

Easter 2 (B)
April 19, 2009
Text: John 20:19-31

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So, I was wondering what you think. If I were to play a little game of one-on-one basketball against, say, LaMarcus Aldridge, I wonder whether you think one or the other of us might have an advantage. Yeah, that's sort of what I thought too. There are some situations where it seems so clear that there is an advantage—one way or another. For example, we might think that when it comes to believing in Jesus, the original disciples, who followed Jesus and listened to his teaching—it seems clear that they would have an incredible advantage over us when it comes to believing in Jesus. After all, they were there. They were witnesses to everything that happened. Especially because they saw Jesus raised from the dead—it seems like it would have to make the sort of difference that would make their experience of faith completely different from ours. Especially for someone like Thomas—Jesus invites him to put his finger in the nail prints, to put his hand in the spear wound in Jesus' side.

The surprise, then, is that our gospel writer seems to be telling us that seeing—and even touching—Jesus is mostly irrelevant when it comes to believing in him. When Mary Magdalene met Jesus on Easter morning, at first she thought he was the gardener. But it's only when Jesus spoke to her that she recognized him and reached out to touch him. And in our reading for today—it was a week later when Thomas finally saw Jesus. Thomas had said he required real proof to be convinced—to see and touch Jesus' wounds. But then Jesus spoke to him, and without touching, Thomas responded with a deep and profound confession of faith—"My Lord and my God." Their journey to believing wasn't all that simple, even with the advantage of being there. I wonder then—what does our journey to believing look like? How do we hear Jesus as the living Lord speak to us and call us to faith?

The Bible acknowledges that it is different for us, that our experience isn't the same as theirs, that it might be hard for us to bridge that gap—between those Marcus Aldridges of the first generation of believers to little old you and me. But listen how God's word bridges that gap, speaking a special word of blessing to us. Jesus says to us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Blessed are you. You have not seen, yet you have come to believe.

Believing in Jesus isn't just believing that he existed long ago. There were lots of Jesus' contemporaries who were certain Jesus existed, but they rejected everything he stood for. And believing in Jesus isn't just going to church or being a religious person. Through far too much of its history, the official

church has also rejected Jesus and everything he stood for—by its support for crusades and inquisitions and witch hunts.

Believing in Jesus is, first of all, believing Jesus—believing him when he says he has come to show us our true life, the life that God intends for us; believing that it's all about compassion and forgiveness and generosity; believing that love is the most important thing in how we treat each other, and how we treat our neighbors. Believing in Jesus means welcoming him and his words into our hearts and lives, so that his Spirit is alive and active through us; so that his way of life becomes visible in the way we live our lives; so that his work continues to be done through our hands. And blessed are you, who have not seen, yet have come to believe.

It turns out that being physically close to Jesus, to be able to see him or touch him, conveys no significant advantage for believing in Jesus. And living 2000 years later, and half a world away from Jesus' homeland of Israel, is no disadvantage either—because Jesus is risen from the dead and is present to speak to us through the words of scripture; present to touch our lives with his forgiveness through the meal of Holy Communion; present to meet us in prayer and worship.

It turns out that our seeing or touching Jesus is less important. The most important thing is being touched and changed by Jesus, because believing in Jesus means being open to him and to his word, which means that our lives will change. Jesus' message will transform us. It will make us see the world in new ways. It will open our hearts to neighbors in need. And it's a life-long process—a process of being converted from a way of life that is all about us and what we want, to becoming part of Jesus' work of love to remake the world, to heal it and make it whole.

For me, that means slowly being converted from Aaron-ism, the religion in which I am the center of everything, so that I can welcome Jesus and his way of life and his vision for the world, in which love is making everything new. And for you, that means being converted from Mark-ism or Linda-ism, or... you get the idea. Each of us is being drawn, by the power of Jesus' love, another step further along the way toward the goal God has in mind for us. And at each and every step along the way, Jesus is supporting us with the gift of his Spirit—inspiring us, encouraging us, giving us strength and vision, and preparing us for the next step.

We are all at different places along the way of this journey. One of the things I love about our gospel story for today is the place of Thomas in the story. When Thomas said he couldn't believe in Jesus without some convincing proof, the other disciples didn't toss him out on his ear. He was still with them a week

later, so that Jesus could speak a word of peace to him, so that Jesus could call him to believe. That's the sort of community we are too. We're a mixed bag. Some of us believe with our whole heart, and some of us struggle with the Christian message. Some of us can see in our lives signs that God is at work, and some of us know that we still have a long way to go. And in God's love there is room for every one of us, regardless of how far along the journey we are.

To you, wherever you are in the journey of faith, Jesus speaks powerful words of blessing: Blessed are you. You have not seen, and yet you believe. Blessed are you. Thanks be to God. Amen