

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Seeing is believing. It's a phrase that we've all heard at one time or another. I often think of this phrase when I read the resurrection narratives, especially from John's gospel.

Today's gospel text is a continuation of the resurrection narrative in John. The text begins with Mary going to the tomb to find that the stone had been rolled away. She went and got Simon Peter and the other disciple to come and look at the tomb. They went to the tomb and saw the linen wrappings and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. They saw the empty tomb and went home. Mary remained weeping. Two angels were in the tomb where Jesus' body once laid. They asked Mary why she was weeping. She told the angels that they had taken her Lord. She turned around and saw Jesus, but did not recognize him until he said her name. Mary was thrilled to see Jesus. Jesus asks Mary not to hold onto him because he will ascend to the Father, to his God and her God. Jesus asked Mary to go and tell the disciples that Jesus will ascend to the Father. Mary went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord.

When Mary found the empty tomb, this was the first of many gradual steps in revealing the resurrection of Jesus. Peter and the other disciple went to see the empty tomb when Mary reported that Jesus' body was not there. After seeing the empty tomb, Peter and the other disciple believed what Mary had said. They may have left the tomb with anxiety and expectation of hope to see the resurrected Jesus.

Jesus' appearance to Mary was another step in revealing the resurrection. The next step was Mary going to the disciples to share that she had seen the risen Lord.

The text continues with Jesus appearing to the disciples behind locked doors. Jesus came and stood among them and said Peace be with you. He then showed the disciples his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus. Jesus then gave the disciples the Holy Spirit and told them that if they forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and if they retained the sins of any, they are retained.

Unfortunately for Thomas he missed Jesus' appearing. Thomas doubted that the other disciples had seen the Lord. He wasn't going to believe that Jesus rose from the dead until he saw the mark of the nails and touched his side.

A week later, Jesus appeared to the disciples a second time. Jesus told Thomas to touch his hands and side and not to doubt, but believe. Thomas replied, My Lord and my God! Jesus answered him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

That same day that Mary saw Jesus, he appeared to the disciples. The doors were locked. We don't know how Jesus appeared to the disciples. He revealed himself to them and gave them the Holy Spirit. He sent the disciples out into the world to carry on his ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation. Now, the disciples began to understand what Jesus had been trying to prepare them for...the ministry of sharing the good news of his life, death, and resurrection to the world.

And now we get to Thomas who was separated from the twelve when Jesus appeared the first time. It's easy to look at Thomas and see doubt. Hence, we've all heard Thomas called doubting Thomas. Jesus appears to the disciples again and singles out Thomas. Thomas acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and his God. The narrative about Thomas opens up the resurrection

story for all of us. Like Thomas, we missed the first resurrection appearance of Jesus. We, like Thomas, and all of the disciples are witnesses to the resurrection. The gospel of John portrays belief, not just something someone sees or believes in, but something that one has an experience with; a direct encounter with what one believes in.

We live in a post-resurrection world and yet are witnesses to God's love and promises. Where do we see God? Where do we experience God in our daily lives? How do we carry on the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Answers to these questions will vary from person to person. Some may say that they see and experience God in the creation that surrounds them. Others may see God in their relationships with family and friends.

God can be seen in community. We carry on different ministries with the people we interact with in our daily lives. Paul Nancarrow, rector of Saint George's Episcopal Church in St. Louis Park, MN and canon theologian of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota states:

“Belief” in John’s sense always includes some element of experience, some direct encounter with the One in whom the believer believes. For post-Thomas Christians, our encounter with the Risen One comes in and through the community of disciples who carry on Jesus’ ministry in Jesus’ name and by Jesus’ Spirit, rather than by the sight of the eyes and the touch of the hand. Yet our encounter with the Risen One is no less genuine for having been mediated through the believing community—as indeed Thomas’s encounter was mediated—and the blessing we receive in believing is no less than the Peace conferred upon the disciples by Jesus on Easter evening. As the community reenacts in its life the divine ideals first embodied in Jesus,

so its members witness and believe in the reality of Jesus' ongoing and eternal life, so its members continue to "have life in his name."

In our daily living and doing ministry together we witness to and believe in Jesus' ongoing and eternal life. We have life in Jesus' name and are witnesses to the resurrection. We may see and experience God in different ways, but as a community of believers God uses us to carry on the ministries that Jesus passed on to the first disciples. We are disciples who experience God in the ministries that we share.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.