

Does Jesus Demand Blind Faith? ~ John 20:19-31

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 7, 2013

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though 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; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.



Grace, mercy and peace to you from our risen Savior,

You will see a statue like this all over the world. Most of these statues reside outside of courtrooms, or wherever justice is dispensed. This statue has its roots in ancient times. It is the statue of justice. An example of this statue is shown on the screen behind me, this particular statue is at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse in Nogales. You can see in one hand Lady Justice is holding a set of measuring scales, while in the other she is holding a sword. The scales representing the case that is being judged, with evidence for guilty or innocent, and the sword represents the power to hand out justice. In many statues, Lady Justice is also wearing a blindfold. This blindfold represents the impartiality of justice. Justice doesn't care if you are male or female, if you are rich or poor, if you are black or white.

I think many people can understand and appreciate the desire to have justice be blind to the issues that don't pertain to a particular case. However, it would certainly be foolish for justice to be blind to the facts of the case. Our gospel for the morning has several similarities to that of Lady Justice and a courtroom scene. And so often, many people think that the faith of a Christian is blind – believing things they haven't seen, believing things that have no evidence to support them. Even Jesus words seem to suggest this, when he says, "**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**" This poses the question, DOES JESUS DEMAND BLIND FAITH?

1. Often this seems to be true
2. Yet it was not the case for Thomas
3. This is not expected of us

(1)

Here were the disciples, trembling in fear behind locked doors on the evening of the first Easter. This was after the women had come back from the tomb telling them Jesus had risen, this was after Peter and John, two of the apostles, ran and saw the tomb for themselves. This was even after the two disciples returned from Emmaus to give them their story. But the disciples were together, **“with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.”** They were still afraid of what the Jewish leaders might do, especially after hearing the rumors circulating around Jerusalem of Jesus’ resurrection.

And like only God knows how, Jesus passed through the doors of the locked room, and gave the disciples words that they would remember forever, **“Peace be with you!”** Jesus had appeared in the room, but he was no ghost, he still had the scars, but his glorified body was not subject to the ordinary laws of nature. He breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit, just like you or I would give someone a cup of cool water. He was reminding the disciples that their mission was not just to be joyful and examine the Words of Scriptures, but to go out, Jesus was sending his disciples out to tell this message.

And what a wonderful message it is, it is a message of forgiveness. When Jesus says, **“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven, and if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven,”** he is bestowing on the disciples the message he brought. That certainly does not mean that the disciples or the church could legislate forgiveness and condemnation, but they were to ratify on earth, what God has already decreed in heaven. God has granted forgiveness to the sinner, the disciples were to tell that. It is the same thing that happens at the beginning of every one of our services. We confess our sins to God, and then as a representative of God I forgive your sins.

It’s a wonderful message but are we to just believe that blindly? DOES JESUS DEMAND BLIND FAITH. Often this seems to be true. We can just take a look at the words Jesus spoke again, **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** Surely Jesus is talking about us, who have not seen him alive, but we still believe it. We are blessed. But do we just believe it blindly? Do we just believe it because our friends do? Do we just believe it because that was the way we were brought up? So many people will tell you that being a Christian is foolish, it’s outdated, it doesn’t make sense, it contradicts “known” laws of science.

And sometimes we might even believe that ourselves, that Jesus demands that we blindly follow him. Maybe that’s why so many young people have become disenchanted with religion. Maybe that’s why people think it’s good enough to go to church just a few times a year. And perhaps if God’s Word was without evidence I would agree with you. But it is not. The case for God’s Word is rock solid. Being a Christian is not like joining some obscure cult just because. And Jesus does not just want us to believe blindly. We can see that clearly with the appearance he made to Thomas.

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It really is a shame that Thomas has adopted the nickname of “doubting” Thomas. We actually have a report from earlier in John of how faithful Thomas was, **“Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’”**. He really was not any more doubtful than any of the others, he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. During Jesus’ first visit to the disciples in the upper room, Thomas, one of Jesus’ twelve apostles, was not with them. We are not told why, and neither should we wonder. But later that night, after Jesus left and

Thomas returned, the disciples were all excited to tell Thomas about what they had heard. But despite at least ten pairs of eyes that confirmed this story, Thomas didn't believe, he wanted to see it with his own eyes.

All the rest of the disciples didn't believe when they first heard the report of the women, it took Jesus coming to them in the upper room before they believed. That was all Thomas wanted. DID JESUS DEMAND BLIND FAITH? Not in the case of Thomas, or any of the others for that matter. Even though Thomas had the words of Scripture and the testimony of the others, Jesus still came to the apostles again to remove the doubts of Thomas. A whole week had passed before Jesus came again, but when the apostles were gathered, perhaps celebrating the one week anniversary of the resurrection, Jesus came to them again.

He walked right up to Thomas and said, **"Put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hands and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** Jesus knew exactly what Thomas needed, even though he didn't deserve it. He did not need any of his disciples doubting the resurrection. That's why he gave them the proof that he did. Upon seeing his risen Lord in the flesh Thomas exclaimed, **"My Lord and my God."** It was not in the case of Thomas that Jesus demanded blind faith, he gave Thomas exactly what he needed.

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And believe it or not, that's exactly what he does for us. DOES JESUS DEMAND BLIND FAITH? This is not expected of us. Our faith does not just rest on a "I hope I'll get to heaven" prayer. Our faith does not just rest on something without evidence. We have not seen Jesus with our own eyes, but we don't have to, that isn't what we need. What we need is exactly what John concludes our verses with this morning, **"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

John recorded his time with Jesus for us. The other gospel writers recorded their time with Jesus for us. Paul wrote letters to Christian congregations for us. So that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. This is certainly not blind faith, it is faith founded on evidence. Just think of some of the other things that we read about. When we read a history book, we learn what happened in the past even though we weren't there. If we go to a place like Tombstone, AZ we can learn about the wild, wild, west, even though we weren't there. It would be foolish for us to say that a person like President Lincoln never existed because we never met him, just like it would be foolish for us to say that Jesus is not the Christ, the Son of God.

But if it were as simple as that, believing the evidence, then everyone should believe. So why not? Because even with the door to heaven opened wide by Jesus, we can't go in, we don't want to go in. **"The sinful mind is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law nor can it do so."** We are more interested in all of the things that Jesus did and we're not told about, than in immersing ourselves in what we are told about. We have been more willing to make excuses for why we don't need to go to church or read our bibles or listen to what God says about sexuality.

We are the only ones who can believe for ourselves, but we can't even take credit for that believing. It is only by the grace of God that the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to hear the message that

John has wrote about. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. It is the Holy Spirit that brings us this peace that Jesus promised. It is a peace that is not just wished upon us, like "I hope you have safe travels," but it is a peace that is given to us, because it is a peace that is given from Jesus.

While we can say that justice is (or should be) blind to the issues that don't matter, justice is not blind to the facts of the case. Justice makes its decision based on those facts. And our faith as Christians is similar. Our faith is not blind to the facts that matter to the case God has presented. It is true, we have not seen the risen Lord with our own eyes, but we still have evidence. We have the evidence that God has left for us. He left us with an empty tomb – look anywhere in the Middle East and you will not find the bones of Jesus, no matter what the History Channel says. He left for us a record, in his Word. A record that has stood up to 2,000 years of attacks and scrutiny. It is his Word that we rest our case on, and the power that Word has to change hearts and lives. DOES JESUS DEMAND BLIND FAITH? No! He gives us a sure faith, founded in evidence, so that by believing we may have life in his name. Amen.