



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Seeing Faith

SCRIPTURE:
John 20:24-29

August 14, 2022 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

Friends, this is the second of three Sundays where we are exploring sensing faith—how faith comes to us through our senses. Last Sunday we tasted faith. Today we’re exploring seeing faith. This may be a familiar story to some of us and new to others.

Jesus has been raised from the dead and according to the Gospel of John, appeared to Mary the Magdalene. She went and told the disciples who apparently did not believe her or if they did, they did not do anything about it. They remained afraid—holed up together in a room in Jerusalem with a locked door. John says they are afraid of the Jewish religious leaders. Then Jesus appears to them and he shows them his hands and his side and then they rejoice—amazed that Jesus is alive. He breathes the Holy Spirit upon them and leaves. But Thomas is not with them and missed Jesus’ appearance.

Thomas comes back to the room and the disciples tell him that Jesus was just with them and he does not believe them. He says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Now it’s a week later. Some scholars believe the disciples still have not left the room. The doors are locked. And Jesus somehow appears and offers his hands and his side for Thomas to touch and Jesus says, “Do not doubt but believe,” which is why Thomas picks up this moniker—forevermore he shall be known as...? Doubting Thomas. But then, Thomas makes the single-most significant faith proclamation of the gospels. Jesus is called Lord many times. But only Thomas calls him, “My Lord and my God.” Many call Jesus, “Lord” but only Thomas—in all of the gospels—names Jesus as “Lord” *and* “God.” He is the only one to say this.

Then Jesus says to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Who is Jesus talking about? He is talking about you and me. He is talking about all the succeeding generations who will believe without seeing Jesus. He is talking about us.

Seeing faith. It’s true. We cannot see the real, live, actual Jesus. It has been nearly 2,000 years since God in Jesus of Nazareth walked on this earth. But I am convinced that God is still present among us. I believe God is constantly revealing God’s own self to us. Our job is to be attentive. Our job is to see.

Many of you may have heard about this or seen this. Little league teams across the world are in playoffs right now trying to get to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. This past Tuesday, the Texas East team from Pearland, Texas and the Oklahoma team from Tulsa made it to the Southwest regional finals. In the third inning, pitcher Kaiden Shelton lost control of a curve ball and hit Isaiah Jarvis in the head. It was a frightening moment. Thankfully, the ball hit his helmet. After a few moments, Isaiah was able to stand and go to first base. So Isaiah Jarvis is all right and standing on first base and he looks out there and sees the pitcher Kaiden Shelton crying on the pitcher’s mound and Isaiah (his nickname is “Zay”) leaves first base and goes over to hug Kaiden and tells him, “I’m all right. I’m okay. You’re okay.”

Zay’s coach, Sean Copeland, said when he saw Isaiah walking up to the pitcher, he didn’t know what Zay was going to do but he knew it was going to be kind. He said he knew it was going to be kind because that’s the kind of kid Isaiah Jarvis is. In

a later interview, Zay said he just thought it was important to comfort Kaiden and show him God's love. Coach Copeland went on to say it's kind of cool that in a time when we are so divided, when there is so much hate out there, that two 12-year-old boys would show us what really matters—what really is important. Seeing faith. God is present all around us and is showing up—even in Waco, Texas, in a little league regionals game.

I have my own experience with 12-year-olds. Years ago, fresh out of college, I taught seventh-grade English and Social Studies at Curtis Junior High School in Tacoma, Washington. My second year teaching, we started a new program mainstreaming special-needs students into our regular classrooms. I received my class lists and found I only had one special-needs student. His name was Travis. He had blond hair, blue eyes, braces, and a gorgeous smile. Travis was born with Down's syndrome which meant that he faced some cognitive struggles. I met Travis and his mom the day before school started so he could get acclimated to our campus. We had nine different buildings all connected by walkways. It was daunting.

To be honest, I wasn't worried about how my other teachers were going to treat him, I was worried about whom? Yes. I was worried about how the other students were going to treat him. I had Travis for third and fourth periods. I gave him a map of the campus and color coded it to help him get to each classroom. The tragedy of his first day was that he walked through the 900 building which was filled with ninth graders and their lockers. They saw this special-needs kid walking with his map and someone tripped him and he fell and then another kid stepped on and ripped his copy of the map. Travis was 15 minutes late to my class. He was frustrated. I hugged him when he walked in and showed him to his seat.

He had a really rough time at our school. The worst for Travis, I found out later, was lunch. We were so crowded that we had five lunches. Fourth lunch was right in the middle of fourth period. Travis would go to the lunchroom and try to find a seat and one of two things would happen; either he would find a seat and sit down and everyone at

the table would get up and leave or he would find a seat and try to sit down and the person to the left would take that seat then Travis would try to take that open seat and the person to the left would take that seat until Travis would end up running around the table and students would make a game out of humiliating him. Eventually, he would go to a corner of the lunchroom by himself on the floor and try to eat until a teacher would tell him he couldn't eat there and escort him to a table which he hated.

After a couple of weeks of this, he came to my classroom at the end of the day and stood in front of my desk and said, "Mr. Nishioka, I have a question." "Oh great, Travis! What is your question? Is it about English or Social Studies?" I asked. "No, it's important," he said. "Mr. Nishioka, how do I get a friend? At my old school, I had lots of friends and at this school, I can't seem to find a friend. How do you get a friend here?" I told him that I knew friends were hard to find but I would be glad to be his friend. Travis looked at me and said, "Mr. Nishioka, you're a teacher. Teachers make lousy friends. I need to get a friend." Then he turned around and walked out of my classroom.

At the start of October, I received a note that I had a new student. He was a transfer student from Santa Barbara, California. His family had just moved. His name was Bernie. He was 12-years-old; the same age as Travis. At 12-years-old, he was my height, 6' 2", with blond hair, blue eyes, braces, and walked into my classroom with a confident stride. He was an amazing athlete. He tried out for our football team which was already more than halfway through season and earned a spot on the varsity squad. At lunch, this allowed him to sit at the ninth-grade jock table—unheard of for a seventh grader. Everyone knew who Bernie was.

A couple of weeks after he arrived, we went to lunch and Bernie went to sit at the ninth-grade jock table. Travis went to go sit in the corner on the floor. There was an open seat next to Bernie. He looked up, saw Travis, and yelled across the lunchroom, "Travis!" Slowly Travis got up and moved to sit next to Bernie. Everybody was talking. "Did you see that cool kid from California?"

Yeah, that Bernie guy—he got that kid to sit with him?!” Everyone was talking about this.

It began to be a routine. Travis would always wait for Bernie to sit and call him over and then he would sit next to him. They began to act like an old, married couple. Travis showed Bernie how to split Oreos and dip them in the milk carton. Bernie would reach over and help wipe Travis’ chin when he was drooling. Soon, the other ninth graders were caring for Travis and he was caring for them. One day, Bernie missed lunch for an orthodontist appointment and so, for the first time in weeks, Travis went to go sit in the corner of the lunchroom on the floor. At the table full of ninth-grade athletes, someone looked around and asked, “Hey, where’s Travis?” They saw him and yelled, in unison, “Travis!” And he came over to sit with them, a huge smile on his face.

Just before Thanksgiving, Travis came to my classroom at the end of the day and told me he had to tell me something. “Great, Travis. Is it about En-

glish or Social Studies?” I asked. “No,” he said. “It’s about something important.” “What do you want to tell me, Travis?” I asked. “Mr. Nishioka, do you remember when I asked you how to get a friend?” he said. “Yes, Travis. I remember. And I offered to be your friend but you said: No, teachers make...” I told him. “Yeah, Mr. Nishioka,” said Travis. “Anyway, I wanted you to know I have a friend.” “That’s great, Travis,” I said. “So far, one friend, but I think maybe a bunch of others, too,” he said. Then he looked at me with his beautiful smile and said, “Mr. Nishioka, Bernie is my best friend.” And he turned and walked out of my classroom.

Seeing faith. On a little league field in Waco, Texas. In a lunchroom at Curtis Junior High School in Tacoma, Washington.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe.” O Lord, we see. Yes. We see.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.