

“How to Believe...”

John 20: 19-31

Pastor Peter Hiett

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Prayer

[Movie Clip from *Jaws*]

Conversation in the cabin of the boat:

Marine Biologist, Sam Quint is examining a wound on his head.

Captain:

Don't worry about it. It won't be permanent. Want to see something permanent? Hits own fist up to mouth and takes out middle tooth.

There you go. You want to see something permanent? Just put your hand underneath my cap. Feel the lump; knock a lolen, Boston, St. Patty's Day.

Matt Hooper:

I got that beat. (He pulls up his sleeve on his shirt.) *Some moray eel bit right through my wet suit.*

Captain:

Well, nope, now listen I didn't have that. But, I entered an arm wrestling contest in San Francisco. See this? Can't extend this, know why? The semi-final, celebrated my third wife demise, a big Chinese fellow pulled me right over.

Matt Hooper pulls up his pant leg:

Look at that. It's a bull shark; scraped me when I was taking samples.

Captain:

I got something better to show you. That's a thresher – a thresher's tail.

Sam Quint:

Thresher?

Captain:

A shark. You want a drink – a drink to your leg.

Matt Hooper:

I'll drink to your leg.

Captain:

Okay, so we drink to our legs.

Sam Quint pulls up his shirt to examine his appendix scar.

Matt Hooper:

I got the crème de le crème. Right here; Mary Ann Moffat – she broke my heart.

What a great scene! Now that's a small group...that's a community group...Captain Quint, Chief Brody and marine biologist, Matt Hooper in *Jaws*. They hadn't gotten along together until this night when in the dark...on a boat...afraid of death...and the beast lurking in the deep...they show each other their wounds.

Did you see Chief Brody...looks at his appendix scar?

He's wishing he had a better wound...ironic, huh?

But what's the “crème de la crème?”...a broken heart from Mary Ellen Moffat.

Well, it's when they show each other their wounds...
That they become friends...that they begin to trust.

¹⁹On the evening of that day, the first of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone it is withheld.

John 20: 19-23 (ESV)

That's what we preached on last week.

²⁴Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶Eight days later...

John 20: 24-26 (ESV)

The Jews would count the first day in a series so "8 days later" by their reckoning is "7 days later" by ours. In other words they've gathered together again on Sunday...first day of the week, one week after Easter.

...his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place [literally "thrust it"] it in my side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20: 26-31 (ESV)

Believing is everything in scripture. So,
How do I believe?
How do I have belief?
How do I get faith?

In Greek, faith or belief is the noun *pistis* and believe is the verb *pisteuo* and they all mean trust.

Well, the story of Thomas (doubting Thomas) teaches us quite a bit about faith.

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| [Slide 1] <u>How to Believe</u> 1. Jesus did what it took for Thomas to believe. |
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First Jesus did what it took for Thomas to have faith.

I mean Jesus didn't show up and ridicule Thomas for lack of faith...
He helped Thomas to have faith.

Remember no one had much or any faith the week before and Jesus didn't call Thomas "doubting Thomas"...the church did. In fact, it's Thomas that was so courageous back in chapter 11...he's the one that said to the other guys, "Let's go with Him that we may die with Him."

Thomas had courage to ask questions when no one else would.

In chapter 14, it was Thomas that belted out "Jesus we don't know where you are going...so how could we know the way?" Everyone thought it...but Thomas said it.

Jesus answered, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Good thing Thomas asked the question 'cause no one would've guessed the answer.

Well you see Jesus did what it took for Thomas to have faith. So, faith isn't a test...at least the way we think it's a test.

God isn't testing us to find out if we have faith...
(as if He doesn't know the answer to that question).

God isn't testing us to see if we have faith...
But maybe God is testing us so that we would have faith.

In 1Peter 1:7, Peter teaches our faith is "tested by trials"

...*The way gold is refined by fire.*

So, 4:12 "*Don't be surprised at the fiery trials...but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings*"...His wounds.

Jesus did what it took for Thomas to have faith...

But check this out: from the time Thomas said, "Unless I see, I won't believe." Jesus was not seen, by Thomas, for 7 days.

In John that's hugely important

...7 is the days of creation...7 is chronological time.

You know, Jesus could've shown up, right when Thomas doubted...but Jesus waited 7 days.

Well Jesus did what it took for Thomas to have faith.

My friend's son told his Dad, "Faith is believing what I know isn't true. Is faith just lying to yourself....lots of folks seem to think so..."just believe, never doubt or question."

Jesus said, "Seek and you will find."

You can't seek truth, unless you have doubts about where truth is.

Thomas sought truth and found truth or truth found him but see faith isn't lying about truth...Jesus is the truth.

And He seems to really like honest questions.

Some people doubt to avoid truth and that's sin...but if you doubt to find truth...cause you want the truth

I think that's called faith.

Hans Kung wrote, "*Doubt is the shadow side of faith.*" Seeking truth, 'cause you want truth, is faith.

Yet, faith is not like knowledge you can just go pick like fruit from some tree.

We are each perfected with faith;

Finished, in God's image with faith...

...but, faith is not something you can just take from a tree.

Actually it comes from a tree and it is a fruit...but it's a gift.

Biblical faith isn't faith in some knowledge, list or law...

Biblical faith is trusting a person.

A famous ethicist (that's a philosopher who seeks the knowledge of good and evil), John Cavanaugh, once asked Mother Teresa to pray for him for clarity. She answered, "No, I won't do that...clarity is the last thing you are clinging to...so I will pray that you trust."

We tend to think growing in faith is about acquiring knowledge but we usually want knowledge so that we won't need faith.

An evil and rebellious son will seek the knowledge of his father so that he won't have to trust his father.

People hate it when I say, "Look..."

"I really don't know how to make your life work."

"I don't know how to fix your marriage."

"I don't know, so I guess you're gonna have to trust God, your Father."

People hate that...they'd rather I just make stuff up; we all lied to each other and pretended to have faith.

Well, Thomas wouldn't pretend and Thomas wouldn't lie, but then after 7 days of not being seen, Jesus shows up and says, "Tom, jam your hand into my side and believe."

Then Jesus says, "Blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believe."

Some of you have doubts...cause you lack empirical evidence...scientific evidence...

And, you feel insecure about that.

Jesus says, "Blessed are you who haven't seen and yet believe."

Some of you have never seen what you would call a "miracle" and you feel insecure about that. Some of you have doubts 'cause you lack empirical evidence

...scientific evidence

And you feel insecure about that.

Jesus says, "Blessed are you who haven't seen and yet believe."

Maybe you haven't seen because Jesus wants you to be "blessed."

[Slide 2]

How to Believe

1. Jesus did what it took for Thomas to believe.

2. He has not seen.

"Blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believe."

You know if we see and believe we have a certain kind of faith:

Faith that God exists and has some sort of power; we know about Him the way... you know about frogs in Biology or trees in Botany...if we see and believe.

Once I was flying over Nevada and the pilot spoke over the loudspeaker. With a sense of wonder he said, "Right below us is the location of the world's oldest living thing...Prometheus, the bristlecone pine." He paused for a moment and then said,

"But its dead...They cut it down to count its rings."

They cut it down to see and then they believed; it used to be the oldest living thing.

They knew about life...but no longer had life...they killed it.

Jesus is the Life. The Jews and Romans wanted to know about Him so they nailed Him to a tree ...and dissected Him on that cross...

And THEN a Roman Centurion said, "Surely this...WAS the son of God."

Perhaps "seeing is believing" but the day you see it...
the day you eat of it...somebody dies."

Well, if we see and believe it's one kind of faith...but if we don't see and yet believe it's another kind of faith.

There are 2 kinds of faith...kind of like 2 ways of knowing...

1. You can know about things;
You can take knowledge of things...
That's called "the empirical method"...that's "science" and I love science
 1. You know about things and
 2. You can know persons.

Two ways of knowing...kind of like 2 kinds of faith...

1. Faith that God exists "Aah...yes class, we know that God exists. For we've nailed him down, dissected the evidence and made our judgment...
He exists...but He appears dead."
 1. Faith God exists
 2. Faith in who He is.

There are those that lack the first kind of faith...

But seem to have the second. They say,
"I like the idea of Jesus; the mere idea of Jesus,
but I'm not sure He exists...I hope He exists."

And, on the other hand there are those that seem to have tons of the first kind of faith...
They "know He exists," but it turns out
They really don't know who He is.

The perfect example would be the folks that John calls "the Jews." By that he means:

The religious folds that justify themselves with knowledge of the Law, in the
power of their own flesh.

If you tested those folks asking, "Does God exist?" They'd all say "I'm sure of it..."

Can't you tell by my t-shirts and bumper stickers??"

"I took the class...I know He exists."

"The Jews" believed in God that way, 100%, and so when He showed up they nailed Him to a tree...in a garden and still today, we're dissecting the evidence.

They believed He existed...but didn't know who He was
and so they had faith ...

But not faith in Him...

It was faith in their version of Him...faith in an idol.

Along about 380 AD, St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

“Concepts create idols...only wonder understands.”

You know there are those that seem sure they've got the Second Coming figured out, They quote prophets like Isaiah and talk about the “day of vengeance” and judgment of God. They seem pretty sure they'll be raptured out of here when Jesus fries everybody else with fire.

In Luke 18:31, Jesus says, “Look we're going up to Jerusalem and everything that's written about the Son of Man, in the prophets, will be accomplished...finished.” And He cried, “It is finished,” on His cross.

I mean it sounds like the vengeance and the fire happened 2000 years ago...that's not to say that we won't see it again and meet it again. But, maybe we don't recognize God's vengeance and God's fire...all that well, because we don't really know who He is...the substance of who He is.

The religious folks missed Him when he came the first time. What's to make us think we won't miss Him if He came again?

Is God impressed that you believe He exists?

If I say to you, “Hey man, I just want you to know I've figured you out and I believe you exist.” You'd be, “Wow, thanks.”

But what if I said, “Hey man, I just want you to know I believe in you...I have faith in who you are.”

Maybe there are some that have faith in who God is but not much faith that He even exists...that He's alive...kind of like Thomas.

I suspect that there are folks who call themselves “atheists” who actually have more faith in God than many “Christians.”

More faith in God 'cause they doubt the God who really is...rather than profess the God who isn't...the idol.

Well, maybe there are some that have faith in who God is... but not much faith that He even exists.

Maybe they're even mad at Him for not existing, but that means they really want Him to exist.

I'm not worried about those folks...for if they want Him, they'll seek Him and He said if you seek, you will find.

He will show up at the end of the 7 days...

And they'll be glad...they'll cry, “My Lord and My God.”

You know Thomas said he didn't believe on Easter Sunday...

So, what's He doing in church...the next Sunday...7 days later????

He said he didn't believe, but now he really wants to believe.

What's been happening for 7 days??? I bet Thomas was really mad at Jesus...but then he really

longed for Jesus and so he really wants to believe and so kinda does believe....

Jesus asks him, "Have you believed because you've seen?"...

Well Thomas is the only disciple that hasn't seen...Jesus already appeared to the others. So, maybe the answer is, "NO, I believe because I haven't seen...and so want to believe...so I guess now I do believe...in YOU."

Seeing is believing when it comes to things that are dead...but believing is seeing when it comes to living persons.

John 20:31. John writes, "*Jesus did these signs and they are written down so that you might believe.*"

Believe in signs? NO! Believe in the person they point to:

In John there are 7 signs...like the 7 days of creation...they all point to the Resurrected Christ.

Every sign is about this sign...but this isn't just a sign...this is...substance...

Every sign...all creation is telling His story...to you.

You see it's so important that you have faith in who He is

...before you see Him at the end of time

...before you see that He not only exists but that He is existence....

Faith in who He is, so that when He appears "you don't shrink in shame" as John puts it in

1 John 2:28

So that you "aren't destroyed by the 'manifestation of His parousia'...His coming" as Paul puts it in 2 Thessalonians.

So that you don't run from the Fire of Love...but run into Love crying

"My Lord and My God."

It's so important that you have faith in who He is

or you'll never endure the glory of His presence.

In the Revelation, John sees the New Jerusalem coming down and she has the Glory of God; she's filled with light and fire...filled with Him and He is Love. It's so important that you have faith in who He is before you are confronted with his undeniable existence.

Hebrews 11:1 "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for...*"

[Like a seed, like a word; like the mere idea of Jesus.]

"the conviction of things not seen...not seen...not seen."

The seed germinates in the broken soil that is your heart when He seems dead...not seen.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."

So, back to our first question: “How can I believe?” Well, you can’t just decide to believe. Belief is the substance of Jesus. You can’t just decide to believe; but with the little belief you’ve got...you can touch His wounds.

Jesus says, “Thomas...touch my wounds and believe. Touch the mark...the scar...the stigma and believe.”

[Slide 3]

How to Believe

1. Jesus did what it took for Thomas to believe.
2. He was not seen.
“Blessed are those who haven’t seen and yet believe.”
3. He told Thomas to touch his wounds.

Of all the things that He could’ve had Thomas touch, WHY the wound? I mean if you watch religious TV, you’d expect Him to say, “Thomas, you wanna believe??” ...

Touch my Lexus and believe!!!!

Touch my health, wealth, and prosperity and believe!!!

Touch my perfect life...touch my halo and believe!!!

No, “Touch the scars and believe.”

Why scars? Why scars?

[Movie clip from *Gangs of New York*]

Jenny Everdeane: “*There was a baby...they cut it out. Sorry.*”

Amsterdam Vallon: “*It’s fine.*”

Jenny Everdeane: “*Have you got any scars?*”

Amsterdam Vallon: “*One or two.*”

I wondered if I should show that clip ‘cause I didn’t really like that movie. It was so dark...I didn’t see much Jesus...except in that scene. And, I wondered if I should show that scene...in church...

Like I said, “there are many different ways of knowing” and...

It looks like they’re about to know each other in a Biblical kind of way...

One that forms a covenant...that must not be broken.

Where two persons become one body: Bride and groom joined at a wound. See? That’s knowing each other in a Biblical kind of way and so is this...

Caravaggio's (1602) painting of the Thomas touching Jesus' wound



Source: <http://www.juggle.com/the-incredulity-of-saint-thomas>

I love this picture.

When Jesus showed the disciples His side...He showed them how He made them His bride...telling them their story...Jesus and His Bride.

Remember Jesus is the "Eschatos:" ultimate Adam. Eve is created from a wound in Adam's side. The Church is created from a wound in Jesus' side –
Body broken and blood shed on a tree

Why wounds?? Well, wounds tell a story. So, if you really want to know a person, touch their wounds. Sometimes you may have the same wounds; or wounds from the same story.
Body broken and blood shed on a tree

It's the Heart of God that hangs on that tree. "Jesus from the bosom of the Father" writes John.

Have you ever run your hands down the scars on the chest of a man that's had heart surgery?
That's what you do when you come to Communion.
The Father has given His heart to you.

Like Richard Dreyfus said in Jaws, "It's the 'crème de la crème'"...a broken heart...and we are Mary Ellen Moffat.

We took His heart and nailed it to the tree...and here's the kicker...He let us...so that He...He would be known by us...so we would have faith...

Faith in who He is and He is love...
It's the "crème de la crème."

So you see...

Wanting to know Him as our possession...(to be used)...

We took His life on the tree...(that's Sin).

But it turns out He gave His life on the tree...(that's Grace).

And that is the plan from the foundation of the world...that we would touch His wounds and believe...

Made in His image...the image of Love.

Our wounds are the imprint of His and His ours...
complementary wounds from THE VERY SAME STORY.
His faithfulness formed a wound...the sin of this world...
Eve...
He is the Helper fit for us.

His faithfulness fills our faithlessness and bears fruit that is life.
Even as His faithfulness bears all of our faithlessness.
He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows and the Lord has laid on Him
“the iniquity of us all.”

So, Jesus appears to Thomas and says, “Touch my wounds and believe.”

So, “How do I believe?”

- Step one: God subjects all creation to futility and consigns all men to disobedience...Romans 11:32a
- Step two: We crucify Him and He has mercy on all...Romans 11:32b
- Step three: He rises from the dead and says, “Touch my wounds and believe.”

Even when we don't see Him...especially when we don't see Him; He says “Touch my wounds and believe.”

So, you might ask, “Where are His wounds?”

Well, “Where is His body?” ...“Where is His wounded body...The body of Christ.”

Do you want Faith??? Then,

Go to Kenya with “Children of Hope” and hold AIDS babies...

Go to Burma with Paul Bradley and touch the wounds of the persecuted church...

Go to Colfax with “Streets Hope” ...bleed Life...bleed Love for another.

See? A wound pierces the prison that is the self; the flesh. And when you touch another wound, it forms a wound called compassion. It hurts, but Love flows between the wounds and Love is Life...

God is Love and Jesus is Life.

He said, “Whatever you do to the least of these; you do to me” and He said to Thomas, “Touch my wounds.”

There are actually people that stockpile food and guard it with guns while they look to the clouds for the Second Coming of Jesus...and Jesus lies at their feet in “distressing disguise” ...lies wounded at their feet, starving. Those people are us.

You want faith, Rich Man?

Then touch the sores on Lazarus...He lies just outside your door...

Now! I have so much cool theology about scars and wounds...scars like circumcision and scars like belly buttons and wounds that bleed fire...

Stories about scars of shame transformed into scars of glory...

Stories about touching wounds; experiencing love and then being surprised by Faith...Faith in Love and God is Love...

Stories, but we don't have time and the reality is we don't need all those stories...cause you are the story...And we don't need to go to Kenya, Burma, or even Colfax to touch the wounds.

There are plenty of wounds; on the body of Christ, right here in this room...

The problem is people cover these wounds in shame, when they could be a door. The wounds on the Body of Christ form a door

...if you belong to Jesus

...you are His body

...so your wounds are on His body.

See, they are His wounds and that means His wounds are on your body as an open door...an open door inviting someone to love and God is Love.

And you know Sin is a wound...the most painful of wounds...yet when its confessed to a friend...it opens a door.

So, if you want to have Faith; touch that wound with Grace...God is Grace...

In my mind, that's the reason we're trying to form Community Groups...

to give you a way to touch the wounds on the Body of Christ...

not fix 'em...just touch 'em...and so, have Faith.

Well to touch another's wounds with Grace...you'll probably need to let them touch your wounds...and to let them touch your wounds...you'll need to let God touch them too.

A while ago a friend sent me a vision...that she received in prayer...

I was lying in a field and God was touching my wounds and healing my wounds

but when He'd reach for my heart; I'd put my hand over my chest.

See? When God touches a wound...He blesses that wound. It's not just yours anymore...it's His.

And then what Satan intended for Evil, you must acknowledge God intended for good.

....it's hard to surrender wounds.

I've met with a small group for almost 20 years now...we haven't met much in recent years. But with one person, I still meet every week. We started doing that when he really messed up and his marriage was falling apart. At first I tried to fix Andrew's marriage and Andrew's wounds but I couldn't...only God can.

Thomas wasn't asked to fix Jesus' wounds...just touch 'em.

So, we get together on Wednesday afternoons and usually just go for a walk on 16th Street.

Andrew shares his wounds and basically I just touch 'em....say, "I'm sorry" and we long for Jesus.

Then I share my wounds as he shared his...so, I share mine...a broken heart...he says,
"Yeah, I'm sorry."

Then Andrew shares his heart and I say, "I don't know what to tell you...but I love you."

And, you know its then,

touching his wound,

that I feel my wound beginning to heal,

it's then I have,

a little more faith."

You know Thomas had a wound...called faithlessness. It was when He touched Jesus' wound that his own wound was healed.

Well, Thomas had been guarding his broken heart. It had been locked down for seven days. He hadn't seen Jesus like the others. Then suddenly Jesus appeared and Thomas – Doubting Thomas – made the greatest declaration of faith in all the scriptures.

He cried, "My Lord and My God, my God."

He saw God and wasn't consumed...or maybe he was...he worshipped.

I hope you were here two weeks ago when Christian Kumpost told his story.

He told about being raped as a young man...how they held him down and cut his chest, while whispering in his ears, "This is so every time you see these scars, you remember what we did to you."

Christian shared how he accepted their judgment and began to cut himself; judge himself...sin against himself.

And he shared how one day, sitting here in church at communion he was praying, "Jesus Christ where were you in all of that?" and he heard clear as day, "Dear Christian, I'm in the blood...the blood you shed."

The life is in the Blood and the Blood is in the wound. Those wounds are Christ's wounds, on Christian's body...which is Christ's Body. They are their wounds. And now every time Christian sees those scars...he can remember what Jesus did for his.

Not as a theory in his head...but like a mark on his body

Not a scar of shame...but a mark of glory...the stigmata of Christ...

And Christian knows who Christ is...knowing Him is Life.

I don't know about you...but when I heard Christian's story...I just wanted to worship. Ya know I've got plenty of faith that God exists and sometimes it makes me do stuff for fear he might "fry my ass." But it never makes me want to worship; but when I see my friend's wounds on Christ's body and when I realize "He suffers all, they suffer."...

When I see...that "He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." When I see who He is...that's when I worship. That's when I say, "That's my Lord." ... "That's my God." ...I want Him to be God...and that's faith.

So on that night, in that room, He took the bread...broke it and He said, "This is my Body given to you. Take and eat and do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant; in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me." I want you to do it in remembrance of me...do this in remembrance of me. This is the one thing that I want you to do; week by week in remembrance of me.

Have you ever thought to yourself? "Communion is just weird." Did you ever think that? (Weird can also mean holy, by the way.) But did you ever think, "why this?" Of all the things, Jesus, that you could have us touch, why this?"

Come to the table and bring your wounds and touch God's wound...and have Life.

Benediction:

The book of Revelation, chapter 5, when all the earth, when every creature in heaven and earth and in the sea and all that is within them sings His praises..." Do you remember what they're looking at? This (holding up the bread and the wine)...the Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered...our Lord Jesus and His wounds. He's risen from the dead and so it's safe to touch His wounds and that's what He says to you..."Touch my wounds...touch the wounds on the broken Body of Christ. And, the broken Body of Christ is all around you and so people often wonder, what's the "take-away" from the sermon? ... What's the practical application point? Well here's the practical application point...touch the wounds on the Body of Christ...And where are the wounds of Christ...they're all around you...

Scripture says, "*Confess your sins, one to another.*" I think that's what scares us about small groups sometimes...when people confess their sins; we think it's our job to fix them. But that's not our job; that's God's job...He asks you to just touch them...and check it out; you have keys...touch them with Grace. We saw that last time. Whom you forgive has been forgiven in heaven; so when they confess to you, all you have to do is say, "In the name of Jesus your sins are forgiven." Wow, that's good news! You get to speak really, really...really good news.