

Series: Corona, Corona

Sermon: "Eyes of Flesh...Eyes of Faith"

Text: John 11; John 20

RGGJR/FBCCS/19-20 UNEDITED

- Good morning, good afternoon, good evening whenever it is that you are listening to this. Thank you for listening.
- I wonder if the *advent* of the Covid-19 virus had been around Christmas time or even around Halloween, if the rebellion against social distancing restrictions would have been a much bigger and much louder.
- Those holidays are more important to many people than Easter. However, I did see that one governor declared the Easter Bunny *essential* but not Easter worship.
- For 40 days following the resurrection, Jesus showed himself to be very much and truly alive to his followers.
- I wonder why he didn't ride back into Jerusalem and show himself to Annas and Caiphas the Jewish leaders who had sent him to the Romans to be executed. I wonder why he didn't go back to Pilate and say with great conviction, "Pilate, 'You asked what is truth?' ***THIS is truth!!***"
- I suspect an earthshattering physical appearance to those who had crucified Him was not God's plan because Jesus was, above all, seeking humans who would believe because ***God said it*** not because they could prove it with their own eyes. He was seeking men and women, boys and girls seeing God's truth with the *eyes of faith* rather than *the eyes of flesh*.
- I originally planned to speak about the Apostle Thomas only as a short illustration in connection with a sermon about two men unknowingly walking with Jesus on the road out of Jerusalem following the crucifixion and reports of the resurrection.
- The road out of Jerusalem to Emmaus, away from all the confusion, will have to wait until next week—at least in detail. Lord willing we will talk about it then and see what it says in connection with this.

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- Last Sunday, I asked you to read or to listen to a long portion from John's Gospel. As long as that was, from John chapter 13 to John chapter 20, I originally wanted it to be even longer but my co-reader convinced me otherwise.
- I wanted to start with what we call the "*triumphal entry*"—or even earlier, with the events that brought Jesus close to Jerusalem where he did so many things and taught so many lessons about God's truth in so short a time before he was crucified and raised from death to new life.
- You may recall that it was the sickness—actually the death—of his friend Lazarus that brought Jesus to the village of Bethany, just two miles outside of dangerous Jerusalem.
- There, a scene of confusion, accusation and grief greeted Jesus outside the tomb of Lazarus. "*If you would have been here with us—if you would have been physically present—you could have done a miracle and saved him,*" is the gist of sister Martha's accusation.
- He's really dead. He has been in the tomb for four days so his body already stinks was another issue she raised. Three days would have been enough to prove he was truly dead—four was more than enough.
- Importantly a few days before this, Jesus was already cryptically preparing his men, including Thomas, for the crucifixion and the death. Raising Lazarus from the dead was to be a LIVING illustration of the power of resurrection.
- As he was setting them up to learn from this unforgettable illustration, he made a statement that always seemed a bit cryptic to me.
- He said to his beloved men, "***Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this***"

world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

- Huh? What?! *"Guys, natural light—physical light in the physical world allows you to see things in a natural worldly way with eyeballs in your head. Your flesh—your body—is built to see this way. But, guys, what happens when your flesh eyes can't see because it is dark—there is no light?"*
- The implied question he was giving them to chew on was, *"Guys, is there a way to see in the darkness?"*
- Is there a way to see reality in the coming days with all the confusion that was about to come upon? They would long to see things with their natural eyes—there flesh eyes—but there would be no natural light of this world that could work to show what was really happening—reveal the reality of the arrest, the trials, the beatings, the crucifixion, the death, the burial and the resurrection of the one they called "the Christ"—God's Messiah.
- In the darkness that could not be seen through with mere flesh eyes, Jesus warned them, they might then stumble and even fall.
- They had lived with Jesus and see his character, watched his miracles and most importantly heard his Words—his teaching. Could they now see in this darkness with faith eyes instead of flesh eyes?
- Sometimes I have looked at the stories in the New Testament and the Old and thought, *"If I had only been there and seen that miracle or heard those words I would not struggle with trusting God or with confusion about what choices to make as I sometimes do."*
- If I had seen the sea parted and walked through on dry land—if I had watched the cloud and fire lead—if I drunk the wine made from water—if I had seen Lazarus walk out of his tomb four days later—

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- If I had just seen with my flesh eyes—I sometimes conclude I would have more faith or better faith or fewer doubts!
- But, the pattern of the whole Bible pretty much disproves this. Just because humans see God work with their flesh eyes doesn't mean they actually see!
- Very often what is seen with flesh eyes keeps humans from seeing reality.
- Very often what is seen with flesh eyes does not sustain humans through times of darkness when there is no light for those eyes to work again in order to see.
- Eyes of faith versus eyes of flesh, which would be more crucial now than ever? These men had been with Jesus. Seen him in the natural light of the world that the even human flesh can detect. They had touched him. They had eaten with him. They had walked the roads with him. He seemed real to them. This reality, however, was still being validated mostly by physical eyes of the flesh.
- BUT, DARKNESS WAS COMING WHEN THOSE EYES OF FLESH WOULD NOT SUFFICE TO SEE ALL THAT COULD BE SEEN BY EYES OF FAITH.
- ***Eyes of flesh are wonderful, but they cannot see reality in the dark.***
- This is why I suspect Jesus did not bother going back to confront Pilate and other powers and turn Jerusalem upside down when people saw him alive again.
- He was not seeking what people could believe because they could see only with *eyes of the flesh* but what people could believe only by *eyes of faith*—eyes that were illuminated by the light of what God had told them about the Messiah in His Scriptures.
- Jesus told Martha that her brother, Lazarus would "*rise again.*" Martha, having listened to her teachers told Jesus that she knew her

brother would rise again, but not until what she thought of as *"the last days."*

- Jesus doesn't deny this truth or correct what Scripture Martha feels applies in this situation, but makes a bold statement and asks another question instead:
- ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"***
- Martha replied, ***"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."***
- Well and good that Martha believed this biblical truth in her heart but not well and good that she was seeing the present situation— even bolstered by her theology from Scripture—mostly with *eyes of flesh*.
- *"He's been in there four days and stinks. It's too late! My eyes of flesh tell me by the light of this world that this is how death works!* In a moment Martha's eyes of flesh will see. How much better had she seen with eyes of faith?
- Presumably, the Apostle Thomas was there listening with ears of flesh and watching with his eyes of flesh but not, evidently, eyes and ears of faith.
- ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** Unlike Jesus' coming resurrection to a new everlasting LIFE, Lazarus is alive again to an old earthly life and will die again someday. I've always suspected, the contrasting descriptions of the grave clothes still binding Lazarus but left neatly behind by Jesus were meant to make that clear.

- During those 40 days between the resurrection to NEW LIFE and the ascension to go back to the Father, Jesus popped in and out of the lives of his followers. Sometimes they could see him with their *flesh eyes*, other times they could not. Would they learn it was far, far better, and absolutely necessary for God's mission now, for them to see him with their *faith eyes*? Flesh eyes alone wouldn't cut it any longer!
- The Apostle Paul, who as Saul the Christian-hunter, would only see Jesus with his flesh eyes, had to have those flesh eyes blinded on the road to Damascus so he could, not just go to heaven when he died, but so he could join God's redemptive mission and take the Good News to the Gentiles.
- By-the-way, as Saul, Paul could only see Gentiles as worthless wild dogs through his flesh eyes. After being blinded in those eyes he could see the same Gentiles through faith eyes and that gave him love great enough to die to see them redeemed to God.
- Faith eyes change how we see everything in this world—even the things we also see through our flesh eyes.
- However, switching from relying on flesh eyes for perceiving reality to relying on faith eyes for grasping the truth is a paradigm disrupting change for humans. Paradigms make us comfortable. Paradigm disruption makes our flesh very uncomfortable.
- Paradigms—ways of see the world that we don't even think about much—it's just the way we assume things to be-- allow us to feel we can see and understand. Many of us are stuck in paradigms that conclude what we see through our flesh eyes alone can be considered reality.

- Paradigm disruption of any kind is very uncomfortable for humans. It makes our flesh existence feel insecure and afraid. What we thought was reality—what we thought we saw correctly just as it truly may not be exactly right. In fact it may be very mistaken. What we accepted as a firm foundation of flesh-eye seeable truth and what we have built our lives upon is shifting sand instead of solid rock.
- That is what makes our flesh so uncomfortable. Our flesh would rather believe a lie with certainty that makes it feel comfortable than have someone—even God point out—***"You are not seeing reality without using faith-eyes!"***
- If you scan back through the chapters of John's Gospel Mary and I read to you last week, you'll find Jesus, more than once, trying to comfort the humans closet to him as their *flesh-eye paradigm* is about to be broken and darkness is about to keep it from seeing anything that is comfortable.
- Jesus is calling them to shift from that flesh-eye paradigm of their world to the faith-eye paradigm he has been teaching them all along—in fact that God has been teaching human beings all along in His Word.
- Jesus says: *"I'm here but I will be gone and then I will be back for a short time and then gone again. "Don't let your hearts be troubled—rather BELIEVE—see with faith eyes what I have taught you from Scripture. You have been able to rely on your flesh eyes to supplement you faith eyes but soon the darkness will come and you'll only be able to see reality by faith. You will have to believe something that you can't see with flesh-eyes is truly true"*
- Another by the way: Remember all those Old Testament guys in Hebrews 11, the *Hall of faith* we talked about a few weeks ago? It wasn't that their faith made anything they believed any more real no

matter how hard and well they believed it. It was that their faith allowed them to see what God had said was real by faith-eyes even when their flesh-eyes would never be able to see it.

- When Jesus pops into the vision of disciples flesh eyes in those 40 days he usually starts with the phrase, **"Peace be with you!"** Why? Because their paradigm of believing mostly because of flesh-eyes was being destroyed. Jesus was not real and alive with NEW LIFE only when they could see him and touch him and eat with him—in the flesh.
- They were being called to trust that what Jesus had taught them from God's Word was true and that he was really truly alive with new life even when they could only see that with their faith-eyes.
- ***This was a critical paradigm change for their part in the redemptive mission of God in the days ahead.***
- Jesus' Apostle Thomas becomes a classic illustration of this struggle for paradigm change in ***John chapter 20 verse 24-29.***
- Thomas wasn't present when Jesus had appeared to the flesh-eyes of some of the other disciples so he had not yet ***seen*** the resurrected Lord.

24 ***But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.***

25 ***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."***

26 ***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."***

27 *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."*

28 *Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"*

29 *Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."*

- Two paradigms for discerning reality—for truly *seeing*—are present here.
- Thomas is stuck in the paradigm of flesh-eyes even though flesh-eyes can only see in the light of the physical world. *"I must see him with my own eyes and touch his physical body with my own physical hands or I will not believe that it is a reality that Jesus is alive."*
- Jesus says there is another paradigm for seeing reality—eyes of faith—eyes that trust what God said is true even if your eyes of flesh cannot validate it.
- You can ponder what it means for Jesus to say that those who will see through the faith-eye paradigm will be "blessed." But, one thing it means for sure is that they will see reality—a reality bigger than any flesh-eye seeing can illuminate. It means, at the least, they will be able to see in the darkness of this world and not stumble along as they are on mission for God.
- Sometimes, in this world we are allowed to see reality with both our eyes of flesh and our eyes of faith. Never in this world can we see with the eyes of flesh the full reality that we can see with our eyes of faith—absolutely never!
- We usually love the experiences when we can see reality with both. The problem is we tend to "fall in love" with those rare and exciting experiences. We can then begin to chase after what we wish for instead of accepting what God gives.

- Relatively young Dietrich Bonhoeffer, recognized this about the church in his day when it was being destroyed by politics, and compromise to hold on to the dream of always being able to see the reality of the church with flesh eyes and not having to rely only on faith eyes.
- In bad circumstances, the church in Germany was being forced to change its paradigms and it was more comfortable to cling to the old familiar one validated by flesh-eyes than have to trust the paradigm validated only by faith-eyes.
- Lest my "free-grace" friends conclude otherwise I must always include the disclaimer that I don't agree with everything young Bonhoeffer said or wrote, at least not as it has been transmitted to us. However I do agree deeply with what I quote now:

"Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest and sacrificial. God hates this wishful dreaming because it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. Those who dream of this idolized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands set up by their own law, and judge one another and God accordingly. It is not we who build. Christ builds the church. Whoever is mindful to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it, for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess he builds. We must proclaim, he builds. We must pray to him, and he will build. We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down.

It may be that the times which by human standards are the times of collapse are for him the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point are great times for the church are times when it's pulled down."

- This time of the Corona virus in 2020, is by human standards, as Bonhoeffer put it "viewed as a time of collapse."
- It does seem for me to be a time of *paradigm* collapse. People feel that the world as they want to see—as they dream of it being with merely flesh-eyes providing the input of reality and success—isn't working the way that makes them comfortable.
- I am asking us as a church to wonder if we need some paradigm collapsing as well. Are we seeing our role in the redemptive mission mostly through flesh-eyes or faith-eyes?
- Are we wishfully dreaming that we will always find ways to create an experience where we ALWAYS enjoy both?
- I think God brought us, FBC, the experience of living with the Corona virus at just the right time as a church body. Of course, he didn't do that only for us but is able to do that for all people—to use this in their lives individually and collectively for his perfect purposes.
- I have no idea how the circumstances of these days will impact the sale of our land and facilities. Maybe it will not impact it at all.
- We have been praying that God would use this sale opportunity to let us consider our "riverbank" values as a body and how to best live by them as FBC in days ahead.
- And, now, at just the right time, God says: "I am going to allow you to think even more deeply than that! I am going to give you the opportunity to "be still" and ask, are we seeing through the right eyes? Flesh-eyes or faith-eyes! What a glorious opportunity! What a gift!

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- Someone might say, *"Why are you talking about this now Raleigh? I just want to survive today!"*
- I understand the feeling and we want to love you the best we can by God's grace, wisdom, power and resources in very practical ways. AND, we are doing that for one another as a body to the glory of God.
- What I am saying is God has given us the gift to not "simply survive" but to **SEE** better as we come through this experience—to see better with faith eyes and not just flesh eyes.
- How do we do that? Well, come back next week. Doesn't even have to be the same time and the same place!
- Here is a little bit of a spoiler: Faith-eyes are not equivalent to what I dream, feel, or wish "in my heart." Faith-eyes are actually far less *mystical* than calling the "faith-eyes" may make them seem.
- God bless you. Trust him. Don't let your "flesh-eyes" take control this week. That's when the dark, threatening water will no longer allow you to "walk on it."