

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 17, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“BELIEVING IS SEEING”

Scripture Readings

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22 John 14:15-21

The *"Show Me State"* it is called: **Missouri.**

The one Colonel Potter used to talk about in the classic TV show M.A.S.H.

It has become a folk saying:

"I'm from Missouri. Show me! If I see it, I will believe it."

So, we get the saying, *"Seeing is believing."*

It's like the person who was asked if he believed in infant baptism.

"Believe in it?" he responded. *"I've seen it!"*

But in this bit of monologue from Jesus' *"Farewell Discourse"* with his disciples we get just the opposite perspective.

Jesus is talking about the promised presence of the Spirit with the disciples, and he is talking about his own presence with them.

He keeps dropping hints that he will soon leave them, but he keeps reassuring them as well that he will not leave them alone, or "*orphaned*" as the New Revised Standard Version so correctly puts it.

And he makes an interesting contrast between what the disciples will see and what "*the world*" will see.

The world will not know the Spirit, *"because it neither sees him nor knows him."*

In the same manner, soon the world will not see Jesus.

But it is altogether different with disciples.

They will know the Spirit because the Spirit abides **with** them and **in** them.

Likewise, the disciples will know the resurrected Lord because he is in them and they are in him.

Disciples do not believe in the Spirit and in the resurrected Lord because they see the Spirit and Jesus.

It is the other way around:

*Disciples see, or know, the Spirit and the resurrected Lord
because of their faith.*

The revelation is as much **to** faith as it is **through** faith.

William Barclay puts it in a fascinating way:

"The point of Jesus' saying is: 'We can see only what we are fitted to see.'"

- An astronomer will perceive much more in the night sky than an untrained eye.
- Someone trained in art will see far more in a painting than another person who has never studied art.
- The trained musician will enjoy a symphony much more than someone who is unfamiliar with musical style or technique.

What we are able to perceive in any situation depends on what we bring to the experience.

Likewise, someone who has given up on the very notion of God won't be listening for him.

This is kind of a tangent, but it is connected to this idea:

I heard a 2010 interview recently with Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of the wonderful book *"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"*

He was saying that when he meets someone who says *"I don't believe in God"*, he responds

"Tell me what God you believe in. I might not believe in that God either."

I have met such people – I am pretty sure we all have.

And we often don't respond in a helpful way.

Kushner's response is helpful, I think.

It opens up the road to further dialogue – a road that might go somewhere meaningful.

If we hope to receive the Holy Spirit in our own lives, it requires waiting and watching for him, *in expectation of his arrival*.

If you want to know the presence of the Spirit in your life, don't challenge God to *"Show me!"*

There is an old story about a visiting revival preacher walking around town before his preaching mission began.

He came upon a young lad playing in the street.

The preacher said *"Young man, I will give you a nickel if you can tell me where God is."*

The boy replied *"I'll give you a dime if you can tell me where he isn't".*

Don't take the attitude that

- *if God wants me to know his Spirit, then God will make it happen.*

Don't take the position *"I'll believe it when I see it."*

Rather, if you want to know that presence, then expect it, wait for it, prepare for it, believe in its coming.

You'll see it.

After all, believing is seeing!

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST, AND SPIRIT...AMEN

John 14:15-21 – comment

To preach the promise of the Spirit and the assurance of Jesus' ascension in the middle of the Easter season may very well get us out of our resurrection ruts, that the resurrection is all that God has in store for us."

"What does it mean to have a relationship with Jesus in his absence? That was a question for John's first readers and for us today."

OFFERING THOUGHT

We owe it to each other - and to our children and grandchildren - to leave our planet in a better state than when we found it.

Christopher Dodd (1944 -), former US senator

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Holy God, we come together to worship, a people who would like to think that we love you with all our hearts and souls, with all our might, but there are so many other things in our lives that clamor for our attention that we often relegate you to Sundays and Tuesdays, and times when we want you to rescue us.

Most of us really do want you to be the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

We really do want to hear your voice above all of the other voices in our lives.

But we get bogged down in the daily routine.

We forget who we are. We forget who you are.

We forget what the church is supposed to be.

So here we are, standing before you today, with our human foibles and our short attention spans, asking that you would make yourself known to us, that you would help us to recognize the presence of the Holy, that you would continue to challenge us, inspire us, and make us into the people you want us to be.

Amen.

Words of Assurance: Psalm 66: 16-20

Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for me.

I cried out to him for help, confessing my sin, and praising his name.

If I had not spoken the truth, God would not have listened.

But He did!

He heard my prayer, and forgave my sin.

Praise God, who listens when we pray, and who responds with unfailing love!
Amen.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Thanks to Bruce Prewer, Australia

Today there are many spaces in these prayers in which I invite you to insert your private love and concern for others. The following bidding and response will be used after each prayer:

Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ's love.

Let us pray for those who are confused by life, and fear there is no Spirit of truth anywhere.

Let us pray for those who are too cocksure, who think they hold the truth without error.

Let us pray for those cowered by oppression & suffering, who fear that despair is the truth.

Let us pray for the severely handicapped, who are angry with whatever truth is responsible.

Let us pray for the very healthy and proud, who imagine that all the truth favours the strong.

Let us pray for the dying and those who love them, who fear that death is the ultimate truth.

Let us pray for those who nurse the new born, who today intuitively know that truth is love.

Let us pray for those who today find faith in Christ, and eagerly want to be led into all truth.

FOR OURSELVES

Holy Friend, pervade us with your living Truth, making us more at peace with ourselves and more understanding of others

Please give us a deeper insight into, and concern for, those who seem shallow, course or utterly selfish.

Make us patient with all who easily irritate us but firm with those who try to manipulate us.

Teach us how to live loyally, lovingly, wisely, courageously and with abundant good humour.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray together...OUR FATHER...Amen!

Prayer for the Offering

Holy One, you have given yourself to us in Creator, in Christ, in the Spirit.

We now give back to you:

this money that seems so little;

this worship that seems so small;

these words that never quite get it right.

Receive what we offer and transform it by the power of your Spirit into:

enough money, sufficient praise, worthy words for proclaiming and enacting your peace, justice, and love in the world.

AMEN

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Easter 6: Benediction

(based on John 14)

Listen to the promise Jesus makes:

I will never abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.

Even though the world will not be able to see me,

I will never vanish from your sight.

And since I live, you will also live.

Go from here in the knowledge that you do not go alone:

the power and presence of God goes with you.

Praise be to God, Creator, Saviour, Spirit! AMEN