

In today's world, the most common answer to what do you have above your mantle or your fireplace or whatever the center of your living room are is your television, right? I mean how many of us have our TVs on full display above our general fireplace area? However, this wasn't always the case right? We all probably grew up with very different things taking pride of place in our living rooms, maybe it was a clock or family pictures or some kind of art work, something that immediately drew your attention and maybe reflected a little bit of what the center of your home was. For me growing up, well, I mean, I guess you could kind of say it was art work, but it was very niche, very nineties art work. If you walked into my house when I was little, there above our TV was not a family photo, not a clock, but a Magic Eye poster. Oh yes, framed and on full display.

We remember these right? The weird fad that was iconic in the early 90's, which led to all sorts of books and apparently in my case, living room talking points. They were these pictures of what appeared to be just squiggly, messy lines that made no sense whatsoever, until you allowed your eyes to relax, cross a little bit, and essentially *see into* the picture, thus revealing some sort of hidden image within the chaos. Now, I can't even say that our magic eye image was like super profound once you saw what it was, no indeed, you settled your mind on our magic eye and came face to

face with an underwater shipwreck, treasure chests, fish, the whole nine yards. We never even had a boat growing up, we still don't! So why in the world my parents felt that this was the image we wanted to display to the world, I have no idea, however, it did leave a lasting impression apparently, and if you want to spin it, which is my intention here this morning, left you with the knowledge that what you see isn't always what's actually in front of you. What you see isn't always what you are called to believe is there. Sometimes you have to believe in what you can't see, even if that is unbelievably difficult to do.

It must be the week after Easter because here we are with Thomas. As usual, year after year after year, the week after the resurrection story comes the story of doubting Thomas, and don't get me wrong, I love Thomas. He was fierce and bold and he gives us the assurance and the permission to not only voice our doubts but to proclaim that Jesus isn't just our Lord, but our God. However, there are only so many sermons one can write about Thomas before you're eyes are going crossed and you feel like you're looking at a Magic Eye photo wondering, have I written this exact same sermon before? So...let's tackle this from a different angle, shall we?

Let's talk about John. John the writer of our gospel this morning. Now, we don't actually know for 100% sure that the John that wrote this is

John the disciple, John whom Jesus loved, John who took Mary into his home after Jesus' death. It's possible, but he would have been well into his later years if he wrote this and with life expectancies during that time, well, it's a question. However, for all that we don't know about who wrote this gospel, what we do know with some amount of certainty is who this gospel was written *for*. We know it because the gospel writer is pretty up front about it. This gospel was written for...well...us. Or at least people like us. People who had not seen Jesus face to face, had not witnessed any of his deeds, heard any of his words, and are building their faith solely upon the words and experiences of others. John, whomever he may be, wanted to write about Jesus so that others might hear the story of his life, death, and resurrection and come to believe even though they had not seen any of it.

In so many ways, John uses Thomas as an example of just how unbelievably *hard* what we are being asked to do truly is. I mean if even Thomas, someone who was intimately aware of all the wonders, signs, and promises of Jesus struggled to fully believe the message of the resurrection, even when he heard it from not one, not two, but *ten* of his best friends, how much harder is it going to be for us who don't have any of those luxuries to put our faith in this message which seems entirely incomprehensible. This is Thomas who witnessed Jesus raising someone from the dead, drank wine

Jesus created from water, and watched a man who hadn't seen his entire life suddenly be able to look at the world around him, and he can't wrap his head around the message of the resurrection that the other disciples are telling him. He doesn't care that *they* have felt the nail marks and seen the wound in his side, he doesn't care that *they* have felt the Holy Spirit wash over them, Thomas needs to experience this for himself, because in the fog of fear and grief and sorrow, the too good to be true thing is absolutely going to feel way too hard to believe. He can't just squint his eyes a certain way and see the full picture, he has to truly see it to believe it.

It's a bit hard to not feel jealous of Thomas as we sit here. Even hearing Jesus say the words, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," knowing that those words are for us, because let's face it, at the end of the day faith is hard. That is written all over every single one of the post-resurrection stories. Even those who are witnessing it first hand have a hard time wrapping their minds around it, so I have to say, we get a little bit of leeway if our brains struggle to keep up with the awe and wonder that is the message that Jesus is not only risen from the dead, but brings that promise to all of us as well. And I mean...let's be real, we don't exactly live in a world that makes it *easy* to see resurrection, hope, and faith on a daily basis. We are constantly assailed by messages of harm, struggle,

pain, and what seems to be the overwhelming power of death, and so to stand up and boldly proclaim that we believe in the resurrection when we have no visible proof of such is...bold. It is brave. It is miraculous.

Yet...even in the midst of the hard of the world, even in the midst of what seems impossible, resurrection is there, each of us does witness it every single day, it's just sometimes it feels like it's all jumbled up in a mess of squiggly lines that make no sense unless you tilt your head, cross your eyes, and take ten steps slowly back at just the right angle. And I don't know, maybe it seems foolish to be like, but there is good in the world, there is resurrection, and yet...Jesus is the picture perfect proof that what the world calls foolish is what God declares as wisdom. Therefore, let's have some foolishness shall we?

A man in South Africa has invented what he has called "a Roomba for the water." He has built a machine with a shark like mouth that literally can scoot along the surface of the water to clean up water pollution efficiently and quickly.

Over the last three years, 800 congregations of vast and various faiths in the US have partnered with RIP Medical Debt to buy and thus pay off medical debt for thousands of people. As one example, a synagogue in Chicago partnered with two predominantly Black churches to raise \$10,000

worth of medical debt and with that money, RIP paid off \$1.9 million of debt and freed 2,327 people of medical debt in the Chicago area. And a church in North Carolina recently raised \$23,000 to pay off student lunch debt for their entire county, raising so much money that they paid off the debt for the year and will help cover debt for next year.

Just last week a church in France that was destroyed during The Somme had its crucifix returned to it after being lost since 1916. Their entire town had been destroyed and now this crucifix serves as the last piece of renovation and resurrection for the whole town.

Two weeks ago, the San Diego Zoo welcomed twin Amur Leopards, a critically endangered species who are finally seeing a glimmer of hope with the birth of these two little fur balls.

At the end of March, a group of Ukranian refugees who had just settled in Minnesota, barely having their feet underneath them, volunteered to travel with a group down to Mississippi to help victims of the recent tornadoes.

A couple of weeks ago, twin women who were put up for adoption during World War II were reunited after *75 years* apart.

A refugee from Afghanistan was recently reunited with his dog after having been apart for a year.

The list could go on and on. And I know, it doesn't eliminate the equal and opposite amount of awful news stories we could also list. However, it is a blazing and bold reminder that resurrection is all around us, even if we sometimes have to squint to see it. It is so easy to let our faith lie stagnant, to let it grow weary under the weight of the world, to constantly have it battered and bruised against the walls of frustration that this world throws at us. It would be far easier to say that Christ's resurrection is too good to be true and move along with life.

Yet...our second lesson slips a little message in here for us...a reminder that our faith is more precious than gold. It is precious because it isn't easy, it takes work, it takes effort, it takes a fierce and ardent attitude that says I am bound and determined to see resurrection in the world around me, and not only see it, but *believe it and be it*. And that might be the biggest challenge of all. Thomas didn't just have to believe the resurrection, he then had to go out and proclaim it, share it, live it in the world, and so much we. It's not enough to be here and say, yes, I believe this in my heart, but we then must go out and be someone else's resurrection story, we are called to be the reason someone believes the too good to be true. Don't make it complicated, be Christ in the world, and make it so that people don't have to squint through the squiggles to see resurrection. **AMEN!!!**