

By Seeing There Is Believing

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them,

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house,
and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were shut,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas,
“Put your finger here and see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed
because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have come to believe.”

Now Jesus did many other signs
in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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John 20: 19-31

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I.

This morning, I'd like to talk to you about tempo. We all have our regular little rhythms and tempos by which we live our lives. Yearly dues to organizations, 6 month newspaper subscriptions, changing seasons, quarterly tax payments, monthly retirement checks, biweekly paychecks, weekly offering to church, the rising and setting of the sun, meal times, and even forms of bodily regularity...like hair appointments. For those with kids, a regular tempo rules the roost: morning wake up, get to school, homework time, dance class, piano lessons, hockey practice, bath time, stories before bed, and, finally, lights out. New borns, though, have a rhythm all their own which seems to be constantly changing, and the entire household along with it: nursing, napping, sleeping, diaper changing.

II.

There is a similar kind of tempo in the church: the plodding of Lent, pomp of Palm Sunday, melancholy of the Last Supper, struggle in the Garden, the Trial (Crucify!) agony of the Cross, 3 days of waiting, empty tomb, resurrection...and now, a pause. Our scripture passage this morning takes place right at that point of pause in the tempo of the Easter story. All the activity seems to have crested: the ministry is done, the miracles, teaching and healings. The parade into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the time in the garden, the betrayal, the trial before Pontius Pilot, the cross, the death, all done.

As evening falls, even the events of the morning seem far away. They gather in with one another safely hidden behind locked doors; quietly pondering the empty tomb, and the words of Mary who insists, "*She has seen the Lord!?!*" And it is there, in that gathering hush, that the Risen Christ suddenly appears to the disciples.

III.

“*Peace be with you!*” Jesus says, and he shows them his hands and his side, proving to them he is the one who died, but is now alive again. Again Jesus told them, “Peace be with you!” and he breathed on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Then, that very night, he gave the community of believers, our forebears in the faith, the power to forgive or retain sins.

But *Thomas*, was not there. One of the original twelve Apostles, scripture shows Thomas to be a person of simple strengths. For instance, after hearing that Lazarus was dead, Jesus decides to return to Judea. But the disciples question him, “*Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?*” (Meaning, “Do we have to go as well?!?) Then amid such complaining and confusion, Thomas displays his courage and loyalty by saying to his fellow disciples, “*Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus.*”

IV.

In another instance, when alluding to his eminent death, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them, and that he will return and take them to himself, so that where he is they may be also. Thomas is the only disciple humble and candid enough to say to Jesus: “*Lord, we do not know here you are going!?! How can we know the way.*” To which Jesus simply responds, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*”

In the evening stillness of that first Easter, however, Thomas did not witness the *way* as had the other disciples to whom Jesus appeared, so he would not believe the *truth* of the resurrection until he himself saw Jesus standing before his own eyes big as *life*.

V.

Now there are a great many people who know absolutely nothing about the Bible. However, just about *all* of them know something about “Doubting” Thomas. They don’t necessarily know *what* he doubted, or *why* he doubted, they just know *that* he doubted. And this, will forever be Thomas’ claim to fame (or shame).

Yet, is the doubt of Thomas really so hard to understand? A bunch of grief-stricken, religious fanatics tell you that their crucified leader is now up and walking around, and you don't have any doubt this may be the case? Is it so unreasonable to ask that you yourself see it before you believe it?

VI.

For those of you who don't know, I was living in exile out at the lake for the entirety of Holy Week. On that Monday, Linda received COVID as a birthday present so it seemed only prudent to move out there lock, stock and barrel. On the upside, I had my own Easter miracle in somehow not contracting it myself, though I had kissed my sweetie a bunch that very same morning she tested positive. Hence, I was able to conduct the Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday services; which was a relief.

As an added bonus, this afforded me the time and opportunity to get started on wiring the She Shack; something which had long been looming on the horizon, but which had recently been moved up to the top of the priority list with a tentative date of May 2nd being set to have a guy come out and apply spray foam installation to the walls and a section of the roof. That is, if I could be ready for it; that is, if the wiring was done in time.

VII.

While I've certainly changed an outlet or a light fixture over the years, I've never wired an *entire* house. So, I went old school: I ordered a book, and spent the entire fall studying it. I also went new school and availed myself of countless Youtube videos. When I had questions, I asked anyone I could including Jim Durham, Barry Walch, Kevin Bailey and my friend Dave Rennie. Last winter I had laid out the basic wiring diagram, calculated amps and wire loads, and purchased all the necessary wire (12/2, 14/2 and 14/3), GFIs, clamps, boxes connectors, staples, switches, outlets, receptacles and a few cool, new tools. Finally, after months of preparation and no small amount of trepidation, I started hanging receptacle boxes, drilling holes, running wire, clamping and stripping ends. Two weeks later, as of this past Tuesday, I had all the wiring for the Shack "roughed in"; which, in theory, is what I needed to accomplish in order to have the spray foam applied. Typically, it is only *after* the insulation is in and sheetrock hung that you, then, do the "finish wiring" by installing switches, outlets and fixtures.



Wiring “Roughed In”

VIII.

One advantage of not knowing what you’re doing, is that you have the opportunity to learn it the right way the first time. Of course, as the entire She Shack experience has taught me, you never know what you don’t know or the right questions to ask at the right time. Nevertheless, I felt I had correctly understood and properly applied the concepts so I was reasonably confident everything *should* work; though once the insulation was in and the sheetrock hung I’d have little recourse. So, I allowed doubt to creep in and take hold.

While I had other things I *absolutely* needed to do to be ready for the insulation (like install rafter vents and frame out the gable ends) Wednesday I started installing outlets, then switches on one of the two circuits. Finally, hoping to assuage my growing doubt, I stood in front of the panel, put my finger on the breaker then flicked the switch and...*nothing* happened. Which is good, which is what you want. Then, I tested all the outlets (correct) and poked my head from the front door and to my great relief saw the outside light was, in deed, lit and gloriously burning bright. Though I *knew* my understanding was correct, I nevertheless needed to *see it* to believe it.



“Finished” Wiring



Lit and gloriously burning bright!

IX.

Of course, wiring isn't the only thing I've been doing for the past two weeks. Beyond the usual church obligations, this past Monday one of my students from the Rev. Mike School of Driving had her road test scheduled. Though Janeil, my Jamaican friend and St. Lawrence University student, had been a bit incredulous when I told her she'd be nervous, 24 hours beforehand she'd finally come around to the reality of the situation as she was

unable to sleep or eat so worried was she about the test.

As luck would have it, the class she had just before the test was scheduled is taught by Duncan Melville and he mercifully excused her so she could practice a bit and settle herself. Unfortunately, things did not go as well as I would have hoped. At one point while we were practicing, she took a right turn from Goodrich street onto Judson and ended up on the *wrong* side of the double yellow line...for more than a little while. Not good.

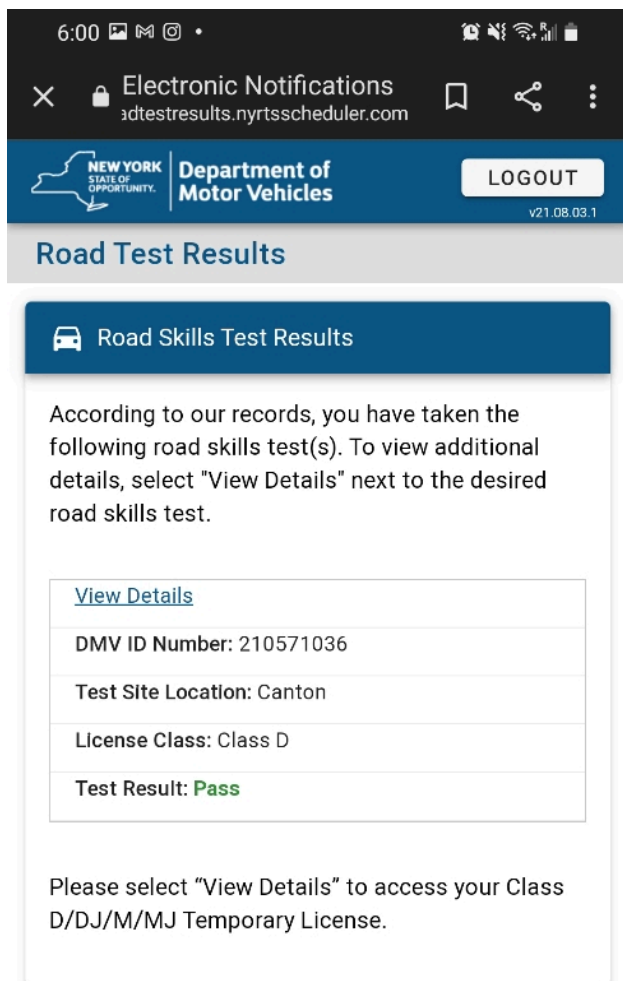
X.

Both of us agreed it would be best to take a break, so she drove us back to the manse where I had a quick lunch and she took a walk around the park. We arrived at the test site by the Court House 15 minutes early, parked the car and got out just as the person scheduled before her drove away from the curb. It was an *excruciating* wait. Tears in her eyes, shaking, the whole bit. Just this side of a freak-out. I tried to calm her with words, but to no avail. Finally, she just wanted me to hug her...for a *long* time. Which is something my required and repeated Boundary Awareness training told me was not

necessarily the smartest pastor move. The father in me prevailed, however, so there we stood embracing as she slowly got it together. The student driver ahead of us pulled back up to the curb, I told her to get into her car, and once the formalities were concluded off she went to face her fate and her future.

XI.

Turns out, they no longer tell you right away if you've passed your road test or not. They give you a card with a web address on it, with results being posted at 6 p.m. that day. While this is probably a good idea given the world in which we now live, it makes for a very long and difficult wait. I got back in the car and asked her how she did. Apparently she failed to yield the right of way, parked too far from the curb, and didn't sufficiently turn her head while parking. That was about all I could get out of her. She had downloaded the score sheet for the test off the internet earlier, but without specifics I couldn't say for sure if she had passed or not. My guess was 50/50; it would be very close.



Afterward, I dropped her off at campus and went about the rest of my day. In fact, I had entirely forgotten about it until I got a call from Janeil at 6:03 p.m. Amid all the screeching and squealing I was barely able to make out the words, "I passed! I passed!" Suffice to say, she was over the moon, as was I. It was a wonderful experience I hope never to repeat again. Sometimes in life, like on your road test, you've got to show people so they, too, can see and believe.

XI.

More than anything, I think this is the role of every congregation. To show people who, like Thomas, simply will not believe before first seeing for themselves the resurrected Christ alive and well and at work in the world through the actions of

his body the church. Because, as we all know and as we all have experienced for ourselves, by seeing there is believing.

Every single one of us should be proud of *our* efforts, in revitalizing this church. It looks good from the outside, feels good on the inside, it is doing great good in the community and world. It has truly become a place where everyone is welcome to come and hear and share in the Good News: that each of us is loved as the child of God we've been created to be.

XI.

We certainly aren't perfect, but we *are* a pretty authentic and caring congregation. Moreover, we persist in slogging it out every week, month and year, managing to do so very much with what often amounts to slightly too little. The simple truth is, like Thomas, people won't believe it until they see it; until they see the light burning brightly, and the test results posted. Which is fine, and as it should be, because Thomas wasn't asking for anything more than what Jesus had already given the rest of the disciples. The chance to see so that *they* might believe.

XII.

Last week we all gathered here and proclaimed that Christ is Alive! Just speaking the words, however, simply isn't enough. We humans need to *see* that Christ is alive in order to believe it. *You* have needed to see it in me, *I* have needed to see it you, and now, the world needs to see it in *us*. And this, my friends, is the only thing in life about which there is no doubt. So, we gather here each week as this church to show that Christ is alive, so that by seeing it in us others may come to believe as well. Amen.