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Seeing with Eyes of Faith  
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I am delighted to see all of you here in worship this morning. Those who truly love Jesus come to church the Sunday after Easter, which some refer to as Low Sunday. There is no rabbit that visits the Sunday after Easter. The Cadbury bunny is gone and no chocolate eggs are left. We already wore our new Easter outfit if we purchased one. There is no major family dinner and we are back to eating leftovers. There are fewer people in the pews, and no brass on the chancel. So all we have to celebrate today is the risen Savior—no distractions just Jesus. Well, someone said when you have Jesus, you have enough. So today we have plenty. We have Jesus and we have one another. Amen

My scripture reading is a bit different from that which is listed in the bulletin. I am going to read John 20:19-29.

### **John 20:19-29 Inclusive Translation**

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Temple authorities. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Having said this, the savior showed them the marks of the crucifixion. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw Jesus, who said to them again, "Peace be with you. As Abba God sent me, so I'm sending you."

After saying this, Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you retain anyone's sins, they are retained."

It happened that one of the Twelve, Thomas—nicknamed Didymus, or “Twin”— was absent when Jesus came. The other disciples kept telling him, “We’ve seen Jesus!” Thomas’ answer was, “I’ll never believe it without putting my finger in the nail marks and my hand into the spear wound.”

On the eighth day, the disciples were once more in the room, and this time Thomas was with them. Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood before them, saying, “Peace be with you” Then, to Thomas, Jesus said, “Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Don’t persist in your unbelief, but believe!”. Thomas said in response, “My Savior and my God!”. Jesus then said, “You’ve become a believer because you saw me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” The word of God for the people of God; thanks be to God.

In our text today we find the disciples still in Jerusalem after an unimaginable week. In that week Jesus died a horrific death. The disciples saw his empty tomb and Mary proclaimed that she saw Jesus and he was alive. I imagine the disciples were disoriented, angry, and frightened. They gathered to regroup and develop a survival strategy. The disciples were **locked** in a room because they feared for their lives. The Roman authorities killed Jesus so I’m sure the disciples wondered if they would be next.

Some of us know a thing or two about being locked in a room or closet in fear for our lives. At times we too have hidden ourselves behind emotional and spiritual locked doors because of our sexual orientation, or sexual identity, or our family history—incarceration, physical abuse, or our personal history of a physical or mental illnesses. At times we live behind locked doors in fear that others will come to know the truth about us and

harm us, or perhaps even kill us, or fire us from our jobs, or abandon us, or write us out of the family will. Being in a locked room or closet is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually draining. Oh, we may be able to breathe while in there, but I'm not sure we are really living. I know what I'm talking about.

So the disciples gathered in a locked room in Jerusalem. We don't know how Jesus got into that locked room. The text doesn't tell us how Jesus got in. Yet we know that when we were in our own closets with the door closed and locked and the light turned off, the spirit of God had a way of entering our places of fear and assuring us that we are God's beloved children and we are wonderfully created in God's image. When we try our hardest to keep God out of our lives, God has a way of getting in anyhow. Anyone else find that to be true?

When Jesus got into the room, the first thing he did was breathe on the disciples. In scripture breath is really important. Breath is life giving and soul enriching. Breath is Spirit. Breath is healing. Breath is comfort. Breath is God.

When Jesus breathed on the gathered believers, he gave them power to move to the next level. Jesus empowered them to let go of that paralyzing fear and move the ministry forward. The church calendar has us celebrating Pentecost 50 days after Easter. But in the gospel of John, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his followers the very first time he saw them.

I wish I had time to really preach this text. So much of our ministry is held hostage by our fear. The seven last words of the church are, "We've never done it that way before!" Well, maybe now is the time. Now, is the time to do some things differently. God's breath, God's spirit, God's Ruah is upon

us to take us to the next level of ministry in this neighborhood—on Capital Hill, in Seattle, WA. The Spirit of the Lord, is upon SFBC. God has anointed us to bring good news to the poor; and proclaim release to the captives; to declare environmental justice; and recovery of sight to those who have lost their way; and to proclaim this is the year of God's favor. We have no reason to fear, for God's breath is upon us, around us, and in us.

When Jesus appeared this first time to the disciples, Thomas was not there. I want to mention that this gathering of followers was more than the 12-1. It was a group of Jesus' followers. Thomas was identified as one of the 12, but Jesus appeared to more than the selected few but to a group of disciples.

These followers before whom Jesus appeared **believed** because they saw Jesus with their own eyes. They saw—they believed. They tried over and over again to share the good news of their experience with Thomas so he too would believe. But, Thomas said “nope I just can't believe what you're saying is true. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and see where the sword pierced him, I just can't go with you on this.”

Now the other disciples had no room to look disparagingly at Thomas because he wouldn't believe. For when Mary came and told them what she saw early on that Sunday morning that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive— they didn't believe her. I'm just saying. So give Brother Thomas some slack!

So a week passes and once again the group meets behind locked doors. Hopefully, there was less fear, but there was still fear for the doors were

again locked. You know eventually we have to unlock our doors and walk out of our closets and into the truth of our lives, Amen? This time Thomas is with the gathered disciples.

We have often referred to this disciple as doubting Thomas. But that places the emphasis of this story on Thomas. The central character of this experience is Jesus. The gift that Jesus gave Thomas was his presence. Jesus appeared to Thomas so he could have that same experience of believing as the others. Jesus didn't have to show himself to Thomas, but Jesus wanted him to believe. Jesus wanted Thomas to move from a place of unbelief to belief. Eugene H. Peterson wrote in *The Message the New Testament in Contemporary Language*, that Jesus said, Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe.

Believing and having faith in God's transforming power, was not exclusive to first generation followers of Jesus. Jesus continues to offer us the gift of God's presence so we too can believe.

So my message for you this morning boils down to this one question, ***Where is God showing up in your life today so you will believe?***

I can tell you, that I saw the face of God when I held Steffi Johana last week during the baby dedication. I have believed in God all my life, but my faith was renewed last week through baby Steffi. Several years ago when I was driving in Alaska and saw the Alaska Mountain Range and Denali majestically reigning 20K feet high, I believed all over again. When I look at my spouse Dr. Renee and see how she has survived pancreatic cancer

and is now taking Crossfit classes and putting me to shame with her planks and squats, I believe, I believe, I believe.

I believe in the power of God to make a way out of no way. God continues to show up in our lives so that we will believe. I believe because I've seen God bring parents and children together who haven't spoken to one another in years. I believe because I've seen what God can do. I've seen God heal when the doctors had given up. I believe because I've seen God take someone who is addicted to just about everything and transform their lives and heal their spirit. I believe because I've seen compassion replace hatred, and forgiveness and grace grow where pain and resentment rooted themselves. I believe because I've seen God bring love to those who had given up on ever finding true love again.

Where is God showing up in your life today so you will believe? You may not see Jesus' pierced hands and wounded side, but you can see the beauty of a sunset that brings you to tear or hear sacred music that calms your weary souls. You heard the healing music of Diverse Harmony and today someone believed that God is real and love is real and God is still at work in our lives.

O, God take us from unbelieving and move us to believing. Jesus said blessed are those who have not seen him yet believe.

Great is God's faithfulness. Great is God's faithfulness.

Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed your hand has provided Great is your faithfulness God unto me.

