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St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of Holy Eucharist  
The Third Sunday of Easter; May 5, 2019

## “More than Sight”

Scripture: John 21:1-4 (3 Easter C, RCL)

So... maybe there's a big fog around the Sea of Tiberias that morning, and the disciples just can't see very well through the mist. Or maybe it's still too soon after daybreak, and there just isn't enough light to make out who it is calling to them from the shore. Or maybe they're just too tired from a long night of fruitless fishing, and their weary eyes can't quite make out the face of the man on the shore in the distance. Whatever the reason, it seems to me the disciples are definitely struggling a little.

You know, for a bunch of guys who only recently spent several years practically living with Jesus, who probably ate with him most every day, who journeyed the local roads with him, who watched him die on a cross, and then were visited by him in their locked, secret hideout —Jesus... resurrected and clearly full of life— you would think these guys would understand what is going on... that Jesus meant what he said about his resurrection, that he is alive and very near them. And he meant what he said when he told them some three years before that they would no longer be catching fish, but catching people for the Kingdom of God.

So, we have all likely heard the saying: “Seeing is believing,” but apparently, it isn’t. At least it isn’t everything. I think this story tells us that the early Church is struggling. By the time John is writing his gospel for an infant Church, it’s some sixty to seventy years after Jesus’ resurrection; there is a new generation of followers, and they have *not* seen Jesus. And they are asking big questions, and I think it’s reasonable that some must be struggling with this new faith.

So John is teaching about sight and about belief. Only recently Jesus says to his disciples: *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”* And today, the disciples see Jesus on the shore, but they still don’t know who he is. And when they do begin to realize that it is him, the risen Lord, all sorts of nutty things start to happen... their nets are overflowing with fish even though they caught none all night long, they whisper secretly to each other about the strange man on the shore, Peter jumps into the water. And they come to shore and find fish already cooking over a fire. And still the scriptures tell us the disciples wouldn’t dare ask “Who are you?” because it is clear that it is Jesus, but how can this be? I mean, why would they even need to ask? Unless, of course, seeing isn’t always believing...

Now, I have to figure that if the people who lived with Jesus had a struggle with belief even after they had seen the risen Christ, well, where does that leave us some 2,000 years later? I think belief really can be a challenge. It is hard to shape a life of belief if what we believe in is not seen, and it's even harder if we hold to the adage that "seeing is believing." But in life and in faith, there is more just than sight. I don't think the struggle with belief in Jesus is just that we can't see him. I think that somewhere in our humanity, somewhere in our finite nature as creatures of this earth who are born and who live for a time and who die, we can have a challenge believing in the resurrected Christ, because it's easier to believe that such a thing is too good to be true. Look at the disciples... with all the personal attention they receive from Jesus, with all he tells them ahead of time about how he is going to die and rise again, after he has visited them and they have seen him resurrected and alive, they still mope around by the seashore, and I imagine Peter says, "Oh, what the heck, might as well go fishing..." and the rest of them say, "Why not?" And when they see Jesus on the beach, they are still shocked and befuddled and tentative and uncertain about what to believe. Just, I suspect, as any one of us would be if we saw Jesus "in the flesh" right now.

Perhaps the experience of Resurrection from the Dead is too profound for sight alone. Perhaps it is too startling and hopeful and powerful for us to take it in all

at once. It took the disciples a while; the Church continues to work on it. Maybe that is why Paul once said: “We walk by faith and not by sight.” Faith is the means of knowing Christ’s presence. Perhaps in spending time in prayer, in worship, in communion with God and others, perhaps in caring for others as Jesus asks of us, and by being cared for by others, perhaps in the experience of the community of the Church, in its celebrations, its Easter mornings, its marriages, baptisms, illnesses, struggles, burials, in literally *practicing* our beliefs, we teach the eyes of faith to see the Risen Lord, to expect his unexpected presence, to trust in his promise to be with us and, one day, to raise us to new life.

So I’ve read that when each of us is born, we can barely make out the faces of those people who hold us and care for us during our first months of life. We know they are there. We can see something. But, as infants, our eyes are not fully formed yet. We come out of the darkness of the womb, and it takes a while for our vision to grow. Well, I think faith can be like that. We can only see more after we have seen a little. And with each day that we live in faith with Jesus, our vision becomes a little better. Sure, maybe seeing isn’t always believing, but I bet it is believing that leads us to see.