reserved.