

**On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”** <sup>20</sup> **After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

<sup>21</sup> **Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** <sup>22</sup> **And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.** <sup>23</sup> **If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

<sup>24</sup> **Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.** <sup>25</sup> **So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”**

**But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”**

<sup>26</sup> **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!”** <sup>27</sup> **Then 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.”**

<sup>28</sup> **Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

<sup>29</sup> **Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

<sup>30</sup> **Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.** <sup>31</sup> **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. (NIV 84)**

Expanded Outline for John 20:19-31. Easter 2. April 15, 2012.

Theme: Blessed are You.

1. Blessed with faith, though you haven't seen him.
2. Blessed through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You have heard some pretty outlandish statements before—statements that are hard to believe at face value. “It’s the funniest movie ever.” “It’s the most beautiful place in the world.” “There can’t possibly be

an uglier dog on the face of the earth.” You could go on and on. And what is your usual reaction? “I’ll have to see it to believe it.” We are skeptical by nature. We are always a little doubtful in our minds until we see it for ourselves. Experience dictates it. We know from the past that people lie, exaggerate, or are just plain wrong. So you tend to doubt something until you’ve seen it for yourself—after all seeing is believing.

But that can get you in trouble. Do you have to see Jesus to believe in him? No, you don’t. Today you see that you are blessed. For you have not seen Jesus, yet you believe in him. For Christ has brought you to faith through the gospel.

Our text for today takes place during the evening of the first Easter. By this time, the reports had started to trickle in. The women who visited the tomb and who had talked to Jesus and spread the message to the disciples. Mary Magdalene also would have reported that she saw Jesus and talked to him. Peter and John ran to look at the tomb, and Jesus wasn’t there. Later Jesus appeared to Peter. Then in the afternoon Jesus appeared to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. And after he left them, they went and told the disciples.

That is four appearances that we know of. And each time—whether it was the women, the Emmaus disciples, or Peter, they went back and told others. They were told multiple times that Jesus had risen from the dead. But they weren’t convinced. They still weren’t sure what it all meant. Instead of rejoicing that Jesus lives, they spent that night in fear. They were hiding behind closed doors. They were afraid of the Jewish leaders. They thought they might be killed like Jesus.

As the disciples were gathered together in that locked room, Jesus suddenly appeared and stood among them. And he said to them, **Peace be with you.** But they didn’t quite understand what was going on. Luke tells us that the disciples thought they had seen a ghost. Jesus assured them that it was truly him. He showed them the marks in his hands, feet, and side and ate some fish in front of them. And when they saw Jesus and heard his word, they finally believed. John tells us, **The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** They didn’t believe until they saw. Yet, they didn’t believe at first. But finally they saw and believed—seeing was believing for them.

So they did what any believer does. They went and told others about Christ. They spread the message about his resurrection. They especially told Thomas. For Thomas wasn't with the other disciples that Easter night. For whatever reason he was gone. So they told him that they saw and spoke to Jesus. They he showed them his hands, side, and feet.

But Thomas didn't believe them. He didn't see Jesus. He didn't see the marks on his hands, feet, and side. He didn't hear him speak or eat the fish. And he wasn't going to believe unless he saw Jesus for himself. **Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.** For Thomas seeing was believing. And if he didn't see Jesus, he wasn't going to believe.

We have a tendency to look down on Thomas. But that is the way we all are by nature. We are skeptical. If we don't see something we often don't believe it. Or if something can't be logically explained to us, then it must not be true. That is why we doubt—we haven't seen or understand. And Satan uses that to call into question God's Word. How can someone die and rise again? How can he simply appear and disappear? How could he know the thoughts and feelings of his disciples? And our reason screams out, "It is not possible—it cannot be true." Our skeptical nature wants to reject it—unless there ample proof.

The Sunday after Easter, the disciples, this time with Thomas, were once again in a locked room. And once again, Jesus suddenly appeared among them and said, **Peace be with you.** Then he went specifically to Thomas and told him to put his fingers in the holes in his hands, and his hands in the wound in his side. It was right then and there that Thomas believed. Seeing was believing for Thomas. Now, we mostly remember Thomas for his unbelief. "Doubting Thomas" is as he's known. But Thomas actually gave one of the greatest confessions of faith of all time. He said to Jesus, **My Lord and my God.** Thomas knew that Jesus' resurrection proved that he truly was God. He rose from the dead and showed himself to the ruler of sin, death, and the devil.

And yet, Thomas didn't believe until he saw Jesus. So Jesus told him, **Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those**

**who have not seen and yet have believed.** Thomas doubted until he saw. But there are many who believe without seeing. And that is the case for you. You didn't see Jesus. And yet, you believe. You believe that he died to take away your sins. And that through his resurrection he proved that he is our God and Savior. You believe that he rose from the dead, even though you have never seen him.

And therefore you are blessed. God has blessed you with faith. He has defeated your skeptical reason. You believe in something that makes absolutely no sense. You didn't demand proof. You don't need to see any evidence. You don't need to see to believe.

It is the one thing in your life that you are not skeptical about. And it's not as if you are stupid or gullible. You don't believe everything you read, hear about, or even seen. It is simply the one thing that you don't need to proof to believe.

But the question is, why do you believe? Why is the gospel different? Why do you need proof to believe in most things, while the gospel doesn't need proof? Because it's the gospel. And the Holy Spirit works through the gospel. Where the gospel is, there are Christians. For the Holy Spirit uses the gospel to bring people to faith. And he keeps and strengthens faith through that same gospel. Through it we believe in something that makes no sense. There may be no evidence to back it up, in fact there may be evidence that point against it. But we still believe it—all because of the Holy Spirit.

It is all about his work through the gospel. Whatever form that gospel may come in. Whether it is the Word, the Lord's Supper, or the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace. He is able to create faith in the mind of a little infant through the waters of baptism. He forgives our sins, strengthens our faith and much more through Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper. His Word is a powerful and effective weapon—it pierces the heart and brings to faith. It never returns to him empty. That is why we gather around the means of grace. That is why the gospel is so prominent in our lives. It is the focus of our worship services and Bible classes. It is something we gather around at home or with other Christians. We strive baptize all and to partake of the Lord's Supper regularly and often. For we know the power of the gospel

But that power can be easy to forget. If the power of the gospel is so great, why isn't everyone a Christian? Why do we struggle to get 50-60 people here are Sunday? You would think that we'd have a lot more members. You'd think that all our members would be here every week. So we are tempted to do something to convince someone the gospel is true. We search for proof. We look for evidence that what the Bible says is true. We hope that Noah's ark is found sometime soon. We examine rock formations and other things that point to a world-wide flood. We try to find the tomb where Jesus was put in. Or some other evidence that Jesus existed. Or we love the books that claim that someone has been to heaven and back.

Now these things are fine, in and of themselves. But not when we put our faith in them over against Scripture. And that's what we may have the tendency to do. We may believe because of outside evidence. Perhaps we were skeptical, until somebody found something. And that proved it for us. We doubted, until we saw.

But ultimately, this will not work. For nothing other than the gospel can create or increase faith. Believing because of outside factors means that you are believing in something outside of Scripture. Those things are fine to back up what Scripture says. But we don't believe God's Word because of them. And if we do, our faith will ultimately fall. For there will always be more evidence that will get us to doubt. And we can't believe in something that isn't the gospel.

Praise the Lord that we have the gospel. We have the Words of Christ recorded for us in Scripture. We have the Words that brought the disciples and Thomas to faith. For it is through the gospel that they believed. And the same goes for us. We were brought to faith through the gospel. It wasn't through outward means. It wasn't because we saw Jesus. It was because of the gospel we heard. It was through the waters of baptism.

That is the purpose of the gospel. And not just the gospel of John, but the gospel of Jesus Christ found throughout the Bible. **These (words) 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 wrote his gospel so that we could see that Jesus is God. He wrote it so that we may be brought to faith. He wrote it so that we could have eternal life. For all those who believe through the work of the Holy

Spirit working through the Word will be saved and will live in heaven forever. They were brought to faith not because the gospel makes sense. It wasn't because there was evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. It was through the gospel through which the Holy Spirit works. It was through the gospel that all are brought to faith and kept in the one true faith.

It is through the gospel that we have the peace of Christ's resurrection. Three times in our text, Jesus said, **Peace be with you.** That is, the peace that message of the resurrection brings. Peace knowing that Jesus is our Lord and God. Peace knowing Our God died to remove our sins. And he rose from the dead so we can rise too. Peace knowing that we don't need to see to believe. Peace that all believers will live with him in heaven forever.

We are skeptical creatures by nature. In most cases, we must see to believe. But that is not the case with Christ and his resurrection—or the rest of God's Word for that matter. That is the power of the gospel. For Christ—we don't need to see to believe. But we know that Jesus is the Son of God, and that we may eternal life in his name. Amen.