

“Things Seen and Unseen”

John 20:19-31

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.”

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

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.”

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.”

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.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

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.”

Now Jesus did many other signs
in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.

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.

Things Seen and Unseen

John 20:19-31

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I.

Our scripture passage today begins with Disciples hiding behind locked doors, in fear of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus somehow broke through not only the physical locks on the doors but, more importantly, the lock fear had on their lives and he said to them, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side and, then, the disciples rejoiced.

Today I'd like to talk to you about fear. We all have fears in our lives that are like locked doors trying to keep out those around us, and stop God from coming in. Somehow, though, there are people who can get beyond our worst fears and continue loving us. Moreover, somehow God can reach to that place which lies deep within us where we harbor our wildest and most awesome fears, and plant there a seed of peace. Now there are as many kinds of fears as there are people to be afraid, but there are four particular fears which seem to be extremely popular.

II.

The Fear Of THE BIG SCREW UP. This is the fear that at some point in our lives, we have done something so bad that we can never recover from it. That somehow, we are afraid to admit, our lives simply just got away from us and there is nothing we can do about it now. People in their early teens, and middle age are particularly prone to this fear. The teenager - "*Oh my gosh, when my parents find out what I've done, I'm dead - or at the very most, grounded for **a month!!!***" The person in middle age - "*Yeah, I never should have done that, just look at me now. Oh well, I'm afraid after all these years, I can't see much changing...*"

Like prodding a cavity with our tongue, our fears always seem larger to us than to others. Yet, they seem smallest to God. Do you really think that after creating the world, parting the red sea, abiding a rag-tag bunch of misfits through the wilderness for 40 yrs, putting up with the invading armies of Assyria, Babylon, and that bugger Goliath, that God can't see beyond our fears and reach out to embrace the sacredness which is you?

III.

The Fear We Can't Cut The Mustard. The fear that once we come to orient our lives toward God, we will not be able to sustain it. This fear is very common in people who *"used to go to church, and plan on going again someday."* This fear is also quite common in people who go to church so much that it has become a regular part of their life. In the first instance are those people who think that Sunday is the last day of the weekend, rather than the first day of the week. However, church is not a *reward* for those who have succeeded in maintaining their piety on Friday and Saturday night. Rather, church is a sanctuary for those who would like a fresh start to the week which lies before them.

In the second case, are those people who have been going to church so long that when they do, inevitably, fail to cut the mustard they become hyper-aware of, and fixated on it. These folks go through life in kind of a mild state of terror, mumbling, *"I know the right thing to do, so I should be able to do..."* (Say 2x) That said, the *ideal* church, is one which is just filled to the brim with sinners...sinners of all stripe and variety. Sinners who are constantly being forgiven by others, and accepted by God.

IV.

The Fear Of The Mirror. This is one that gets us all. How many times a week do *you* look in the mirror before work or school and say, "Wow, I Look Good Today!" One morning in 3, 5, 10? Not since you were 18? Usually what we see is one more wrinkle, a few more pounds, and hair thinning or graying. At this stage in life we would even be thankful for a little acne every now and then. More often than not, we see ourselves in that mirror and say, *"Well, I'm afraid that is as good as it is going to get today."*

In a world where a size 8 dress will not fit on the fashion show runway, and every man in television land stands 6 ft. with a washboard stomach, it is easy to get down on oneself. Though the standards of physical beauty are difficult to meet without a strict regiment of rice cakes, marathon aerobics, and dry toast, the standards of Sacredness are even stricter but far more easily attained. You, and you, and you, are each a child of God. You possess a sacredness and a beauty which penetrates your fears, pervades your body, and infuses your soul. It is, in fact, your very nature.

V.

Fear Of The Risky Plan. In today's reading Jesus imparts the gift of the spirit upon his disciples, he blesses them with peace, and reveals to them that *they* are part of God's plan for the world. Like those disciples we, too, stand on the threshold of God's unfolding plan. Something new and, as of yet, undetermined is unfolding at our church here on the Park. However, this can be very scary to some because newness demands risk as a service charge. Allowing God's plan to unfold is risky business; always has been, always will be. Because, although we are *part* of God's plan we are never completely *in* on the plan. Therefore, God reveals the plan to us a little bit at a time through new ways of doing things, ideas, and people. Like the resurrection, the Gospel, and the church.

God's plan now continues to unfold with us. Exactly *how* we do not know. Remember, we are a *part* of it, but not completely *in* on it. Yet, I have a very strong sense that whatever God is up to next *you* will have a role to play! If we are part of the oneness of God (and we are) then we are also part of God's plan. However, so is the person next to you. Although sometimes seemingly different, it is through both of you and all of us that God unfolds the plan because each of us has been created to be a child of God.

VI.

That said, what about Thomas? What about doubt? It is hard to believe it when you don't see it. Please do not misunderstand me this morning. What I've just told about your own sacredness, your beauty, your status as a child of God, is not very easy to accept. I know all too well how hard this is because, if I am being honest, like Thomas I *too* have my doubts; serious doubts. So I will tell you the same thing I tell myself: it is OK to have doubts. Faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive, they are two sides of the same coin.

So, how do we deal with our doubts? I think, by simply *wanting* to believe. Jesus gives similar words to Thomas, and to us in John 20: "*Do not doubt, but believe.*" These are the question I would leave you with.... Do you want to believe...you are a part of the oneness of God? Do you want to believe...you are part of, and have part in, God's plan? Do you want to believe... you are a child of God? These are the things seen and unseen. Amen.