

The Second Sunday of Easter
April 18-19, 2009
John 20:19-31

“Not Seeing Is Believing”

The Chronicles of Narnia, the book series by C.S. Lewis, has recently been popularized by two big screen movies that have been produced: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*. Originally written for children, the books and the moves are also enjoyed by many adults. By show of hands, if you've read any books in this series or seen any of the movies, please raise your hand. In the final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, everyone is living in an Eden-like paradise; however, the dwarves refuse to believe this is really true. It is the end of a very long winter in Narnia and the powers of darkness and evil have been overcome and a new day is dawning. The reign of Aslan, the lion (a figure of Christ), is beginning and with it comes springtime. Flowers are in bloom where there had only been snow and cold before. The sun is out and the sky is blue where before it was always grey. Water tastes sweet and fruit is delicious for everyone, except for the dwarves. Throughout the Chronicles, the dwarves have prided themselves in not being “taken in” by any “humbug” that may have misled others. “The dwarves are for the dwarves,” they said, and not being “taken in” means that they only ever believed what made sense to them. Lucy is the youngest of the Pevensey children, and as she stands in the sunlight and sees the dwarves, she takes pity on them. She asks Aslan to fix this dilemma and show the dwarves the way the world really is – full of life and light and love. The great lion says, “I will show you what I can and cannot do.” Aslan gives the dwarves a feast of wonderful food and puts a glass of wine in each of their hands. The dwarves refuse to see the gift as it really is, as it is given by their king. Instead, they see themselves as eating turnips, and drinking dirty water out of a donkey's trough. Their refusal to believe is very sad indeed.

On this Second Sunday of Easter, with Alleluias still ringing in our ears from last Sunday's festival Easter worship, we are confronted today with refusal to believe. Like the dwarves, Thomas is not going to be “taken in” by any “humbug” about Jesus rising from the dead. I think Thomas must have been from the state of Missouri because that is the “Show Me” state, and unless he could be shown by positive proof that Jesus was alive, he would not believe. Thomas drew a line in the sand and told the other disciples, **“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”** (John 20:25). For Thomas, seeing is believing, but as Jesus makes known to him, *not* seeing is believing. That is the theme for today's message. May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

Thomas is an everyman for us today. We can't be too hard on him because in all likelihood we would've done the same thing. If everyone around us tells us something quite unbelievable is actually true, we will have our doubts. If everyone else has experienced the reality of this unbelievable happening, and we have not, then it is very likely we will continue to harbor doubt and skepticism – perhaps with dwarf-like stubbornness. The good news is that the risen Savior does not leave Thomas in his doubt and skepticism. Jesus comes to him in order to move him from doubt to confident trust and faith. Appearing in the midst of the disciples, Jesus invited Thomas to do what he said he needed to do in order to believe: **“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe”** (John 20:27). The Scripture does not actually tell us whether Thomas really did put his finger into the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, and placed his hand into the spear wound of Jesus' side. Jesus invited Thomas to do this, but we are not told specifically whether Thomas actually did this or not. The Scripture moves from Jesus' invitation to Thomas' declaration: **“My Lord and my**

God!” (John 20:28). Could it be that Jesus’ presence there, and his invitation to Thomas were enough? With the crucified and risen Lord standing before him, did Thomas then really need the proof he said he needed? That is one of those questions I’d like to ask when I get to heaven.

Thanks be to God that Thomas’ doubt and skepticism gave way to faith and trust. To be trapped like the dwarves in stubborn refusal to believe is a very dark and terrible place to be. Jesus does not praise Thomas for his demand of proof. What he does say is this: **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”** (John 20:29). My friends, Jesus calls us blessed! We who have not seen and yet do believe, we are blessed. Unlike Thomas and the other disciples, we have not seen the risen Savior with our own eyes. We have not touched the wounds of Jesus on his resurrected and glorified body. The only thing we have is faith, and this is enough, as the Scriptures tell us: **“Now faith is assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen”** (Hebrews 11:1). My friends, we walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by faith trusting with all our heart that this Jesus of Nazareth gave his life on the cross for our sins, and that he truly is risen from the dead, and that as he has promised, he is with us always, even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). My friends, *not* seeing is believing. As St. Augustine has said, “Faith is to believe what you do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”

May the risen Lord Jesus Christ dispel whatever doubts we may harbor in our hearts today about his resurrection. Through our Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us may we be moved to vibrant and confident faith, and like Thomas, confess Jesus as **“My Lord and my God!”** Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.