

Seeing & Believing: Confirmation Sunday

[John 20:24-29](#)

April 30, 2017

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As I mentioned last week in worship, I recently had laser vision correction. Yes, I paid to have someone immobilize my eyes and shoot lasers into my corneas to cut and reshape them.

I know this is a very routine procedure now, but it's kind of bonkers when you think about it.

When I first told Todd I was having LASIK done, he said, "Well, those biblical images about sight and seeing are going to have a whole new resonance, aren't they?"

"I think you're right," I said. "There should be some sermon material in this."

And here it is, folks. It's been just about a week and I'm already thinking about perception in new ways.

Until now, I've always been profoundly nearsighted.

I first got glasses when I was five years old, and I still remember it vividly because it was such a revelation. I remember running around and looking at everything, taking my glasses off and putting them back on again and gasping in surprise each time because there was much more to the world than I had known.

It turned out, for example, that trees were not just smears of green. Trees had individual leaves on their branches, and with my new lenses, I could perceive that for the first time.

I remember my parents had this print of an 18th-century engraving of Harvard Square on the wall. And lo, where there had once been grey shadows, my glasses revealed a scene populated by buildings and people and horses and even a little dog. I could see the little dog!

The LASIK experience feels similarly profound to me. Obviously, I was able to see, just fine, with correction. But now, for the first time in over thirty years, I'm no longer completely and utterly dependent on very expensive, high-tech lenses. Before the procedure, my eye doctor said, "This will be life-changing for you." And I knew that, intellectually.

But as they say, seeing is believing.

That's what today's passage is all about, right? It's a familiar story: "Doubting" Thomas who refuses to believe in the resurrection until he sees the telltale marks from the nails in Jesus' hands and touches the gaping wound in his side.

Thomas wants direct contact with the violence that had been enacted on Jesus' own body. That's the only way Thomas could verify, to himself, that this miracle had truly come to pass.

And Jesus allows Thomas do it. He invites Thomas to do it.

In the classic King James translation of this passage, Jesus says to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side.”

What a gross, vulnerable, intense thing to do!

(Not unlike inviting someone shooting a laser into your eyeball.)

And Thomas is finally convinced, and then Jesus says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

I once found these words to be rather chiding in tone. It’s as if Jesus is scolding Thomas for needing this extra level of proof. As if Thomas’s faith isn’t good enough, isn’t real enough, isn’t pious enough, isn’t strong enough.

But let’s think about this. Let’s think about who Jesus’ real, intended audience is here.

We’re not watching a documentary about Jesus.

We’re hearing an ancient story, a myth, one that was told and retold verbally before it was even written down. And by the time it was written down, Jesus’ words aren’t really meant for this Thomas character.

No, when Jesus says, “Blessed are those who believe without seeing,” he’s speaking *to us about us*.

He’s speaking to people in the future, to anyone who has ever tried to understand *who* and *what* Jesus is. He’s speaking to anyone who has ever asked if Jesus is a God or a

messiah or prophet or a spiritual teacher or maybe just a really charismatic guy who got swept up in something bigger than anyone could've ever imagined—or maybe, somehow, all of the above.

The Anglican priest R.S. Thomas said this of Jesus: “His are the echoes we follow, the footprints he has just left.”

People have been following those footprints for two thousand years. Unlike the disciples, who were drawn by Jesus' presence, you might say that everyone else is pulled by his absence. To me, this is the essence of church: remembering, searching, waiting, and wondering about someone who is, fundamentally, a complete mystery.

That's not easy!

And yet Jesus tells us that we are blessed. We're blessed even though we may never have the definitive experience of Jesus that Thomas had. Even though we are separated by 2,000 years from our most sacred story.

Maybe Jesus is assuring us, across time and space, that we don't need to see him to experience God. Maybe Jesus is suggesting the reality of God can't be contained in one story. Thomas had *his* experience, his encounter with the Holy. We will have our experiences, and they probably won't look much like Thomas's and they won't look exactly like one another's.

And that's OK. It has to be OK. How could it be otherwise?

My hope for our confirmands—for everyone—is that you have rich, vivid experiences of life, experiences as real and vivid as Thomas touching Jesus' wounds, but in a way that

fits who each and every one of you really is. I hope that you find your own language to describe the Holy.

And by the “Holy,” I mean whatever it is that gives you comfort, whatever it is that challenges you, whatever it is that calls you to care for the world.

Whatever it is that gives you a sense that the universe is vast and complicated, letting you know that you are part of something bigger than yourself.

Whatever it is that helps you to trust, even when things are really hard, that somehow, somehow, everything *will be* all right.

My hope is that your encounters with the Holy help you see yourselves—and others—with clarity and compassion, and that you give yourselves permission to perceive things differently as you grow and change.

Really, my hope is that you realize trees aren’t just big green blobs but actually collections of little leaves, all moving together—however that metaphor may best translate into your own life!

And if nothing else, I hope you leave this place trusting—really trusting—that you are blessed and loved because of exactly who you are and how *you* see and believe.

Amen.