

Worship on Sunday, April 19, 2020

Scripture Readings:

[John 20:19-31 \(Click here to read\)](#)

[1 John 2:3-11 \(Click here to read\)](#)

[Worship Videos \(Click Here\)](#)

“Seeing is believing.” That is the thesis addressed in the scripture. And yet there seems to be a contradiction in the conclusions. Scripture sections are in disagreement over the value of such a motto for our personal faith.

In the gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples. But Thomas is not there to witness the risen Lord. And so Jesus returns later, only to find that he must offer physical evidence to the incredulous Thomas. Thomas responds with an affirmation of faith, but Jesus is not that impressed. “That is nice,” Jesus says to Thomas, “but how blessed are they who don’t need the proof.” This is clearly a commendation of a faith that does not require tangible exhibitions and demonstrations. Blessed are those who can believe without seeing.

The letter of John seems to say the opposite. The writer challenges the Christian to act in a manner befitting the faith. If they claim to be followers of the Christ, people of the light, then their lives should show it. Those who claim to be disciples of Jesus should act like it. Or else their proclamations are suspect. The authenticity of a person’s belief is verified by the visible behavior. Seeing is believing.

Two passages that speak about faith and trust. Are they contradictory? Is there a discrepancy? Both selections acknowledge two characteristics of humanity. As humans, we have two traits that affect the dynamics. We are untrustworthy. People are often dishonest, deceitful, duplicitous. That is a hard lesson garnered through unfortunate experience. We hope for integrity and we seek honesty, but too often they are illusory and elusive. Politicians promise, but seldom deliver. They betray the public trust. Fraud and corruption are so common that they are the norm. Leaders pad their pockets, favor their cronies, vote their self-interest. Those in power dishonor themselves with greed.

“Buyer beware” is the motto for consumers. You can’t trust the products or salespeople. Evangelical church leaders are exposed as shady characters. It is easy to point fingers at the corporations, the institutions, the leaders as sneaky. Closer to home it is no better. There is widespread hypocrisy. Each of us has many faces that we project. Which is real? We hide behind masks and pretend. We act out roles. We fool ourselves. We are not always what we seem or profess to be.

The result of this tendency to deceive is a widespread cynicism and skepticism. We have ceased to trust...for good reason. We no longer swallow campaign promises. We expect to be lied to. Every statement is taken with a grain of salt. The media have become scapegoats for the authorities. Those in charge deflect accountability and refuse to accept responsibility. Some leaders refuse any culpability.

We are jaded. Only the most gullible believe the supermarket tabloids that herald the discovery of aliens in Topeka or the sighting of Elvis in Omaha, the hundred pound baby in Newark or the twenty four pound grasshopper in the Midwest. We are incredulous, for we know that others are out to con us, to pull the wool over our eyes, to scam. Our bad experiences have destroyed our openness and our charity. As a pastor I have heard many sob stories, all of which were phony. Whom can we trust? We are cautious and suspicious. We have been conned, tricked, stung too many times. We will believe it when we see it.

Thomas is the patron saint of all of us doubters. It was Thomas who expressed some doubts about their trip to Bethany to see Lazarus after his death. Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Thomas foresaw trouble and doubted the safety and security of the trip. Later, Jesus began a monologue on going to prepare a place for them. But Thomas interrupted with his questions. “But Lord, don’t know where you are going.” And then, to compound his image, he adds, “And how can we know the way?” Doubting Thomas. Seeing is believing.

Is such a stance deplorable? When the women told the disciples that Jesus had risen, the disciples said it was “nonsense.” The disciples ran to the tomb to see for themselves. The disciples did not recognize the risen Lord even though they had walked miles with him on the road to Emmaus. Thomas was not alone in his attitude of doubt.

Jesus did not condemn Thomas. He only notes that not everyone will have the privilege of a command performance and appearance to dispel their doubts. Doubting and asking questions are not to be prohibited as a danger to the faith. Our God does not require a blind faith. We are not to put our intelligence on hold in order to believe. Knee-jerk obedience and unequivocal allegiance are not virtues. "My country, right or wrong," is not patriotism. Jesus did not denounce his interrogators. He replied, "What do you see?" or "What do you think?" Blind faith was not held out as the model. Uncritical acceptance was not proposed as the ideal. If anything, Jesus would want us to ask more questions, like "Why are there homeless? Why are there hungry? Why is there violence?" God does not want "yes men" or "yes women."

People are untrustworthy and people are distrustful. That is who we are. But against those truths the scriptures present a contrast and an antidote, an example and a strategy. God is trustworthy. God keeps promises. Jesus can commend a faith that is not based on evidence, because he assures us that God can be trusted. Against the tentative trust we place in fallible humans, Jesus posits an absolute trust that is possible with God. If we trust God, we will not be disappointed. We will not be let down. There will be no "Psyche!" no "April fool's!," no abandonment. God is faithful. God keeps God's word. That is a promise to some, a threat to others. God's word is good. You can count on God. But we remain cynical. No matter how trustworthy God is, we are still skeptical. That is where a moral lesson for us enters the picture.

The Bible says our lives must authenticate our claim to faith. Our conduct must corroborate our beliefs. Our behavior should validate our gospel. You say you are a child of the light. Prove it. Live it. Be it. You say you are a follower of the Christ? Where is the evidence? Show me. There should be coincidence between proclamation and practice. There should be evidence that you are who and what you say you are.

Are we a Christian church? Let God sit in on your meetings; let God check your pledges; let God watch the fellowship time; let God monitor the conversations; let God attend your classes and worship. Are you a Christian family? Let God sit at your dinner table; let God watch you discipline your children; let God watch your quarrels. Are you a Christian disciple? Let God hear you pray; let God look over

your shoulder at work; let God sit in your car as you drive. If we say we are, we need to be. If we claim to be, we better be. Seeing is believing.

It is not only to legitimize our claims to discipleship. When we are faithful, we are also living proof of the claims of God. We are evidence for the truth of the gospel. Does God have good news? They can see it in your face. Does God deserve praise? They can see it in your worship and testimony. Does God change lives? They can see it in your transformation. Does God extend grace to the sinner? They can see it in our self-acceptance and our redemptive freedom. Does God keep promises? They can see it in our expectant attitudes. Are we joyful or guilty, hopeful or anxious? Seeing is believing.

God asks us to be real, genuine, authentic. God asks us to be what we claim to be. Then our lives can be a demonstration, a manifestation, of the love of God. Our lives can be proof of a risen Lord. Our lives will be the evidence of the power of the Spirit. If we are real, people can trust us. And if we are real, people can know our God is real. Seeing is believing. And as we begin to believe, God becomes more real. As we trust, God works. As we have faith, God is manifest. Seeing is believing. But more important, believing is seeing. You will believe it when you see it. But you will see it when you believe it.