

April 16, 2023
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

Needing to See in order to See

The good news of Easter is that people have seen the Lord. Jesus isn't gone. He is here. He is among us. Maybe we don't recognize him at first. But then suddenly we do. We see. We understand. We run to tell others that it has happened to us. We have seen the Lord. This is what happened to the disciples. They encountered him in gardens and locked rooms and on the road to other towns. They come back to tell one another: "Listen, I have seen Jesus. It's true, he is not dead; he is alive." They share their stories. And for the next few weeks, some of our elders will be sharing their own stories of how they have met the risen Christ. The good news of Easter is that we have seen the Lord. And when we share our stories of where we have seen the Lord, our community is strengthened. We remember the love and care of Jesus. We remember what mattered most to him and what matters most to us. Our stories help us realize that Jesus isn't gone. That the Spirit is still with us. That God is still at work. That our faith isn't something from long ago and far

away, dead and turned to stone. It is something living and active and present among us.

Having a long-ago faith might be easier. It might be simpler to worship a god made of stone or wood or Bible verses. Because it's hard to believe that anything divine or holy might be alive today. Surely, it would suffocate. Surely, we would kill it. Death is what is real. Fear and hate seem to be in charge. That's what the disciple Thomas thought. Thomas had loved Jesus. He had been so devoted to him. He would have followed him anywhere. Then they took Jesus and they crushed out everything he was in the worst way possible. Now, Thomas couldn't imagine believing in anything again. He couldn't imagine hoping again. Now the others were saying that they had seen the Lord. He just couldn't take their word for it. He needed proof. He needed to see Jesus in the flesh. And touch and feel things personally.

In the flesh is how we really know others. Being there. In our body as yourself. It's how we have that holy encounter. It's one of the reasons I take our youth group to the Hope Center. To be there in the flesh. To see people and talk to people who are unhoused and see that they are not

scary monsters. They are human beings, and we are there to meet them.

The last time we went, one of the clients had on a scarf that looked to be homemade, knitted with beautiful rainbow patterns. As he came through the line to get his goulash and green beans, I complimented him on how lovely his scarf was. “Oh, HERE, you can have it,” he said without hesitation. I convinced him to keep it because it complimented his eyes. But what a gesture. What a kind thing to do for a stranger like me. With that kind of love, I knew had seen the Lord.

That’s what Thomas wanted to see. He wanted to see Jesus in the flesh. He wanted to believe he was alive but only if he saw him alive for himself. And sometimes, that what’s WE need. We need proof. We need evidence. We aren’t trying to be rude. Or doubting just to doubt. We just don’t want to be fooled. We don’t want to have false hope. We want Jesus. And we know we will recognize him when we see him. We will know him by his mercy and forgiveness. We will know him by his love and welcome. We will know him by the scars on his hands and feet, the price he was willing to pay for all of it. We won’t accept anything less. We need proof, or we won’t believe.

We want to see. And yet, it is not easy. It's not easy to look at his body. It's not easy to see his pain and suffering. The scratches and scabs and scars left by selfless love. Love can take a toll. Like the raw faces of doctors and nurses who wore masks during COVID. Like the burns and blisters on the arms of those who cook in our cafeterias. Like the cracked and calloused hands of those who pick our fruits and vegetables. Like the scars sustained by first responders who risk their lives for others. Some scars are visible. But some scars are not. Some are the wounds of a tired spirit or a broken heart. The aches and pains of parenting, the frustrations and sorrows of school, the harried exhaustion of caregiving, the time given up in volunteering, the real loss of donating yourself, your blood, bone marrow, or kidney. All given for others, so love can be there in the flesh. So it can be real and present. Without gratitude or recognition. And it would do it again in a heartbeat.

In those real-life actions of love and care, I have seen the Lord. In the neighbors who make space and welcome for refugees. In retired people who volunteer at schools and libraries. In city council members who take phone calls and in school board members who speak up for fairness.

In those who run a 5K to support their school or give up a Saturday to pick up garbage. In all the people who get a little dirty, a little worn-out, a little less comfortable, a little more scuffed up, a little less wealthy, a little more rich in the things of heaven. I see you. I see you doing what you do. And in you, I have seen the Lord. I see God's love making things new. I see our Savior overcoming death and darkness. I see resurrection. And when I see it, I feel the presence of Jesus and his peace washes over me. Ah, there you are, Jesus. There is my proof. God is still there. And still above all and in all and through all.