

## **“Looking Hard”**

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April 3, 2016

### **Scripture:**

#### **John 20:19-31 (NRSV)**

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When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear (of the Jews), Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## **The Sermon:**

Did you know hawks can see infrared?

That whales can communicate with other whales, across hundreds of miles of ocean by their songs?

That elephants feel the vibrations of other elephants stomping, thirty miles apart?

Did you know that we have glasses you can buy that allow a colorblind person to see in color?

That a cochlear implant will give a deaf person the ability to hear sound?

We should appreciate our senses. We should be in awe of the sensory capacity of so many, and so varied, creatures all over the earth!

It is something we are trained-in from our youth; the empirical process...don't just believe it because I said so, go and test it by using your eyes, your hands, your ears...to see how it works.

That is the fun premise behind the guys who blow things up, and blow things apart on the show, "Mythbusters"!

We can trust our senses. (Most of the time, we won't get into the ways our eyes fool us, or our senses can be wrong.)

Certainly the risen Jesus is fully in-tune with the need to trust our senses. He was fully human, like you and me.

So, he shows the disciples his hands and his side. And after the disciples have seen with their own eyes, and trusted their own senses, then they rejoice to be with Jesus, again.

And as if that is not enough, he breathes on them. There is something very intimate about being close enough to feel someone's breath on you; on your skin, on your face.

Jesus is that close to them.

Who could possibly deny the reality of someone whose breath you can feel moving the little hairs on your arm?

Yes, Jesus is with them. And he breathes on them; using a word not often found in Scripture...it is the word for breath that is used in the book of Genesis when God breathes into human beings to give them life. And it is the word that is used in Ezekiel when God breathes life into the valley of dry bones.

Jesus is breathing God life into his sad and frightened disciples. They were sad and shrunken shadows of the lively people they had been before his crucifixion. They really needed the breath of God breathed into them!

And so it is...the breath of God and the words of Jesus are bestowed on them and they come alive...they come alive as the followers of Jesus, as the first members of the Jesus movement that will sweep through the world and change our planet and human life in astonishing ways as the years roll on.

And what are the words of Jesus? "Peace". "Love as I have loved you". This is the commission they receive. If they can show the love and peace of God to others, then others will receive this message.

And so it is, before the Pentecost scenes from the book of Acts, the risen One comes to the disciples and fills them with life and Spirit, on Easter evening!

Spirit is there, all the time. Spirit doesn't wait, though we celebrate the Spirit of God on Pentecost, 40 days after Easter.

And if you aren't there in one moment of joy and celebration, then like Thomas (who is no more of a doubter than any of the other disciples!) you can still count on receiving it when you do show up.

Thomas isn't a bad disciple...he is just like the others, just like them he wants Jesus to show him his wounds. And so Jesus does...he shows up and gives Thomas exactly what he needs; verification through his senses.

And then, Thomas gives one of the strongest declarations of faith in the whole gospel; he recognizes that Jesus is both Lord and God.

Jesus is seen in his uniqueness as the firstborn of the dead, Son of God and Son of Mary, the One who is and was and will be, who died, rose, ascended to the right hand of God and sits in power, until he comes again.

That is all from the gospel of John, (and the Nicene Creed).

It is the testimony of disciples who trusted their senses, who saw and felt and touched, and smelled the breath of Jesus breathed on them.

And who tell us now, across the generations and the years, that they can be trusted. Jesus has been raised by God, and he is not a ghost. This is not a mass hallucination (o please!)

Jesus has been raised, and they saw him, heard him, touched him.

Jesus has been raised, and the people of 2,000 years ago are not simpletons, are not naïve to the importance of listening to their senses...they tested him, and they found him, to be himself. And to be more than they had ever realized. Risen from the dead, deathless, changed and yet still himself.

So they tell us, to trust their witness. Trust their senses.

Become the believing people of hope and new life, they say.

Become the fearless people of love and service, mercy and justice.

Live your life in the model of Jesus, and in the model of the resurrected One; fearless, joyful, filled with Peace, and Spirit. Blessing all who follow, blessing all around you (vs 29b).

Those disciples did, and they changed their world. So can we. So can we.

Alleluia, Amen.