

**Jesus said: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

After Easter Day service last Sunday a visitor said to me "You sounded so certain about Easter, that Jesus has risen from the dead, and that it guarantees your own resurrection. I don't have that certainty."

Maybe some of you sat through Easter thinking the same thing. "I am not sure either, but I wish was." We all have doubts, we all have moments of scepticism, and sometimes we have all wondered if we believe at all, and if we do, why? Maybe some of you know what that is like - not to believe at all, but perhaps wish you could.

Rock solid, committed, "ready to die for Jesus" faith was not the first response to Easter either. Luke's Gospel says the men didn't believe the women and wanted to see for themselves. Mark's Gospel says the women left the tomb trembling, bewildered and afraid. Matthew says they were happy but scared at the same time. And John tells us that on Easter evening, the first church service after Christ had risen was hardly a celebration. They were not belting out "He is risen" with the organ on full throttle! There was no Eric at the door welcoming visitors - the doors were bolted to keep people out! They were afraid they might be next in line for a crucifixion.

Faith, faith that Jesus had risen at all, and faith in the risen Jesus took time, different time for different disciples after Easter. And it took his appearances to them in the flesh to absolutely convince and convict them personally. The presence of Jesus changed the atmosphere of that first church service. **"Jesus came and stood among them and said: Peace be with you!" He showed his hands and side**". It was the same Jesus who died, who was now standing with them now. **"The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord"**. Of course they were, they could see him with their own eyes!

They tried to tell their mate Thomas, but he wasn't there when the others saw Jesus alive again. It's like Thomas missed church at Easter. We don't know why, all we know is he did not believe Jesus was alive – a good enough reason not to gather with believers on Sunday! No wonder many come to pay respects on Good Friday but never come to Easter day or other times during the year – perhaps they suspect Jesus is dead not alive. No point getting together with other Christians if Jesus is not going to be there. Church would only be a weekly memorial service, nothing more! Imagine celebrating Anzac Day 52 weeks of the year, it would soon wear off!

Thomas thought Jesus was dead and he refused to believe otherwise, unless - **"Unless I see the nail marks and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand in his side I will not believe it"**. A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. **Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"** The risen Jesus does not stand at the door and wait for them to invite him in to their lives, no he just comes into their lives and he invites faith from them. **He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** Thomas said to him, **"My Lord and my God!"** Then Jesus told him, **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

With Thomas, we often believe only what we can see too, rather than what we hear. Now we can't even believe what we see either, because not everything we see is real any more.

Sometimes there is less to what we can see – it is not real, but fake, and a deception. At other times there is more to something than what we can see. We underestimate it.

When people looked at Susan Boyle on “Britain’s got talent” last week no one believed in her. The audience laughed when she said she wanted to be a singer. A 47 year old single unemployed church going cat owner with learning disabilities who looked after her elderly mum til she died – what could she possibly offer the world? She was condemned by what people could or could not see about her on the outside. The only people who believed in her were her church who knew her, who had heard her, and no one would have believed them if they had’ve tried to convince the world otherwise. No one believed, until she opened her mouth... Until they heard her words. Then there were no doubters this week, only admirers, and 20 million people around the world hit Youtube this week to see and hear for themselves. This woman whom everyone had written off turned out to be the real thing. The proof came in listening to the words from her lips. In a way faith came from hearing.

Thomas doubted Jesus, the risen Jesus he had not seen, and the Jesus who was now standing there in front of him! He wanted more proof even than what he could see. He wanted to see the scars of Good Friday before he would believe it was the same Jesus. Who could blame him for that – I’m glad he asked for proof. I don’t want an illusion or imagined faith. Jesus invited him to see but still called for faith, belief, trust. We don’t know if Thomas looked at the scars on Jesus or not. All we know is he was called to believe even without seeing and told that is a blessed thing. His faith moved from being based on proof and experience to being based on the word of Jesus. That’s what we are called to – believe without seeing. Believe on the basis of his word and the word of eye witnesses. John writes: **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name”**

John’s Gospel simply ends by saying the word is enough for faith. You don’t have to look further - dig up an empty tomb, or even see the scars in Jesus hands and feet. Ultimately our faith is not in proving resurrections but in a person, the person of the living risen Lord Jesus. That’s where Thomas ended up, not saying “wow resurrections are possible” but saying **“my Lord and my God”**. Jesus challenged him and us: **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

That same gift of faith is ours Jesus says, not by seeing his scars but listening to and trusting his word. Faith, not just “hope so”, “maybe” faith, but convicted faith, certain faith, comes from hearing the word of Jesus not necessarily seeing him. I couldn’t prove to the person who questioned me on Easter Day how I could talk with certainty about the resurrection of Christ and my own resurrection. All I could do was point to the words of Jesus and about Jesus and give witness to the difference it made to me..

If you are struggling with faith, don’t think about faith, don’t long to see. Close your eyes and listen to his words, the words of the risen Christ. **“Peace be with you”, “Receive the Holy Spirit”, “I am with you always”, “Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved”**. Listen to Christ singing to you his song of love and forgiveness and eternal life. Hear his words in scripture, listen to the eyewitnesses and first hearers. Listen to the voice of the church over the centuries, people who have believed the word and discovered the reality of Easter without seeing. Faith is not seeing, it is faith. It may be “blind faith” because we can’t see the risen Christ, but it’s not deaf faith, because Easter faith comes from hearing, not seeing, hearing the words of the one the world rejected but God raised up for us.