

JJ¹

Have you ever looked at the events of Easter and thought you'd do things a little differently than what Jesus did? Maybe you haven't said it outright, but you and I do it all the time, especially with Easter. We see it in every time we ask, "Why did Jesus do this, instead of that?" or "Why didn't he just...?"

Take a moment to think about all the evens of that first Easter. Have you ever noticed how veiled and rather secret Jesus' resurrection was? Even over the following 39 days before his ascension, Jesus is often hidden. He doesn't spend nearly every moment of those days with his disciples like he did for the 3 years previous. He's just here and there for a bit, and then gone again.

But it's especially on that first Easter that so much is hidden. Just think of the resurrection itself. No one sees it happen! You would think Jesus would make a big show of it. You would think he'd go and publicly show himself to his enemies. You would think he'd stand before Pilate and his soldiers. But not that at all. At first, it's just angels relaying the message. That's it!

Why is that???

What if Jesus would have never appeared to any of his followers? Could

they still have known and believed in Jesus' resurrection? What if the angels didn't even come? Could they still have known and believed? What about us today? If your answer is "no" or "probably not," then it's very good that you're here today as we join them that first Easter and a week later to understand that **EARS ARE BETTER THAN EYES.**

Remember where Jesus' disciples were that first Easter morning? Hiding away together in fear that what happened to Jesus was going to happen to them. Where were the women who were always with Jesus and his disciples serving them so they could carry out ministry? They were on their way to the tomb, but with hearts filled with sorrow to give Jesus' body final preparations to remain in the tomb. Had they listened to Jesus, they all would have been keeping vigil at his tomb, waiting in eager expectation for him to keep his word and rise just as he said.

But then, can we really blame them? And I really mean, you and me. Think of yourself. Would you have been there? Think of what they just went through. They saw Jesus murdered in the cruelest of ways. It looked like Jesus' enemies won. Worst of all, it looked like the devil won! Even Judas who betrayed Jesus, killed himself, splattered on rocks at the

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

base of a cliff after a botched hanging! What an awful weekend! Everything looked like a disaster—a disaster that might quickly swallow them up too!

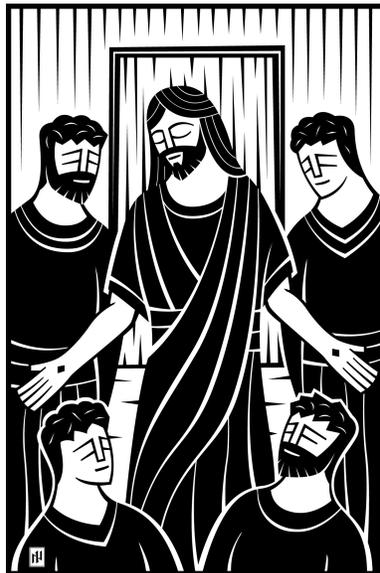
Then, people see angels with a message that Jesus is alive. Some women even see Jesus alive. The report comes to the disciples and...they don't believe it. And so there they are, that first Easter night, still locking themselves away in fear because Jesus' Words and promises were buried in their hearts and minds when Jesus' body was buried in the tomb. Suddenly, Jesus appears! And what does he do? He showers them with grace and forgiveness. "Peace be with you!"

Then they believed. Then everything changed. Their grief is turned to joy and fear into peace. Jesus is alive and they are not lost! They all have this peace, all of them except for Thomas.

Where was he? What did he have to do that was more important than to be with his fellow disciples who were in mourning over the death of Jesus, in guilt over their own role in his death, in fear of those who had killed him... Where was he? Thomas misses out on the joy of Easter! And now he compounds his misery by clinging to it.²

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

The Words and promises of Jesus weren't good enough for Thomas. Words that were spoken to him by his closest friends. Men he knew weren't *gullible and easily fooled*. Yet remember these were words brought to him *by men who themselves needed convincing and were not convinced until they had seen the risen Savior*. So, in a way you could say Thomas was a lot like them, but also not.



For a whole week his friends continued to tell him "We have seen the Lord!" And Thomas' doubts grow into *stubborn unbelief—not just doubt, but rank unbelief*. It's rank unbelief, not just by what Jesus would later say, but also because of his demand. An appearance of Jesus wouldn't be

enough like it was for the others. No, *he demands more: a crude thrusting of his fingers into the holes where the nails had been and a jabbing of his hand into the spear wound in Jesus' side*.

Apparently by the end of the week, Thomas had at least advanced from rank unbelief to severe doubts, for at least now he is back with his fellow disciples. Indeed, the greatest

² Italicized sections are either paraphrases or direct quotes from Rev. Daniel Deutschlander's book, *On Giving Advice To God*, NPH 2017, p. 201ff.

insult to God is a refusal to believe his Word; but not far behind is the crime of doubting it.

Then, just like the previous week, Jesus suddenly appears among them. And what would you have done were you Jesus? Lay into him for his doubts? Maybe even declare that he was no better than Judas, and therefore had no place with him? No, Jesus is far better and far more gracious than you and I even know how to be. He sees Thomas' weakness and self-inflicted needs and still gives it to him anyways! That's Jesus. He just gives and gives and gives.

"Peace be with you. Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe."

Thomas' faith-destroying doubts are crushed under the weight of Jesus' words of love and cries out in faith, "My Lord and my God!"

But now you might wonder, "If Jesus did this for Thomas, why doesn't he do this for me? I struggle. I have my doubts!" So often you and I can be just like those disciples, even Thomas. How often we doubt God's love for us. How often we struggle to believe that he is ruling over all things for our benefit. Sometimes even after hearing the beautiful gospel promises and assurances of Jesus, we doubt. We hear about Jesus' glorious

resurrection and how through it we are at peace with God, but we wonder if it could really be true...really be true especially for me...especially after what I've done. And those doubts lead to fear. Fear that I am alone. Alone to face judgment without Jesus by my side. Those doubts also lead finally to despair and unbelief. God has abandoned me and so I'm abandoning him. He can't help!

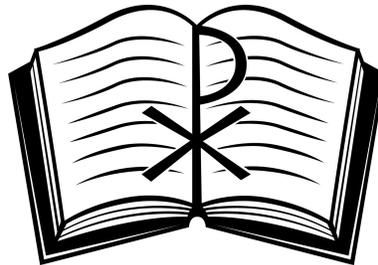
And friends, these fears, doubts and troubles all arise in your hearts for the same reason they did in Jesus' disciples

so long ago—because you have neglected and even forgotten Jesus' words and promises. It's because you're not listening. It's because you think eyes are better than ears, seeing is better than hearing. But **EARS ARE BETTER THAN EYES** and

Jesus proves it by what he says next.

"Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Why did Thomas get what you so often long for? You see, friends, it wasn't just for Thomas' benefit. It was also for yours, and mine. Just as John explains: "Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written 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.”

You see, *the disciples, and especially Thomas, were not stupid or foolish, easily deceived bumpkins. They did not invent a resurrection story to fit what they wished would have happened but in reality never did.* Rather, it was quite the opposite. These men *were skeptics and in the case of Thomas, wavering between doubt and unbelief. The appearances of Jesus, and especially this one, were necessary to overcome doubt and unbelief* so they could be his witnesses to the world that he did indeed keep his Word and rise from the grave. And you and I, friends, receive all the benefits of those eyewitnesses today so that we would be blessed in Jesus’ eyes and have life in his name!

And we are blessed and have life in Jesus through his Word. It is not through seeing, it’s through hearing. **EARS ARE BETTER THAN EYES** and as you read through the Gospels you see Jesus making this point. He’s always lifting up his Word over what is seen. Even when there is something spectacular to be seen, like one of his miracles or even his own resurrection, Jesus always points us to what he has said. Because in the Word and promises of God is forgiveness, peace, joy and life.

Why did Jesus do what he did on that first Easter? Because that’s exactly the way it needed to be done. He needed his disciples then, and he needs them now to rely on his Word. It’s the one thing that creates faith. It’s the one thing that sustains faith. Jesus’ Word is all the proof we need. So if you’re looking for more peace in your heart, listen to Jesus’ Word. If you want to be more loving and kind, listen to Jesus’ Word. If you want to learn how to forgive, listen to Jesus’ Word. If you want assurance that your sins are forgiven and Jesus is with you always, listen to Jesus’ Word. **EARS ARE BETTER THAN EYES.** Amen.

SDG²

³ SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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