

*19When 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." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So 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."*

*26A 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." 27Then 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." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But 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.*

I remember the first time I encountered one of these. People were standing outside a shop in Estes Park, Colorado, staring into the window at pictures. They talked of seeing what I could not see, dolphins, jets, the starship enterprise. I went into the shop.

Inside, these pictures were everywhere. And people were staring, and telling what they saw. So I tried my turn. I looked, and I looked, and I looked. And nothing happened.

I looked some more, stood for what seemed a long, long time, and then a whole new sight snapped into place. Astounding. I glanced away. My eyes returned to the picture and everything was gone. I had to begin again.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

Jesus was talking about us, those who have not seen him and yet believe in him. If this morning Jesus were to suddenly appear right here, speak his peace into us, breathe his spirit into us, how many doubters do you think would walk out that door. We are surrounded by those who were there, in that room those two Sundays, Peter, Andrew, James, John. We have their word, their witness that has been passed hand to hand, mouth to ear down to us. Jesus said

to Thomas, and to all of them, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

Do you? Do you believe? Do you know whether you really believe?

Sometimes I think we are like someone standing before one of those 3-D pictures waiting. Nothing has happened yet, but they do not walk away. There is faith, but not seeing yet. They keep looking because they believe they will see. Like someone opening the scriptures, hearing the word, receiving the sacrament in anticipation, in hope, in faith but not in sight. For a moment they catch a glimpse of the glory of the one they seek. Forgiveness bathes them. Love embraces them, a word touches them and they are sure, but when they glance away they wonder.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Others receive a dream, a vision, a sign, an assurance like those who do see the picture. But they do not have the power to make this experience happen in another. The ten who were there Easter evening talked to Thomas of Jesus present with them. But their word was not enough for Thomas, "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." Thomas thought he would need even more than all the rest had received, to touch, as if their experience were only an illusion, a hallucination, a vision.

We do that with one another. One speaks of their experience of Jesus which I do not share and my temptation is to label it as an illusion. "What I have not received, no one has really received," I want to say.

But Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

But when Jesus appeared to Thomas, Thomas no longer needed to touch, but cried out "My Lord and my God." Everything snapped into place. He saw.

But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

How strange that Jesus should call us blessed when we do not see, or are poor in spirit, or are in mourning, just when we might feel least blessed of all. But we are most blessed of all, when we believe in him.

I remember people telling me of what it was like in the 30's. Living day by day because they had no other choice they learned how to be neighbors and to share their bread with those who had none. They were real and human in that time of shared need, alive. But as they told

me of that time as they were now living in a time of abundance their stories were about people they no longer were. They were like soldiers who tell of the faith they had in the fox hole but tell the story when bullets are no longer flying and when that kind of faith is only a memory.

You and I are most blessed when we are not powerful over our lives, we are most blessed when we believe precisely when there is no sign that God is present, precisely when faith is no longer an act of our will, but a gift of God's grace. When we are poor in spirit, when we do not see the hand of our Lord, when there is no laughter but only tears - Blessed are you.

Christ died and rose again for you to provide for that day. When there is no excuse for what you have done, and everyone should despise you for it, Jesus says, "Peace, be with you."

When there is danger everywhere and there is no escape, Jesus promises, "I am with you."

When you are being pursued by death, like a terrible dream but this time waking from sleep will not save you, Jesus says, "I am waiting for you."

So if you are one who stands before the picture in faith, waiting, waiting, waiting to see your Lord, as you hear his word and taste his body and blood, believing in him, then Jesus speaks this word to you: "Blessed are you who do not see and yet have come to believe."

Amen.