

John 20:19-31
Easter 2

Gail L. Miller
April 19, 2020

I wonder... Did Thomas have FOMO? You know, Fear Of Missing Out – FOMO. It's why our kids need to be online and connected all the time – so they don't miss out on anything going on with their friends. Or why some kids participate in EVERY activity they can, so they don't miss out....

I have FOMO – and I remember having it when I was a kid. And no phrase sets off my FOMO more than, “You had to be there!” Because, obviously, I wasn't!

I find that - try as I might – I can't match someone else's passion and excitement for something, when I myself was not there with them. I can be happy for them to have seen the spectacular sunset or experienced the amazing meal, but if I wasn't there.... it's not my experience.

And so I wonder about Thomas – did he have FOMO? How did he feel when his friends said, “While you were out, we saw Jesus – alive! You just had to be there!” Ugh... We don't know why he wasn't there; he just wasn't. And so, he has to take his friends' word for it when they tell him that Jesus – who is supposed to be dead – is alive!

I also wonder if Thomas was given the same advice my father gave to me, "Believe none of what you hear and only half of what you see."

Because as much as he might want to believe his friends, he can't! He needs to see for himself: "Unless I see, I will not believe." And you know, there's an admirable honesty here. You've got to respect someone who doesn't just go along with the crowd.

But then, a week later, when the disciples gathered again, Thomas was with them, and Jesus speaks directly to him, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but instead believe."

When Thomas has his encounter with the risen Christ, I'm not sure that disbelief is necessarily the issue. But rather, perception is. Although "doubting Thomas" is the name we give to anyone displaying skepticism, Thomas isn't so much a doubter as he is an empiricist. He needs evidence. His laboratory mind-set keeps clouding his perception.

Thomas wants proof. And in the end, what he ends up with is – presence – Jesus' presence. Only after Jesus' presence then, does his perception change. Because then Thomas proclaims one of the great confessions of the New Testament: "My Lord and my God!"

Notice that Thomas does not actually touch Jesus' hand and side. The invitation by Christ is enough, and he believes by seeing. No more FOMO for Thomas, he has seen for himself! Here we have the one most skeptical of the resurrection, proclaim not only the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, but also its ultimate meaning - that Jesus was and is – God Himself.

And with his newfound understanding comes a fresh blessing for successive generations. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," says Jesus. And that's us! Because, no, we have not had the privilege the disciples had of seeing Jesus alive from the dead, nor of having our faith jumpstarted in the extraordinary way Thomas did.

Ours is a faith based on the words of others. And the Bible is the first and best place to hear from those who've seen him. But, blessed are they who, without having had Thomas' experience, share Thomas' faith!

What this tells me – tells us – is that we don't have to see him in order to believe in him. The old adage, "Seeing is believing" has been reversed. Now you believe first. And then, you see. It is now belief that gives us the vision to see things differently. When you believe in Jesus and his resurrection – you'll begin to see resurrections all over the place!

And so I prefer to call him "Faithful Thomas" instead of "Doubting Thomas."

There is a compelling photo of the Warsaw Ghetto from WWII, which shows these words scratched on a ghetto wall by a young Jew:

I believe in the sun, even if it does not shine.
I believe in love, even if I do not feel it.
I believe in God, even if I do not see him.

To which the Christian can add,

I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, even if I do not see him.
I believe that the Risen Christ is my Lord and my God, even if I do not see him.

Blessed are they who are honest about their doubts, who know and struggle with their limitations, who acknowledge their needs and have the courage to ask Jesus to meet, love, and rescue them where they are.

This last beatitude that the Bible records was not spoken just to Thomas or the other disciples. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" is addressed to those who had not yet been born. It is spoken to us.

The relationship between seeing and believing is experience; the relationship between not seeing and yet believing is faith.

And our faith grows from hearing the word of God – hearing the Good News that is so compelling we can't help but join Thomas in exclaiming, "My Lord! My God!" Faith has its own sight, which is not confined to the ways of the world or to earthly experiences.

My faith grew this week when I read the story of the Knol family. Nancy, the mom, suggests that perhaps the biggest curse from Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, was the fact that what had been whole became fragmented, and that God no longer "walked in the garden in the cool of the day" with Adam and Eve.

She writes:

It has often been said that a single, important event has a way of dividing our lives into two categories—before and after. In the case of our family, this important event was most unwelcome—our second child, Adam was diagnosed with a childhood cancer called “Wilm’s Tumor.” His illness changed our lives dramatically.

Life revolved around doctor appointments, surgeries, hospital visits, and desperately trying to find some semblance of “normal” for the sake of Adam and our two other children. So a wiggly tooth, or learning to ride a bike, or a trip to the beach or reading a book together became spectacular—far more noteworthy and delightful than they would have been in the absence of the shadow of death. My husband hoped for a cure—I have to confess that when I heard the word “cancer” I did not expect a happy ending.

Just moments before his death, Adam regained consciousness. He opened his eyes WIDE and said, “I see EVERYTHING! I see EVERYTHING!” And we have wondered so often since: What did he see? We will not know until it is our turn to go Home, but I would like to think that Adam saw a garden, glorious and colorful beyond our imagining, and standing in the middle of it – the Tree of Life, and God Himself reaching out his hand to my beloved son, Adam, in the cool of the day. (Perspectives blogpost, April 4, 2018)

I believe her - I didn't have to be there. Because of Nancy, I believe, and I believe again, that Christ was raised and will raise each of us. That's Nancy's witness... But there are Nancy's all over the place. Including among you.

And whatever your resurrection story is - I didn't need to be there - I believe you. And because of you I believe, and I believe again, that Christ was raised and will raise all of us.

When we have deeply moving experiences like that we need to share them – because...

Blessed are those who have NOT seen and yet have come to believe!

There's a hymn about Thomas which we won't sing this morning, but I'd like to close by reading a couple of the verses:

The vision of his skeptic mind was keen enough to make him blind
 To any unexpected act too large for his small world of fact.
 May we, O God, by grace believe and thus the risen Christ receive,
 Whose raw, imprinted palms reached out and beckoned Thomas from his doubt.
 (Thomas Troeger)

So tell of your doubts, your skepticism, not necessarily with an eye for receiving proof but rather watch for Christ's presence. Because, you don't have to be THERE, or anywhere. In fact, it doesn't matter where you are.

Because if we're not going to believe by seeing - then it will be by other means... hearing, loving, forgiving, caring, receiving, sharing....

You had to be there? No - you have to be here! To hear from Thomas, and Nancy, and each other. So that you too can believe, and believe again, that...
 Christ is risen - He is risen indeed. Alleluia and Amen!