**John 20:19-31**

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.

**“A Blessing To See Christ”**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Many in our modern world hold to that saying, “What you see is what you get.” This phrase traces back to the 1940’s arising out of advertising in the U.S.[[1]](#footnote-1) It truly was the start of a straightforward no hassle way of life that now spills over with only more prominent today. We want to see that final cost for a vehicle or home with no strings attached. We want to see an honest arrangement without any of that fine print. We want to see something for what it is, rather than having to guess at it.

Thomas is such a modern man in our terms. The disciples on Easter Sunday saw the Lord, but if “What you see is what you get.” Thomas saw no Jesus and so did not get Him. Why should he believe in a crazy story of a risen Jesus? What made sense was that by the cross He suffered, died, and was buried. That at least was consistent to life, even if it had a sad outcome. Yet, note how God takes what we see and gives us something far better. To the apostles in prison, they received release to “speak to the people all the words of this life.” To an old and weary John exiled on Patmos, he received sight of the living Jesus who proclaimed, “I have the keys of Death and Hades.” To Thomas a week later, doubt no longer could deny what he saw is what he got. Christ still gives that blessing of life to believe so that we see.

Now the most natural thing in life is to see in order to believe. Thomas gave such a standard to the disciples stating, “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.” He was not looking for a feel good Jesus, but a Jesus who was real. This meant no less than the Jesus he witnessed crucified a few days earlier. Of course, the safety of “what you see is what you get” left Thomas alone in the darkness of death for a week. We can be thankful for such a “doubting” Thomas who did not let down his guard. As the early Church Father Gregory the Great says, “The divine mercy ordained that a doubting disciple should, by feeling in his Master the wounds of the flesh, heal in us the wounds of unbelief” (ACC).

When we go by what comes natural seeing means belief in life with a sorry state of affairs. What we see is a world still covered in darkness and the shadow of death. Like Thomas, we look for what is real and what do we find? Real is that people do not just get over tragedy. Real is crunching the numbers to pay the bills. Real are the loveless ways in marriage. Real is the hardship to bear with your child. Real is that there is always work to do. Real is to suffer loss as the years press-on. Real in terms of what we see finally ends with death. If seeing is to believe, every form of doubt arises more than against a risen Jesus. Sin has become the standard so people best live to whatever works for them. Death has made life meaningless so existence has no ultimate value. It seems God does not care, hates us, and even holds back so why not deny Him.

Yet, Christ reigns just outside of sight making faith the ultimate gift of life He gives. The problem of Thomas and his demands only proved to stifle faith. After meeting every one of his doubts, Jesus told him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” So faith is the opposite of what we see most often in this world. The apostle Peter put it this way, “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9). Again, St. Paul looking beyond the glory of Rome confidently proclaims, “…Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Romans 8:24-25). To believe is to see God in those places where you doubt Him the most to be. Just as He paid the price for all we see with His life on the cross.

Since Easter is about life, the basis to see life comes from the risen Jesus who says, “Peace be with you.” He said it to the disciples showing them His victory marks on Easter Sunday. He delivered this same peace again a week later for the sake of Thomas. God grants His peace to be life for sinners. It is nothing less than to receive forgiving peace from Jesus. Instead of leaving Thomas to drown in doubt, God did the very opposite. This is what Christ has promised for you. He takes your doubts, fears, sin, shame, and makes them His own. Yes, there still are problems in life, but not without the inward triumph of peace from Jesus. Yes, suffering, disease, addictions, and much darkness surround us, but Christ defeated them by His death and resurrection. Yes, we look for glory in life to confirm God’s love, but faith sees another comfort hidden in lives under the cross. Regardless the doubts over life, nothing is out of the sight of Jesus. He says, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one.”

Those who believe in Christ see life with meaning and value that has no end. Thomas made such a confession about life declaring, “My Lord and My God!” More than being surprised, his word both confessed repentance and faith in Jesus. Thomas was no push over, but His life took a turn to see the greater peace that passed all understanding. Christ brings His forgiving life as victory for us to see in Him. This comes not from what we see fit or by some heartfelt reaching out on our part. Martin Luther points out, “If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ...in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross” (Treasury of Prayer 191).

Since to believe in Christ is eternal life, what you see is not what you get. We see plain water in baptism, but you were really born to new life by the Spirit that no darkness can overcome. We see the sharing of Christ by His people in their lives, but instead really Jesus is extending His forgiving word for any to believe in Him. We see bread and wine on the altar, but the Word promise we really are before the One who St. John saw and fell at His feet only to hear, “Fear not.” What you see is what you get is good for sales in this world, but not so much with celebrating the life risen up on Easter. That is where sin and forgiveness, death and life, man and God stand and fall upon this promise, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Our eyes do much today more than any other senses. Yet, the downfall is to see at the end of life only death. When faith comes first, it sees Christ from start to finish. He reigns as Lord and Savior who still comes to say, “Peace be with you!” God’s grace is fit for our life no less than Thomas. Forgiven lives learn to make a good confession. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed Alleluia. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/what-you-see-is-what-you-get.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)