

## Believing and Seeing

John 20:24-31; Romans 10:14-17

Sunday, April 7, 2024, The Second Sunday of Easter at the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- **Introduction**

Today's reflection is called "Believing and Seeing" and it notes that the order of faith and trust that our Lord Jesus prefers is the opposite of what is commonly done in the world, and what probably should be done in the world. There is, after all, a place for doubt in life. There's a story about a circus couple trying to convince some skeptical social workers that they can provide a good home for an adopted child. They almost succeeded. It goes like this:

**a joke about doubts**

A husband and wife who worked for the circus went to an adoption agency. The social workers there raised doubts about their suitability. The couple then produced photos of their 50-foot motor home, which was clean and well maintained and equipped with a beautiful nursery. The social workers then raised concerns about the education a child would receive while in the couple's care. "We've arranged for a full-time tutor who will teach the child all the usual subjects along with French, Mandarin, and computer skills." Then the social workers expressed concern about a child being raised in a circus environment. Our nanny will be a certified expert in pediatric care, welfare, and diet." The social workers were finally satisfied. They asked, "What age child are you hoping to adopt?" "It doesn't really matter ... as long as the kid fits in the cannon."

<https://upjoke.com/doubt-jokes>

Sometimes being doubtful is wise.

- **Set the Stage**

Doubting Thomas actually had a point. Cf. Missouri-the "show me" state.

In the days after the Resurrection, pretty much everybody had trouble believing that Jesus had risen from the dead, but Thomas was the last one. He wasn't there when the Lord appeared to the other disciples, and he had maintained that he needed to touch the wounds in his hands and side. It was actually reasonable, though he was defying everyone else by this time. Yet, the Lord honored his request and made another visit, offering to show the wounds in his hands and side (and feet). Thomas, overwhelmed, confesses his allegiance to Jesus and Jesus responds by telling him that the people who believe before they see are blessed. According to ancient church tradition, Thomas was church planting in India when he died a martyr's death. But why is believing better than seeing?

- **Main Point**

Believing comes before seeing with Jesus because He is trustworthy, and the Scriptures are powerful and life-changing. You are blessed for believing before seeing. (def. blessed) Perhaps the reason that, in the case of Jesus, believing is better than seeing is because of the long record of the trustworthiness. Scripture is filled with episodes in which the Lord proves true even when people prove false. In the verses after our main text, the Apostle John asserts that the record exists for this purpose and that Jesus did more signs to prove Himself than could be recorded. Perhaps "believing" is a form of seeing that is heard and read and somehow conveys power that transforms. We know in the Creation account in Genesis that God can speak things into existence, so great power can be transferred by words. In Romans 10:17 the Apostle Paul wrote

“so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Perhaps believing, when it comes to Christ, is a form of seeing that is done with the mind and the soul and goes deeper than believe based on sight alone. Here’s an example in the story of a young mother who was raised as an atheist.

- **The Atheist Whose Mind Was Opened**

There’s this atheist I wrote about once who grew up in an atheist home. Her bedtime readings from her dad were from the book *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan. As a young adult she enjoyed debating Christians. She said it made her feel intellectually superior. Clearly materialism was the only way a thinking person could look at the world.

Then she had a baby.

She shared the moment her mind began to open. In her own words:

‘What is this baby?’ And I thought, ‘Well, from a pure atheist materialist perspective, he is a collection of randomly evolved chemical reactions.’ And I realized if that’s true, [then] all the love that I feel for him, that it’s all nothing more than chemical reactions in our brains. And I looked down at him, and I realized: that’s not true. It’s not the truth. And I didn’t know where to go from there but that’s what prompted me to start researching topics of spirituality.

Eventually she came upon some of the great Christian thinkers: Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Descartes, people who wrote these intellectually rigorous books. What these church fathers thought about the Bible and the Bible itself made her begin to think something explosive and world changing happened in first century Palestine. Eventually she became a Jesus follower. (See [Lifelong Atheist Jennifer Fulwiler Tells of Her Life of Scientific Materialism, and Christianity](https://godrunning.com/2020/09/19/why-believing-without-seeing-is-a-great-idea/))

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- **Application**

The application is that time with Scripture is precious and life-changing. People exposed to what is written in Scripture become different people sometimes. I remember a speech given at a Youth Group convention given by a man who was once a terrorist in the Middle East, driven by a radical form of Islam, but since had become a Christian evangelist. He described reading the Scriptures for the first time, and that the experience was like an “atom bomb” exploding in his soul. It was that powerful. Read Scripture or get Scripture on an MP3 file and listen to it. It leads toward believing that is greater than seeing.

- **Conclusion**

Years after this encounter between Thomas, the disciples and Jesus, Peter wrote in his first epistle and wonder and value of the gift of faith without seeing.

1 Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” They never saw, yet they believed, and that was better.