***Touch, Taste, Hear and See: Thomas’ Faith and Ours***

Scripture: John 20:19-31

April 12, 2015

**SERMON POINTS/OUTLINE**

**A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation**

**A Prayer for Every Day:** Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief! Amen. Mark 9:24

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**MONDAY**

Read John 20:19-31 (*NRSV*)[[1]](#footnote-1)

*19* When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." *20* After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. *21* Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." *22* When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. *23* If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." *24* But Thomas (who was called the Twin ), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. *25* So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." *26* A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." *27* Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." *28* Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" *29* Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." *30* Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. *31* But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

* When did this story take place?
* Why do you think Jesus said “peace be with you” **twice?** (Note: When something is repeated, it’s usually for emphasis.) Why do you think this was so important that it was repeated?
* “He breathed on them.” What does this recall for you? Why do you think he “breathed” on them?
* Jesus gives the disciples a commission in this passage. Imagine for a moment that you were one of the disciples receiving this commission. How do you think you would have reacted?

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**TUESDAY**

Re-read this week’s scripture lesson, focusing on verses 24-28.

* Imagine yourself as Thomas – both before you saw Jesus and then when you saw him a week later. Read these verses with yourself in Thomas’ role.
	+ What does it feel like at the different points in the story as you first talk with the other disciples and then talk with Jesus?
	+ How do you feel when Jesus invites you to place your finger in his hands and then your hand in his side?
	+ Take a moment and ***embody*** Thomas’ response to Jesus: ***My Lord and my God.*** Are you standing face to face with him? Kneeling? Use your body to express this proclamation of faith.

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**WEDNESDAY**

Re-read verses 30 and 31.

Looking back over your life of faith, how did you come to believe? Today, trace your path to faith. What “characters” in your life story helped you come to faith? How did they help you? Who has prayed for you (out loud and in your hearing)? What effect did their witness and their prayer have on you?

How has your faith brought you new life?

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**THURSDAY**

This week’s meditation was primarily focused on Christian formation. Christian formation is a lifelong process whereby people come to faith and grow in faith – and grow in their relationship with God. There are a number of factors that contribute to how we come to experience God:

* The love, encouragement and support of a grace-filled family and others who surround every child and youth. As the scripture says in 1 John 4:19, “we love because God first loved us.” Children experience love from the moment they are held lovingly by their parents. That unconditional love is critical to a child’s developing faith, to knowing that God loves them.
* The witness of others who have experience God’s love and the new life that is possible as we come to faith. Parents and other trusted adults, as well as other peers, should share their stories of faith with their children. *It is essential that we understand that faith is not about* ***knowledge.*** Of course we need to learn what the Bible says. The Bible is a main source of information and knowledge about God. However, focusing only on what we know creates lop-sided, head-only Christians. Experiences of God and the sharing of God-experiences moves faith from a head exercise to a heart experience.
* Modeling and observation. Children and youth observe what parents and other adults do and value. Is your faith important to you? Do you make exrcising your faith a priority in your life? Or is it possible that your children see faith as a duty for you – or a social event? In your everyday life, can your children see how faith helps you? Does faith help you to cope and shape your behavior? Or is faith for Sunday only? Most parents and grandparents know that children often absorb attitudes and behaviors by “osmosis,” often picking up on very subtle clues what their parents think and feel, even when the adults think they have hidden their feelings pretty well. It is important to share what you think and feel about your faith, just like almost anything else. Let them know that you have struggled with doubt. Share with them times when you have not been the kind of Christian you want to be or when you have struggled with sin. And be sure to share with them how your faith has shaped you or what your faith has to say about a particular issue in your life. Talk about when you feel the presence of God, when God’s comfort has been important in your life.
* **Worship!** When children are included and welcomed in worship, they are sharing in meaningful, sacred experiences with their parents and/or grandparents – and their faith family. So, bring your children to worship! One of the reasons we use lots of music, videos, visuals and movement is to engage the attention of children. When they can see what’s happening, they are more likely to be engaged. I invite you to sit up front with your children. Have them get one of the activity bags in the Parlor and bring them in the sanctuary so they have something to color or write on. Kids can usually focus on more than one thing at a time, so they often hear what’s happening even as they are busily writing or drawing. They are experts at multi-tasking! While loud talking may be disturbing to people around them children do not have to be still. After all, how many adults sit perfectly still throughout an hour of church? When children worship with the faith family, they learn how to worship, they learn what it means to pray as a body, they see adults participate in the sacraments and see them come forward for prayer, they hear the scriptures, and ***they feel included*** – ***they are part of the family of faith***. Worship is no longer just for adults and therefore (in their minds), not for them. My hope is that the children in our faith family will find a true welcome in our worship together and will embrace the other kinds of learning that takes place in our Sunday School.

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**FRIDAY**

Read and reflect on this hymn text, *Hymn of Promise* by Natalie Sleeth[[2]](#footnote-2):

1 In the bulb there is a flower;

in the seed, an apple tree;

in cocoons, a hidden promise:

butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter

there’s a spring that waits to be,

unrevealed until its season,

something God alone can see. (continued on next page)

2 There’s a song in every silence,

seeking word and melody;

there’s a dawn in every darkness,

bringing hope to you and me.

From the past will come the future;

what it holds, a mystery,

unrevealed until its season,

something God alone can see.

 3 In our end is our beginning;

 in our time, infinity;

 in our doubt there is believing;

 in our life, eternity.

 In our death, a resurrection;

 at the last, a victory,

 unrevealed until its season,

 something God alone can see.

Now try your hand at writing a statement of your own faith. Perhaps use the tune of a favorite hymn and write it as a hymn text or a poem rather than narrative sentences. For a guiding question, ask yourself, “what do I believe about God?” or “how does my faith bring me new life?”

 ~ Rev. Vivian McCarthy, Pastor

 Reisterstown UMC

 April 12, 2015

1. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Natalie Sleeth, *Hymn of Promise,* Copyright © 1986 Hope Publishing Company. Used by permission. CCLI License # 1011499. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)