

**April 18, 2004**  
**Rev. 1:4-8, John 20:19-31**  
**Dr. Lewis Galloway**

**“The Eyes of Faith”**

I remember reading as a young boy a series of books that placed the reader right into the middle of important episodes of history. The books bore such titles as *We Were There with Marco Polo*, *We Were There at Valley Forge*, and *We Were There with Christopher Columbus*. I can't remember how many titles there were, but I read them all. The writers knew how to spark the imagination of this young boy and make me feel I was present in the great moments of history. I could see the splendors of Chinese palaces; huddled around a campfire, I could feel the cold snow fall on my thin blanket; from the crow's nest, I caught sight of land for the very first time. I wish I could have been with Jesus during the last week of his life: to have stood at the foot of the cross in shock and terror, to have gazed into the empty tomb in grief and wonder, to have seen him appear among the disciples in that locked room on the evening of the first Easter. If I could have been there to see, then I would have known for sure.

I wasn't there. Neither was Thomas.

I understand Thomas. I suspect you may as well. He is the careful person who relies on what he perceives with his senses and not on his intuition. When Thomas hears the disciples say that they have seen Jesus, he cannot believe what he is hearing. He says, “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.” He not only wants to see; he wants to touch.

Thomas is the scientist, the thinker, or the engineer. He is down-to-earth—practical. He wants to deal with facts and figures and not flights of imaginative fancy. He is the barkeep in the grade B Western who has to bite the coin to be sure it is really gold. Thomas would never buy the proverbial pig in a poke. You won't see him falling for the miracle products advertised on television. There won't be any bottles of hair restoring goo on his bathroom shelf or plastic machines that slice vegetables faster than ten French chefs in his kitchen.

Every group needs a Thomas to keep it on track and honest. He is the one who prevents us from falling for the con artist, going off half-cocked, or drowning in our illusions. Thomas keeps our feet on the ground and our thinking straight. Or maybe we need to appreciate the little bit of Thomas that is in each one of us. There is a part of us that needs to see the evidence, know the facts, and find the “proof” of faith.

One reason Mel Gibson's movie, “*The Passion of the Christ*,” has made such an impact is that it responds to the human hunger to see with one's own eyes what happened to Jesus. In the film we see in horrific, sustained detail the suffering Jesus

endured. It leaves nothing to the imagination. Whatever you may think of the movie, it has led millions of people to read the Gospels, to ask questions and to discuss their faith openly. The film touches the need to know what really happened on Good Friday and Easter morning. The film also presents difficulties. Some folks talk about his movie as if it were an eyewitness account or a historically accurate report of the last hours in the life of Jesus. The film is a blend of one director's religious vision, the Catholic tradition of the Stations of the Cross, and Scripture. Even the agonizing realism of this film does not offer "proof." It is still based on the imaginative testimony of others.

Thomas is not convinced by the testimony of others. He has to see for himself. Eight days later, the disciples gather together again behind locked doors. Jesus appears among them. On seeing the Lord, touching his wounds, and hearing his words, Thomas cries out in faith, "My Lord and my God."

Twenty centuries later, the experience of Thomas is not open to us. If we can come to faith only through sight, sound, and touch, then we are to be pitied. Jesus offers a beatitude spoken just for us who come late in time: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Faith comes through the hearing of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

Jesus is not putting Thomas down; he is simply stating a holy truth. It is good to have been with Jesus on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem and from the cross to the empty tomb. It is even better to walk by faith and not by sight and to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. You might say, in some sense, that through the indwelling Holy Spirit we can have a closer relationship to the Risen Lord than those who followed him down dusty roads and into the villages and towns of Galilee. We live in Christ and Christ lives in us in a way that was not possible until the Holy Spirit is given to the disciples. According to John, Jesus breathes into gathered disciples the Spirit of God. From that moment on, they begin to live a new life in the power of God's Spirit. The Apostle Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:19b-20).

Faith is another way of living in the world. It should not surprise us to know that most of the important things in life we hold by faith and not by sight. I have never seen gravity, but I know that it will hold my feet to the ground. I believe that gravity exists. I have never seen the wind, but I have seen it power a sailboat. I believe the wind exists. I have never seen love, but I have seen how love will move a parent to sacrifice for a child. I believe that love exists. It is not the marriage license that Bunny and I have tucked away somewhere in a drawer that holds our marriage together, but the unseen covenant we have made before God. I believe in the reality of covenants. I believe that Jesus is risen because I see his Spirit at work in the world, I see his presence in you, and I sense his presence in my own heart. I cannot prove the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, my faith in him is as real as, or perhaps more real than, anything else in my life.

We tend to treat faith as if it were something unreal or irrational. In the letter to the Hebrews we hear the familiar phrase: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). We are so used to these words that we hardly think about their meaning. The Greek word that is rendered by our English word, “assurance,” generally means “reality” or “substance.” Faith is the reality or substance of the things for which we hope. Faith is the demonstration of things unseen. Faith itself is the manifestation or presence of unseen spiritual realities. In faith, we experience the presence today of God’s future reality. John reminds the church in the book of Revelation, the day will come when Christ will appear and every eye will see him. Even those who saw him in the flesh and who pierced his hands and side but did not believe will see him when he comes. Faith makes present the reality of Jesus Christ. We see him with the eyes of faith.

What we see through the eyes of faith determines how we live. When we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, then even death itself has lost its power over us. Death is not the end. We are free to give our lives for others. When we know by faith that human evil could not ultimately defeat Jesus, then we know that evil cannot defeat us. We are free to commit our lives to the causes of Christ. When we know that God’s justice and mercy will prevail, then we are free to live as just and compassionate people in our work and in all our relationships. When we know that love matters most, then we are free to take the risk of loving as Jesus loved. When we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who will come again in glory, then we want to share that faith with others.

When Bunny and I first began in ministry, we served two small churches in eastern North Carolina. There was a teacher in the town church that everyone called Miss Frances. She was the third grade lead teacher in the county school. She knew everyone and everyone knew her. More than anything else, she wanted the children of the community to know God and to know Christ’s love for them. She was especially concerned for those children that did not have a church home. While we were there, she started a junior choir at the church. Every Wednesday after school, she loaded up her wood paneled station wagon with children from all over the community. She brought them to church for choir.

Many of these children were from troubled homes. I remember one young boy named Kenny whose father was dead and whose brother was in prison. His mother struggled to make ends meet. He was just at the point of getting into trouble at school and in the community. There were times when it did not seem like we were getting through to him. The frustrations seemed to outweigh the effort. One day I asked Miss Frances why she continued to go back week after week to encourage this young boy to come to church. I wondered why didn’t she just give up. She said, “I believe God has a purpose for Kenny’s life and it’s my job to help him find it. I have to believe that he will be influenced more by what we do here and what he sees here for a few hours a week than by what he sees at home and does around the neighborhood. I believe that the people of this church who love them will help them see Jesus.”

Sometimes we live in fear behind locked doors. We only let dribble into our lives what we can experience through our five senses. These senses are not the only ways we have of knowing. Through the eyes of faith we see Jesus Christ the Risen Lord among us.