



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
Ann Arbor | Michigan

Sermons from

“You Are My Witnesses”

The Rev. Evans McGowan
April 7, 2013 - 8:00 & 11:00a.m.
Second Sunday of Easter
Isaiah 48:8-12
John 20:19-29

Did you see the viral YouTube video a few months ago with the bird, the child and the golf course? Some guy is filming his family on the golf course, with a little toddler waddling after a golf ball. All of a sudden, some bird of prey, a hawk perhaps, swoops down, picks up the kid and starts to fly away! The bird lifts the kid a couple of feet for a second or two while the mother chases after it, then drops the kid and flies off. It looks like the kid is OK as the mom grabs him into her arms. It's a simply stupefying event to watch, and you have to feel so thankful for the parents and the kid, while simultaneously being amazed at what just happened.

The only thing is, the video isn't real. It was faked by two students for their film class using special effects in a realistic way. Oh.

Our eyes can be deceiving. The bible reminds us time and time again, from the time when Eve and Adam first see the fruit on the tree to David peering from his rooftop at a bathing Bathsheba: Our eyes deceive us. For all Thomas knows, the disciples could have been deceived. Here they had been on a miraculous and ultimately tragic journey together for probably three years, sharing both good times and bad, and all of them confirmed what they had seen, plus the women at the tomb, yet still Thomas would not believe. And yet still there they were, still in the same room a week later after Jesus breathed on them. Had anything changed? Did they not really believe it either? Were they still waiting to be convinced, too? Had they seen and not believed?

We here today, who also cannot see Jesus, can sympathize with Thomas. He not only wants to see the Risen Lord. He wants to touch him, to feel his wounds, to be absolutely sure he isn't being deceived... Like Thomas, we all want to be touched by the divine, to experience the holy.

What's interesting also is that they didn't try to convince or coerce Thomas into believing. They welcomed him into their midst and waited together for a week, to still be a part of the community. They made room for someone still searching, still wondering, still struggling to come to terms with tragedy. I wonder how we can make room at the table for those who do not yet believe, who are searching but still haven't found what they're looking for.

Like the disciples, we are all waiting for an experience of the Risen Lord. Some of us long to have empirical evidence that Christ was resurrected. Others just want relief from their pain or comfort in their sorrow. Some are just waiting for their daily bread. We all long to be given something to hold onto, anything that will get us to the other side of our doubt, doubt in God, doubt in ourselves, doubt in others.

We are waiting for justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an every-flowing stream. Where is Christ now?

And not just Christ, but the Risen Christ, the one who still bears the wounds of sacrifice and torture? It's fascinating that Thomas wants to see and feel the wounds of Christ. He not only wants to the good news that endless love conquers inevitable death – he also wants justice. He wants evidence of the corporate execution, that God will right the wrong and restore an innocent man to life. So where might we see the Risen Lord today?

In Isaiah, God calls all the people together to testify to what is good and true. Those who have eyes yet are blind, those with ears but cannot hear, they are called to bear witness to their gods. And God calls on us, his followers, to bear witness to his proclamation and salvation. The people call upon a witness only when the witness has seen or heard something. But how are we to see if there's nothing to see, or hear when there's nothing to hear?

In an age of the 15 minute – or perhaps 15 second! – news cycle, or rather, news flood, we must be ever vigilant with our eyes and ears. We must take the time to **see** and **hear** one another; otherwise our senses are stampeded by overstimulation. Let people speak for themselves. Listen to interviews, not arguments. Listen to people's perspectives not simply counterpoints. Let people be heard before they are interrupted. There's a difference between your chest burning with the desire to win and your heart being deeply moved within.

Take stock of your senses: Do you stay at the surface level, distracted by anything that moves, or do you open yourself to the very depths of your being?

If our god is the god of love, faith, hope, peace and justice, then we are called to be witnesses to love, faith, hope, peace and justice, wherever they may be found.

Those with ears, let them hear!

Those with eyes, let them testify!

If God is the most moved mover, then how are we being moved by what we see and hear? Who are God's witnesses today?

Before we respond harshly to criticism or perceived injustice, will we first hear the compassion in the voice of a friend or critic?

Before we take account of our grievances and how others have wronged us, will we first be thankful for all that we have?

Before the news cycle the next terrorist attack, will we see the terror wrought by U.S. drone attacks?

After we hear about the first-ever UN International Arms Treaty, will we then hear about local legislation influence of U.S. gun manufacturers who produce nearly half of the world's guns?

As the drumbeat of the war on terror continues to drone on, will we remember those 100 or so prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, many of whom are on hunger strike protesting being imprisoned without charge for over 10 years?

After we bring our donated goods to the table after communion, will we remember the men, women and children of this county who do not have enough to eat today?

After we celebrate the kickoff of our Resident Minister Campaign, will we also bear witness to all those who love and serve the Lord in various capacities?

Friends, there is much love to share and injustice to proclaim.

There is someone here today who has seen an injustice, who has witnessed an event of compassion that is worth sharing, that others, too may believe. Will we believe what they have to say?

We long to see the truth... but really we want to feel it.

Our eyes are constantly deceived... so we often protect our hearts. But it is our hearts that must be opened to feel the truth. We cannot see the risen Christ. But we can feel him in our hearts.

May our hearts open and grow, strong as lions and soft as lambs.

God bless Thomas for making his faith real. First he needed to know if his faith was on solid ground; bloody and in the flesh. Once he knew, he asks and we all ask, "What does it mean?" He proclaims his faith "My Lord and my God," the clearest and simplest statement of faith. Thomas affirms a faith in the past for all the loving acts Jesus said and did, as well as a hope in the future with the Risen Lord when all will be made right in the world.

We today have this same faith and this same hope, and we are set free to live in the present as servants of love, not of hate, devoted to kindness not cruelty, sharing God's grace not God's judgment, with any and all who will see and hear, open their hearts and lend a hand.

When we fail to see acts of kindness, when we fail to hear the cries of the oppressed, then we cease to be God's witnesses. So let us be God's witnesses, crying out at injustices and joining together in acts of loving-kindness.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Amen

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