

*“Have not seen and yet believe”*

Our focus today, coming both from the Scripture Reading and from our Worship, is on **Personal Commitment** – Personal Dedication. During this Worship Celebration, we joined in the **Dedication of Julian Clay** and in a few minutes, Mike Dawes, Chairperson of Round Groves’ Board of Deacons, will share his Personal Dedication Testimony, as part of **Round Grove United Church’s Personal Dedication Program**. It reaches its high point next Sunday, Personal Dedication Sunday, when, during Worship, members and friends will complete and bring forth their Personal Dedication Booklets to the Altar for Dedication.

In the Gospel Lectionary Reading, we find several important examples of **Personal Dedication – of Living Faith**. Those experiences are important because they are part of **God’s process, which reveals the Truth of the Good News, so you and I and everyone else are enabled to Believe – Live Faith – Live out the New Relationship with God and New Life in Christ!**

As I studied this Reading in preparation for today’s message, verse 29 jumped out as particularly revealing, for it closely ties together **the experience of the disciples with the Risen Lord and both their and our Life of Faith**. Thomas had just declared his faith and Jesus’ identity when *“Jesus said to him, ‘Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!’”*

Over the generations of the Christian Community, “doubting Thomas” has frequently been denounced for refusing to believe Jesus was raised from the dead, until he shared the same type of encounter with his Risen Lord, which the other ten disciples had experienced on that first Easter evening. But, **Jesus was not rebuking Thomas; he was utilizing Thomas’ moment when he was transformed to Live Faith to share the Good News of how many other persons would also come to Live Faith – including you and me!**

Frederick Buechner discusses that sacred experience, saying, “Even though he (Jesus) said the greater blessing is for those who can believe without seeing, it’s hard to imagine that there’s a believer anywhere who wouldn’t have traded places with Thomas, given the chance, and seen that face and heard that voice and touched those ruined hands.” (Frederick Buechner’s excerpt on Thomas, was first published in Peculiar Treasures and reprinted in Beyond Words.)

You and I are not able to switch places with Thomas or any of the other ten disciples or with Mary Magdalene for that matter. Instead, the reports of their experiences of being with the Risen Lord, along with the gift of the Holy Spirit, are important aspects of **God’s Process**, which enables you, me, and all people to experience and Live Faith – the New Relationship with our Divine Parent – the New Life in Jesus Christ. So, the personal encounters of Thomas and the other original disciples with the Risen Lord were not just of benefit for themselves but for every Christian, who has also come to **Live the New Faith Relationship with God – Lives Faith**.

Let’s take a few moments to note how the Gospel of John reports the events of those two Sunday evenings with emphasis on the disciples’ experiences leading them to Faith. I have asked Brooke Leenerts to project the crucial parts of this Scripture. Please notice the commonality of all of the

**underlined portions** and especially the words having to do with **seeing the Lord**, which are in blue text. Now, let's take a look. John explains, *"Then Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord."*

*"One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'"*

Continuing these comparisons, we focus on the **Connection between seeing the Lord and Thomas' coming to Faith**: *"Thomas said to them, 'Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'"*

*"The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!'"*

Jesus gave Thomas the same opportunity and more, which the other ten disciples had experienced with their Risen Lord. Jesus responded to Thomas' previous declaration of needing to see the Risen Lord for Faith by using the imperative for Thomas to have the faith he promised:

*Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'* – Statement or Declaration of Faith.

*Jesus said to him, 'Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!'"*

Friends, an important part of the **Good News** coming from today's Scripture is you and I and all people are enabled to be part of those who are **"happy"** and **"who believe"** **"without seeing"**! The Good News also includes the eyewitness testimonies about the Risen Lord from Thomas, the other ten disciples, Mary Magdalene, Saul of Tarsus, and **"more than five hundred of his followers"**! **Those revelations, along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, are combined to form God's Process, through which you and I and everyone else are enabled to Believe – Live Faith – Live out the New Relationship with God and the New Life in Christ!**

So, as we celebrate the commitments of Julian's parents and of our two congregations for his growth in Christian Love and Faith, as the members and friends of Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, approach the high point of our Personal Dedication Program next Sunday, let us all allow **God's Process** – the eyewitness testimonies along with the Holy Spirit to enable us to **Live Faith – Live the New Faith Relationship with God – Live the New Life in Christ – "believe without seeing"** the Risen Lord Jesus Christ – the Son of God!

Finally, the author of the Gospel of John wants all of us to understand the whole undertaking of the writing of this Gospel mirrors **God's Purpose in Jesus Christ** – it enables us to Live Faith – Live the New Faith Relationship with God – Live the New Life in Christ – **"believe without seeing"**! John concludes today's Scripture, *"In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life."* Amen.