Acts 5: 12-20

**Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. 13None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.**

**17But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”**

Revelation 1:4–18

**John to the seven churches that are in Asia:**

**Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.**

**To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.**

**8“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”**

**9I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”**

**12Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.**

**17When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.**

John 20:19–31

**19On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”**

**24Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”**

**26Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

**30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

You know most people would agree that when in doubt “seeing is believing.” So consider Thomas. Why in the world should Thomas believe the accounts of the other disciples claiming to have seen a risen Jesus? It didn’t make sense. Nobody rises from the dead.

And yet, today’s text challenges us to reverse our normal way of thinking: Not “seeing is believing,” but “believing is seeing.

Or as Jesus himself said it, **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

Before we talk about what it means to believe while not seeing, let’s consider why it’s necessary in the first place. What’s wrong with Thomas’s attitude insisting on seeing something before we accept it?

In this day and age, skepticism is often a good thing. If you’re buying a car or a home or anything at all, it’s a good idea to test the claims of the seller and see for yourself whether everything is on the up-and-up.

So “seeing is believing” is a good philosophy for life in this world.

But what happens when we apply it to ultimate questions about the significance, aim, and meaning of human life? What do we see when we look for answers to questions like these?

When it comes to such things, we don’t see very well. Again consider Thomas. What was his situation during that week of doubt? It couldn’t have been pleasant. A whole week went by. All of his friends were abuzz with the good news of Jesus’ resurrection appearances. But Thomas stuck stubbornly to what he had seen: Jesus suffering, dead, and buried. For a solid week, Thomas was holding on to death instead of the good news of life.

And this is exactly our condition too, 2000 years later, if we, like Thomas that first week of the first Easter, reject the resurrection. What are we left with? Only death.

We live in a death-denying society. A lot of people don’t die at home anymore; they die in a hospital or nursing home. But no matter where they die, we turn the body over to a funeral director, so that he can make the dead person look as lifelike as possible for viewing, not at home but in a church or a funeral parlor. Previously, burial preparation was done by the dead person’s loved ones. Funerals were from homes draped in black, and people wore mourning clothes for months thereafter. But we want to avoid death, avoid seeing it, dealing with it, confronting it.

But we really can’t. In spite of all our best efforts, death is the ultimate reality for each one of us, and every human knows it. The people who are dearest to us die, but so do complete strangers. Poor people die, but so do the rich, the famous and powerful as well as the humble and ordinary. And, oh, yes, so will you and I. Our death is coming too, unavoidably, sooner or later. Everybody dies.

If we are honest and open about the meaning of human existence on the basis of what we *see*, that is, death, we have to say: There isn’t any. No meaning, no purpose, no significance, because it all ends in death. Not only will you cease to see whatever you’ve accomplished, whatever good you’ve done, but eventually, so will everybody else. They’ll all be dead too, and what good will anybody’s anything do anybody? In our efforts to make sense of everything, we discover that it is all nonsense because of death.

If seeing is believing, that is, if our hope and confidence are based only on what we experience, and what we experience is only death, then our lives are pointless. It doesn’t matter who we are or what we do; it all ends the same way, dead.

Unless there is something more to human existence than what we see. Or, to put it another way, unless there is someone from outside of our experience who can make a difference in the face of death.

But this brings us back to Easter. For there is Someone who has made a difference, a radical difference, in the human story. Someone for whom death was a reality but not the reality. Someone who could deny death not just in appearances but in truth.

That Someone is Jesus Christ! When death had done its worst, when Jesus was for sure dead, they had pierced His side, they had hauled down His body, and they had put Him into Joseph’s tomb, when all that was over, it still wasn’t over, because on the third day, He arose from the dead! He said “No!” to death, and He meant it.

In that single act of defiance, Jesus Christ changed the lot and destiny of man: not death but now life has the last word! And with the gift of life comes everything else that makes life worth living.

Consider again what it is we see in ourselves as well as others, the weaknesses, the faults, the failures, what the Bible calls sin and declares to be the cause of death. We see our own helplessness. No matter how hard we try, we cannot measure up to God’s Law. So we end up living in a world that is filled with sin and its consequences, not only out there but here in our own hearts and lives, and we deserve the death and hell that God threatens against sinners.

But the conquest of Jesus over death was also His victory over sin, for He who had come to assume not only our nature (God became man) but also our burden, our obligation, our sin and its punishment, did so effectively and forever. He resisted every temptation the devil could throw at him. He suffered every punishment that God ever imposed. And then He arose from death, triumphant over it all.

This great victory is what Christ now offers to us in His Word through the power granted on Easter evening: **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.”**  No conditions, no strings attached, just forgiveness and all that follows: eternal life and resurrection, ours through faith.

“Eight days later, [Jesus’] disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe’ .”**

For those who believe this Word, the Word that Jesus is risen and that He forgives just as He forgave Thomas, everything is different: there is meaning and significance to human existence. Our Lord’s Word of forgiveness to us is also a Word for others, and we preach it. A world wracked by sin and death is precisely where we spend our lives in loving service to others for the sake of God, who first loved us. Then, when this life is over, we go right on living with God until on the Last Day we rise again with glorified bodies just like Jesus. Then we will see with our eyes what for now we only believe. For now, believing is our seeing, but believing is also the way toseeing, the way to seeing Jesus with our eyes for all eternity.

This doesn’t mean that we never experience anything bad, anything difficult, anything dangerous. No, our lives are filled with challenges, hurts, bereavements. That’s what we still see and feel. But in the midst of pain, sorrow, and loss, there is a certain hope that rests on the victory of Christ. For now, we see that simply by faith. Believing is seeing.

We don’t yet see with our eyes, but where there is sin, Christ offers forgiveness; where there is hurting, Christ offers hope; where there is bereavement, Christ offers life. All this is sure and certain, for God is greater than our sight, just as Easter shows us: death, our ultimate reality, was not His ultimate reality. And what He has obtained, He has obtained for us.

“Seeing is believing,” the attitude of doubting Thomas, may be perfectly fine for buying a car or casting a vote, but when it comes to sin and forgiveness, death and life, man and God**, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**  Believing comes first, for believing grasps hold of what is greater, indeed the greatest. It grasps hold of Christ, the risen and triumphant Lord, and joins Thomas not in doubting but in confessing: **“My Lord and my God.”** Amen.