

## St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church

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### **“Faith Requires Action!”**

Fr. Richard Molison, Preacher

Have you ever wished you could actually see Jesus? To touch Jesus? To physically hear His words? Have you ever wished that you could sit down with Him to seek His advice? To be like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus? Wouldn't that be awesome!

Well, you and I are not the only ones to have those thoughts. For some reason, the disciple Thomas was not with the disciples when they gathered in the upper room shortly after the resurrection of Jesus. This account is recorded in John's Gospel, chapter 20, verses 24-29:

*But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." <sup>26</sup> After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."*

The truth of the matter is, what was just read to you is considered to be one of the most profound passages of scripture for it helps us to understand, helps us to define, helps us to unpack, what faith truly is. Jesus said to Thomas that believing is not dependent upon physical presence, the physical reality of what we believe.

Jesus, in the form of the Holy Spirit, is present with us at all times. Even now, He is with you and me, for whenever two or three are gathered in His Name, Jesus is there with them.

So, "Good Morning, Jesus! Thank you for being here with us this morning! We pray that your visit with us will be a joyful one."

In faith, Jesus can be as real to us as He was to Thomas on that day in the upper room. The greater faith lies in those believing without seeing.

Fr. J. Jeffrey Snead, an Anglican Priest in the Anglican Church in North American, rector of a parish in Ligonier, PA, a place familiar to many of us here, in his sermon entitled "Faithing," offers the following illustration.

"One day, a young disciple of Christ desiring to fully receive all that God had for him, visited the home of an elderly Christian. He had heard that this old man had never lost his first love for Christ, over all the years. The elderly man was sitting on the porch with his dog taking in a beautiful sunset. The young man posed this question: "Why is it sir, that so many Christians zealously chase after God during the first year or two after their conversion, but then fall into a complacent ritual of church once or twice a week and they end up not looking any different than their neighbors who aren't even Christians? I have heard you are not like that.

The old man smiled and replied, "Let me tell you a story: One day I was sitting here quietly in the sun, with my dog. Suddenly a large white rabbit ran across the field in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up, and took off after that big ole white rabbit.

He chased that rabbit over the hills with a passion. Soon, other dogs joined him, attracted by his barking. What a sight it was, as the pack of dogs ran barking across the creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns!

Gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit, discouraged by the course and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit. In that story, young man, lies the answer to your question."

The young man sat in confused silence. Finally, he said, "Sir, I don't understand. What is the connection between a rabbit chase and the quest for God?"

"You fail to understand," answered the well-seasoned old man, "because you failed to ask the obvious question. Why didn't the other dogs continue in the chase? And the answer to that question is they had not seen the rabbit. For many unless the prize is seen, the chase becomes just too difficult. Faith is

lacking the passion the determination to keep up, lacking. The chase wanes, and finally ends."

Every living person daily manifests faith, daily exhibits faith in something, and for the most part, does so without thinking or is aware of what is being experienced. No one can live a single day without exercising faith. When you get up in the morning, faith assures that your feet will touch the floor; faith assures that when you flip the switch, a light will go on; faith assures that when you turn the car key, the engine will start; faith assures the letter dropped into a mail box will be delivered; faith assures that the elevator ride to the 15<sup>th</sup> floor is a safe one; and such illustrations as these could go on and on, revealing the amount of faith placed in everyday life experiences. All of the above illustrations have one thing in common, all have one common denominator, to which I shall later return.

But when it comes to having faith the in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith becomes anything but routine. By routine, I mean the ease of acceptance. All of us have a bit of the disciple Thomas within us. We wish to see the physical reality and then believe. "I am from Missouri. Show me!" Remember what Jesus stated, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

St. Paul echoed this same thought when he wrote in his letter to the Romans, in chapter 8, verse 24, *"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what is already seen?"*

Is there ever a time we hope for what is already present? For instance, is it correct to hope that I will be here with you this morning? Of course not. I am here! Is it correct for me to hope that you will take home something of value from this sermon? You betcha!

From the opening statement of our second lesson read by \_\_\_\_\_, we heard these words: *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen."*

One of the best examples of such faith is Noah. Again from our second lesson from Hebrews, chapter 11, we heard read, *"7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."*

Noah was told by Yahweh God to build an ark. Now how ridiculous is that! Noah was told that it was going to rain. Rain? What is rain? Don't we wish to have a bit of rain here! To Noah, rain was an unknown phenomenon! Never experienced it! Never saw it! Never felt it! It must be remembered that the moisture-laden hydrosphere surrounding the entire earth was still in place. The earth, at this point in time, did not need rain. The earth at this time was a God-created, self-sustaining, self-sufficient greenhouse. No need for rain!

Yet, in Godly fear Noah set to work. In spite of the ridicule he and his family experienced, the banishment from friends and family, Noah had faith in the things hoped for, the conviction, the assurance of things yet unseen. Every tree that fell, fell in faith. Every board cut from the log was in faith. Every peg driven into the wood was driven in faith. Every animal placed on board was in faith. The closing of the door shouted faith!

There is one common denominator in all of the examples we heard read from Hebrews as well as with the illustrations of faith given earlier. That common denominator is that **faith requires action**. Faith is not passive. Faith is action to do God's work. Passive faith did not build the Ark! Passive faith did not get Yahweh God's people out of Egypt. King David, Gideon, Samuel, Moses, Samson and many others, did not reflect passive faith, but rather a faith which produced works; a faith that changed lives. An action faith that transformed lives.

Faith brings with it *vision*, for the vision of faith produces the evidence of things unseen. Proverbs 29:18 states, "*Where there is not a vision, the people perish.*" A young preacher went to a small church and God was showing him a great vision for his church. The pastor worked very hard to do his part, setting the example and encouraging others to see God's vision and the potential for the church. The pastor posted a sign on a wall in the parish hall on which was written from Proverbs 29:18, "*Where there is not a vision, the people perish.*" However, and tragically, no one caught the vision. No one wanted to see it. No one cared to see it! They were very content with the way things were. Eventually God called this pastor to another church. After the service on his last Sunday, a strange thing happened. As he was walking down the aisle to leave for the last time, the letter "W" fell from the sign he placed on the wall. The sign now read, "Here there is no vision, the people perish."

It is a given that faith requires action, action to do God's work. How do we acquire faith? St. Paul writes, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing, by the Word of God. Once again, I refer to Fr. Snead's work. He shares that there are two Greek words used to translate the term *word* in the scriptures. One is *logos*, the other is *rhema*. We are more familiar with the term *logos* which is the general word, the general spoken and written knowledge of God. Through the scriptures, you can receive all the knowledge you need concerning God and His promises, but through reading alone, you will not receive faith. By reading alone, you will not receive faith.

However, in the verse just cited, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," for the term *Word*, Paul uses the Greek term *rhema*. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *rhema* of God." *Rhema* translates to, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the saying action word of God." *Rhema* is the faith action word of God. Faith requires action!

As was stated before, Noah and the others manifested their faith through action, through the *rhema*, the faith action word of God.

You know, Peter never walked on water because of logos, because of his general knowledge of God. No. Peter asked Jesus to give him a specific word. Peter asked Jesus, "Command me to come." And Jesus replied, "Come." The actual word Christ gave Peter was *rhema*. (Slowly) The word Christ gave Peter brought forth action faith. And without *rhema*, without action faith, it is impossible to please God.

It is important for this parish to have a vision for itself. Remember proverbs, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." I now invite you to become an active participant in this morning's message. We heard biblical scripture state that without vision, people, this body of Christ, will perish. Without a sense of purpose, without a sense of direction, without something to shoot for, this community of faith will fail.

I ask you to share with us what your hope is for St. Bartholomew's. There are no wrong responses. There will not be any discussion on responses given. No judgment calls will be heard. An idea pops into your mind, treat it as being from the Holy Spirit. Recorded responses will be added to this sermon and made available on the sermon rack in the hallway.

So, who volunteers to be the recording secretary? And who is going to break the ice and be first? What hope do you have for St. Bartholomew's?

Non-edited responses given by members of the congregation:

Growth

Growth

Growth

Longevity

Greater involvement from congregation who normally do not volunteer

Community involvement

Give life and hope to the community

Positive effect on the community

Work outside the church in the community

Further God's kingdom

To become known as a Bible-believing Christ-Centered church

Youth – Greater involvement opportunities

Ministries for the youth

Families

Help people with addiction

Continued learning experiences

Salvation for everyone  
Provide a school for youth  
Soup kitchen  
Latch key kids program  
That everyone in the world would get to hear the  
word of Jesus  
A gem given by Fr. Amend: "To see the rabbit."

I thank you for taking the risk of offering a response in a public setting such as this.

Just a reminder in closing, that faith without *rhema*, faith without action, is not a faith pleasing to God. And who is responsible for providing the *rhema*, who is responsible for fulfilling the action true faith requires? All of you, first of all, and yes, me as well. I am already involved. Soon, it will be your turn.

Now to God who forever is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.