

BEFORE YOU HEAR THE GOSPEL BEING READ, I INVITE YOU TO ENTER INTO THE TEXT AS A CONTEMPORARY PARTICIPANT AND TRY TO SEE THE THINGS BEING READ AS THEY ARE HAPPENING IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES. YOU MAY WANT TO CLOSE YOUR EYES FOR THE READING, IN ORDER TO DO THIS.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

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." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

1. Some people will **believe just about anything**. Unfortunately, this pseudo-faith will fall like a house of cards with the first whiff of trouble.
2. Some people **must have everything proved**. By definition, they do not have FAITH, which is unproven (except by trouble in personal experience)
3. Then – like Baby Gear in the Goldilocks story – some people have a **faith that is JUST RIGHT**.

“**Doubting Thomas**” became “**BELIEVING Thomas**” we learn from today’s Gospel lesson. Tradition tells us that that faith was so strong it led him to spread the Gospel throughout India, where he suffered martyrdom on behalf of his faith.

Doubt is not the OPPOSITE of Faith. Indeed, 20th century theologian Paul Tillich said that **without doubt we can have no faith.**

What makes the difference between the Mama and Papa Bear Faith, on the one hand, and the “Just Right” Baby Bear Faith, on the other hand, **is a personal relationship with Jesus.**

It's **not in acceptance of creeds**; it is the **reality of the relationship.**

In our Worship Committee, a few weeks back, one of our members told us that her sister had shared with her the occurrence of a nighttime visit from their recently deceased mother. The Worship Committee member said that she was – for some time – a bit jealous that her sister and this experience and they did not. I suggested to her that maybe she didn't get the visit because she didn't need that visit, but her sister did. (Jesus said: “**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”)

Dick Ford shared with me and with others the fact that his deceased wife Wanda came and visited Dick just a short while before Dick also passed through that doorway we call death to be reunited with Wanda.

One of my favorite authors, Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, wrote about her last visit in the hospital with her mother. Rachel's mother told Rachel where to sit, and then directed her attention to the other visitor's chair in the hospital room. She introduced her to the person that she saw sitting in the chair. Rachel could not see her; she only saw an empty chair. Rachel's mother introduced Rachel to Rachel – the grandmother she never met, but after whom she had been named. After awhile, Rachel's mother said: You know I am going to be leaving the hospital in the next day or so with one of you Rachels. I don't know yet which one, but I'm glad I got the chance to introduce you to one another. And – sure to her

words – Rachel left the hospital with the day with the elder of the two Rachels.

What are such “visits” about? Are they real?

G. Scott Sparrow wrote two books on the basis of long years of research. The books are “*Blessed Are You Among Women*” and “*Lo, I Am With You Always*.” The books are about encounters such as I earlier described, between many people and (a) the blessed virgin Mary, and (b) the resurrected Lord.

When he began his research Sparrow was an agnostic. He was a believer and disciple of Jesus by the time he had finished.

The books reveal fascinating accounts of the many different ways that these people “SAW” Mary and Jesus.

The **one commonality** that he found in all of the encounters was that each person who had such a visit was someone who **NEEDED SUCH A VISIT**.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. We heard Jesus say that. But life experiences tells us that Jesus will also bless others in different ways that they may come to believe.

The question that I asked you to consider before the Gospel was read: WHAT DID YOU SEE? Let me review now:

1. **How did you picture Jesus passing through** the locked door and solid walls?
2. **What was His breath like?**
 - a. Was it a sweet aroma, as powerful as a flower shop, or cut grass after a rain, or honeysuckle on a spring morning?
 - b. Or was it 3 days dead “Lazarus Breath”?

3. When Jesus gave the disciples “Peace” how did you envision it:

- a. Was it mouth to mouth resuscitation?
- b. Or was it Jesus coming up behind each one, His hands on their shoulder, and leaning forward so that His face was next to each of their faces, whispering in their ears the words they needed to hear to experience that peace?

We heard the scripture a few weeks back from Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and it is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Jesus comes to each of us – according to our needs.

Last week’s Gospel told us about how Jesus told **Mary not to hold onto Him**. She needed to let go of the physical body to which she had grown accustomed to holding, in order to be able to experience the new resurrected body of Jesus, which would be available to her wherever she was, whatever she was doing.

Today’s Gospel has Jesus telling Thomas what appears to be exactly the opposite: **Thomas, let your fingers do their walking ...**

Oh, you think I’m being frivolous to quote Jesus as saying, “Thomas, let your fingers do their walking ...

Look at verse 27. I was surprised when, after all these times of reading this passage, I suddenly saw what Jesus said: **“[Thomas,] put your finger here and see”**

He made it personal for Thomas. It's indeed the **first recorded incident** in the Bible, and perhaps anywhere, **of Braille: put your finger here and see**

Sometimes we are not able to encounter Jesus, to really see Jesus in a faith way until we touch the woundedness of life.

Not all roads lead to Jesus (for sure) but Jesus is willing to travel almost any road to let us see Him.

What do YOU see?

WHERE do you see?

What are you LOOKING FOR?

One final word about today's Gospel lesson: look at verse 21: **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**

Don't be afraid to let others see God in you.

- You were made in God's image.
- The way you encounter God may indeed be just strange enough that it is exactly what someone else finds hard to believe is real. Let them see the REAL YOU, not some fake-what-you-think-is-what-faith-is-supposed-to-look-like.
- Real Faith does not fake.
- Real Faith is Real.

And when it's real, it may still encounter doubt. But in doubting and in being real, we encounter Jesus. And it is in that encounter that we discover the peace and power that Jesus promised.

Let others see the real you – so that they may see the real Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.