

Sermon – April 11, 2021
“Stop Doubting and Believe”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Let's begin with prayer...

“Gracious Father - bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Grant that we may hear your message, and in hearing ... be led in the way you want us to go. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Christ.” Amen.

What do you believe in? While you are thinking about that question, let me tell you about a story I heard this past week.

A man strolled out of a hardware store with a smile on his face and a brand-new chainsaw in his hands. He was told it could cut down five big oak trees in an hour. Twenty-four hours later, however, his smile was gone, and he was back at the store complaining that the saw would never cut five trees in an hour. He said, "It took me nearly all day to cut down one tree."

Puzzled, the store owner stepped outside with the saw, gave the cord a swift pull, and fired up the steel-toothed saw.

Its deafening roar sent the customer stumbling away gasping "What's that noise?"

Obviously, it's ridiculous for someone to try to cut down trees with a chain saw without starting it first.

But that's just how foolish we can be as Christians when we try to live a Christ-like life without turning on the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We just get frustrated and spiritually exhausted when we try to work things out on our OWN terms and according to our OWN schedule. God's wisdom and power is available to us when we truly BELIEVE in Him.

There is another story about a fellow who had been raised in the city who bought a farm and some milk cows. In the feed store one day, he complained his best cow had gone dry.

The store manager asked him, "Are you milking her every day?" The man answered, "Just about. But I only get what I need, and I let her save up the rest."

The manager had to explain to the new farmer that it does not work that way. With cow's milk, just like with God's presence, you take all that is there, or EVENTUALLY you have nothing.

It is amazing what you can do when you believe strongly in something. Many years ago, I had a friend who was particularly good at selling things.

He worked for Amway, and all sorts of those door to door, sign-you-up, pyramid-type businesses.

And no matter what he was selling, he was good at it. I think he was good at it principally because he fully believed in the products he was selling. He always believed they were the best; they were important; and everyone would be better off with them.

The point is, when You and I try to live a godly life, we must believe in what we are doing just like that friend of mine.

We can be good at it ... every one of us ... if we but believe that Jesus IS the best; that He IS important; and that everyone would be BETTER OFF with Him in their lives.

But often, I think we act and think just like the man who fell off a cliff, who managed to grab a tree limb on the way down. He shouts out ... "Is anyone up there?"
"I, the Lord, am here. Do you believe in me?"

"Yes, Lord, I believe in You. I really believe, but I can't hang on much longer."

"That's okay. If you REALLY believe, you have nothing to worry about. I will save you. Just let go of the branch."

After a short pause, the man shouts again "Is anyone else up there?"

The man obviously developed some sudden doubt about the Lord's claim that He would save the man from the fall.

Have you ever had a time when you doubted the Word of God? I think we all have had some of those moments.

I suspect you have never hung from a branch over a cliff about to fall, but perhaps you have had a key prayer that you think had gone unanswered, or some other important circumstance like that.

Then, you question again God's existence, or His love, or His grace. Are they really true, or are they part of some made up religious thinking that you got caught up in.

Today we are going to talk about belief and doubt, which I think we often try to cover up BECAUSE we don't want people to see us as BEING WEAK in our faith.

So, let's look at how Jesus deals with doubt, how he forgives us, how he helps us to live by faith and NOT by sight.

Obviously, the POSTER-BOY for this topic is Thomas ... "Doubting Thomas" is how we often refer to him. The other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" And his response is now a famous quote...

"Unless I ... put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." John 20:25

It is easy for us Christians 2,000 years later to look back at his story and think that Thomas was somehow less intelligent, less religious, less of a Christian with less faith than you or I have today.

But I don't think that would be accurate. For a moment, let's stand in Thomas' shoes. When we do, we just might realize that you and I are more like him than we would like to admit. We are told Thomas missed seeing Jesus on Easter when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. We don't know where Thomas was or what he was doing, but he MISSED it.

When Thomas was told by the other disciples, "We have seen the Lord", what would you have thought if you were Thomas - would you have believed?

Remember, Thomas saw what happened to Jesus ... the torture, the crucifixion, and it would have crushed him to see Jesus bleed and die like that ... being such an innocent man.

And when you're hurting and mourning the loss of a true friend, it's hard to be rational and believe in anything. Consequently, Thomas said, "Unless I see, unless I touch - I just can't believe".

Have you ever doubted, like Thomas? Have you ever been asked to live by faith and not by sight...

Live By Faith ... Not By Sight

A loved one dies in Christ, and you hurt. All you can hang onto is your faith and belief that one day he or she is going to rise from the dead.

But until then, you may be caught up in feeling empty, lonely, confused – perhaps you are worried and upset because you don't know how things are going to work out for you.

You may think ... I am supposed to know that Jesus loves me and that he is watching over my life. I should trust that He is always doing that, but it sure doesn't seem like it.

Have you ever doubted? Have you ever asked for PROOF, like Thomas, have you thought ... "unless I see ... unless I touch".

Perhaps you pray and pray, and don't get the answer you are hoping for, or "expecting". You want God to intervene ... to show that he is real.

But the bottom line is this ... God wants us to live by faith, and not by sight. And we all know that faith is believing in something or someone that you cannot see.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is true man, through and through, just like us, and that he is also God, through and through.

I can't explain to you how Jesus is true man and true God at the same time, but that is what the Bible says ... so I accept it by faith.

We know Jesus was publicly executed on a cross and was buried in a tomb sealed by a large stone. There were always many eyewitnesses for the Roman public executions.

In Jesus' case, many eyewitnesses saw Him die and be buried, just like we see people die and be buried (or cremated) today.

But then, Jesus was physically resurrected from the dead ... I cannot explain to you how He

did it. But that is faith.

The Bible says He did it, and says there were many eyewitnesses of His resurrection (more than 500 in fact), so we accept it by faith today.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is what pays for our sin ... is what leads to the forgiveness of our sins.

His death and resurrection gives us assurance when a loved one dies in Christ, we will one day be resurrected from the dead with them.

So, we need to always live by faith, and not by sight.

Let's take a moment and look at how Jesus helps Thomas through his dilemma. A week after Easter, Jesus appeared to the disciples again, and this time Thomas was with them.

Jesus then gently says to Thomas "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. ...

"Stop doubting and believe."

You would think that Jesus would have chastised Thomas for his stubborn lack of faith. But Jesus was very patient, and very gracious when He allowed Thomas to touch His hands and side.

Then, Jesus encourages Thomas to stop doubting and believe, just like He is encouraging us today ... stop doubting and believe.

In a sense, anytime we doubt like Thomas, we are simply NOT TAKING God at his Word. Thomas, along with all the disciples, had previously been told by Jesus on three different occasions that Jesus had to be tortured, crucified, and would rise 3 days later.

Still ... Thomas could not bring himself to believe that Jesus rose from the dead ... he was not taking God at His word.

But finally, after his personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus, Thomas responds with one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible, "My Lord and my God."

Let me break this to you gently ... I do not think Jesus will ever appear to you on this side of heaven, like he did Thomas, although he could do whatever he wants since He is God after all.

So today, I suggest we all choose to live by faith, and not by sight. Listen again to what Jesus goes on to tell Thomas...

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those (meaning us) who have not seen and yet have believed."

It is NOT EASY to believe in Jesus as your Lord when everything in the world tells you the opposite.

It is NOT EASY to believe when you've been hurt by the evil in this world, when you are in pain and afraid of the future, or your prayers aren't immediately answered the way you want them to

be answered.

But those are the specific reasons that I believe God gifted each of us with faith.

The author of Hebrews says faith is...

"...confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1)

We believe, even though we don't see.

We don't see ... we have no proof ... we have nothing ... except the Word of God. And isn't that precisely the reason God gave us the Bible? The Apostle John says...

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ – the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him, you may have life in his name." John 20:31

Today, when you arrived for worship, you were living by faith ... you were trusting that God's Word would be present, or you would not have come and wasted your time.

Today, when you come forward for the Lord's Supper, you will be living by faith. When you approach the altar, all you will see is bread and wine ... and that's all you are going to taste.

But you believe that there is something else going on here. You believe that Jesus' body and blood is in, with, and under the bread and wine, as well, because that IS what the Bible says. We Live by Faith, Not by Sight

We can look up into the blue sky and believe that there is something behind all that.

We can believe there is a real heaven with a real God and real angels.

We can truly believe that because the Bible says that, and we live by faith and not by sight.

The bottom line is this ... we look at the world differently when we live by faith. We look at people differently.

And we look at life and death differently ... all because we believe in Jesus Christ, who has died and risen from the dead.

Truly BLESSED are those who have NOT seen, and yet have BELIEVED. Today, you are TRULY BLESSED. Amen.

(please rise as you are able for prayer)

PRAYER: "LORD, help us all to live by faith and not by sight. Help us discern your will for our lives, and help us overcome the periods of doubt when they do develop in our lives. Help us continue to grow our faith through study of your word. Amen