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Saint Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church
Dallas, TX

***BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET BELIEVE.* AMEN.**

Over the past week and a half, I've heard it said more than a few times: You'd have to see it to believe it. And who would have believed it without first having seen it? If one had listened to the pundits and prognosticators, the doubters and naysayers, all the so-called expert analysts and commentators for all their vast predictions and pontifications, one would never have believed it:

A small, generally unheard of liberal arts college in North Carolina, from a mid-major conference, ranked as a tenth seed, predicted to make only a respectable and modest showing and then to bow out gracefully in the first round of the tournament when the proverbial clock struck midnight. Disregard the nation's current longest win-streak. Discount the seemingly tireless, fluid and, I daresay, elegant movement on the court. Never mind the senior guard who leads the nation in assists or the youthful sophomore guard with the quick and devastating jump shot among a team of well-balanced and talented players. And let's ignore the athleticism, work ethic, sportsmanship, integrity and scholarship of these student athletes and the dedication of their coach. Forget about Gonzaga, Georgetown, Wisconsin.

Apparently, it had to be *seen* to be believed. For all, that is, except the Wildcat faithful. Goliaths and glass slippers, indeed! To quote the psalm from this morning: This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Truthfully, during my days at *that* generally unheard of and now *elite* liberal arts college I was taught to hone that tool of critical thinking to a razor-sharp edge on the whetstone of intellectual skepticism and doubt. I have learned not to believe everything I see, to uphold not taking everything at face value, not to be satisfied always with the generally accepted point of view, to pick things apart, to deconstruct, to assume that the truth on the surface is not the same truth at greater depth, with every "yes" to entertain a "but." I've banked my educational career and intellectual life on these very principals. I have the student debt to prove it.

We live in a sometimes cynical culture, mistrustful even. One might think that over eons and epochs after having been collectively and repeatedly duped, tricked, deceived and hoodwinked, humanity has become hardened against believing much of anything. Sometimes it seems like there has never been an age of faith, but rather generations upon generations of frustrated believers and doubters. As some of us have experienced, the world can treat faith as the paramount of folly, and doubt is put on a pedestal.

And lo and behold, here is our friend, Thomas.

We like to fault Thomas; it's true. And we're often quick to do it. It's *easy* to do it. He's all but become by-word, the Doubter, Doubting Thomas. But it's easier to pin it on Thomas rather than admit to ourselves our own doubts. I think most of us relate a little too well to Thomas for our own comfort. Perhaps when we read this passage in secret, we privately may whisper, "I'm with you Thomas." But publically we disparage him a bit.

If we do criticize Thomas, let it not be for his doubt per se, but rather for his missing the point. What Thomas wanted was proof. He wanted the empirical evidence of the resurrection on which he could base his belief. I will believe it, he says, when I see it. If anything, Thomas had the misfortune of being left out. For millennia, Christians have asked, what was Thomas doing while Jesus was appearing to the disciples? Maybe he was late; maybe we should call him Tardy Thomas. I worry sometimes that I would not so much be the disciple who would have doubted, but that I would be the disciple who would have been flaky enough to have missed seeing our Lord. I can just hear the other disciples say, "Dude! You missed it! It was so cool! Jesus appeared and he was all like 'Peace be with you.' It was awesome!"

I always want to vindicate Thomas, though. Perhaps the doubting is an integral part of understanding this passage, of understanding who Thomas is. But that isn't the only piece. It is also about understanding who we are. We may consider that there is more to this part of the story of Jesus' resurrection and, indeed, more to Thomas than just his doubting.

To me, Thomas is bold. When Lazarus dies and the disciples try to discourage Jesus from visiting Martha and Mary in Bethany because of the plot to kill him, Thomas declares to the others, "Let us go to Bethany that we might die with him." To me, Thomas has guts. Part of me says, of course Thomas said unless I put my finger in the mark of the nail and my hand in his side, I will not believe. Who wouldn't have said that? Well, not me, but not because I wouldn't have thought it, but because I would have been too cowardly to say it out loud. Not only does Thomas express the doubt we may sometimes have, he expresses the doubt we are sometimes too afraid to confess, too timid to explore. Maybe too often he speaks before he thinks—and if that's a mortal sin, we're all in trouble—but Thomas is willing to say something out loud that many of us might be thinking but unwilling to speak. Thomas takes a risk, I think. And there is nothing so risky, nothing which requires more boldness than to have faith.

I can also appreciate Thomas' passion, his desire to see face to face, the risen Lord, to be intimately reunited with his beloved teacher and friend. What faithful Christian does not have some of that passion? What we share in common with Thomas is that at this moment we have not yet seen the risen Lord. We must struggle with that same tension that Thomas did. I don't know about you, but I have sometimes had my doubts. I have had moments of Thomas-like obstinacy.

But what we can see from the story is that Thomas ended up seeing and experiencing more than he expected. Putting his finger in the mark of the nail and his hand in Jesus' side, Thomas doesn't merely say, "OK, I'm satisfied." He sees and knows Jesus in a radically different way. I don't know about you, but that is an experience after which I seek. Jesus shows Thomas his hands and his side to *prove*—no pun intended—that Thomas

needed no proof. And at this moment of profound revelation, Thomas declares, “my Lord and my God!”

Another not to be overlooked aspect of this passage is that Jesus sends the disciples. This is a story about our new life in the risen Lord. As my Father sent me, so I send you, Jesus tells his friends and disciples and us. Perhaps Jesus remark to Thomas is a little cutting; do you believe just because you have seen? But it speaks to the fact that this is not just about Thomas’ moving from doubt to faith, but about his taking his faith into the world to spread the gospel, to share his faith with others. In other words, this is where we enter the story.

Thomas shows us that seeing is not believing. In Peter’s first epistle he writes: “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” We have not seen, but we believe, and we strive to believe, that we might be perfected in our faith. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.” John writes that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples that are not written down. But these things are written so that those of us who were not there to see it, might believe it. Thomas saw so that through his testimony we might believe, and so believing, we shall one day see. Blessed are they who saw and believed for the sake of those who believe and have not yet seen. *Amen.*