

Selfies

John 20:19-31

Preached at FCCW May 23, 2020 Virtual Worship Service

All the communicating I've been doing lately through teleconferencing and zoom meetings has got me thinking about how different the resurrection of Jesus would have been if there had been smartphones around. I mean, a lot of incredible stuff took place that day and it would have been such an advantage to have been able to record what was happening in pictures rather than having to rely on eyewitness testimonies.

Beginning with when Mary Magdalene woke everyone up early in the morning with her startling news. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" she said. If Mary could have just snapped a shot of the empty tomb with her iphone and attached the jpeg to a group email addressed to the disciples it would have saved her a lot of steps, running back to tell them in person.

A little while later, Mary was at the door again. This time, she said, "I have seen the Lord." Maybe the disciples thought that meant she had found where the body of Jesus had been taken. But Mary meant that she had literally seen Jesus up and alive again. The disciples were plenty skeptical.

If only she could have taken a selfie of herself with the risen Lord, maybe seeing would have been believing. Instead, later that night, Jesus had to pay a personal visit to the disciples to corroborate Mary's story. Even so, it took showing them the wounds he still carried from his crucifixion to convince them that it was really him and not just some emoji of their grief-stricken imaginations. So, eventually they *all* got to see for themselves that he was resurrected. Well, almost all of them. You see, one of them - Thomas - was out somewhere when Jesus paid his visit. I wish someone could have made a YouTube video of the conversation when Thomas got home. It would have gone viral.

Maybe it went something like this:

Sue - "Thomas! We have seen the Lord!"

Ray ~ "What! You mean they found his body?"

Sue - "No. He was actually here! He just came through the door and-"

Ray ~ "Wait. Did you leave the door unlocked? You know the authorities may be looking for us. The rule is, always keep the doors locked!"

Sue - "Thomas, the door *was* locked. Jesus came THROUGH the door."

Ray ~ "How do you know it was Jesus?"

Sue - "He showed us the nail scars in his hands, and the scar of the wound in his side."

Ray ~ "Well, I won't believe he is alive, unless I know it is him for sure by seeing the scars with my own eyes!"

See, this is where I think a smartphone would have come in handy. The disciples could have all huddled around Jesus while he was there and Peter could have taken a group selfie, so they would have something to show Thomas, to prove that Jesus had really been there.

Actually, they would not even have needed to wait until Thomas returned. They could have texted him the selfie. Maybe Jesus could have held up his hands in the picture, for Thomas to see the scars there. THAT would have got him home in a hurry!

Of course, there were no smartphones, and so no selfies, to provide the proof that Thomas was looking for before he could believe that Jesus was resurrected. Instead, Thomas got something even better than a selfie to remove his doubts. A week later, Jesus came back to the room where he had appeared to the other disciples. Only this time, Thomas was home. Seeing with his own eyes the nail-scarred hands and spear-pierced side, Thomas cried out, "My Lord and my God!"

I guess Jesus cared enough that Thomas' doubts be put to rest that he made a special trip for an in-person visit. But really, that's what Jesus does for everyone. He meets us right where we are, with all our questions and uncertainties. He doesn't wait for us to graduate from some spiritual webinar before we can have a relationship with him. All we need to show is a desire and a will to know him. Because it is not knowledge, but faith, that qualifies us as his disciples. Often our questions and our doubts are the very things that open the door for a deeper encounter with Jesus.

This story began with the disciples holed up behind locked doors for fear of what might happen to them if they set foot outside and were recognized by the authorities. I can relate to that after weeks of staying at home waiting for the COVID threat to go away. But locked doors and fearful hearts could not keep Jesus out.

After he offered them proof positive of who he was, he breathed on them. Which, you don't need me to point out, would--under today's social distancing guidelines--be sooo not cool. Except that what Jesus exhaled all over them was not coronavirus bearing breath-droplets, but life giving Spirit.

Jesus told Thomas and the rest of the disciples, "You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." When he said that—he was talking about us! None of us have ever seen Jesus with our own eyes. And yet, we have come to believe. Those who have not seen Jesus either have only us, who believe in him, to reveal him to them. And that good news has hardly ever been more needed than in these days when just about everyone is sheltering fearfully behind closed doors.

With all our smartphones and selfies, our tweeting and zooming, when you get right down to it, the best equipment we have to help people to believe in Jesus hasn't changed since that day when Jesus was raised. That would be the witness to his living presence that we offer with what we are doing with our lives.

I don't know. Maybe someday they'll invent smartphones that are smart enough to take selfies of Jesus standing by our side when we are doing things we feel called to do in his name. But, for the time being, all people will have to convince them that Jesus is alive and active in the world--is us.

We can't produce *selfies* to prove that Jesus is alive. But we can present to the world *selves* that are committed to following the Way he has set before us. Selves that are gifted with the Holy Spirit.

But, as it turns out, that is the best proof of all.