

Rideau Park United Church
Sermon: When Not Seeing IS Believing (Rev. Jim Baldwin)
Sunday, April 12, 2026

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was *with* God,
and the Word *was* God.”

If this quote sounds familiar, it is because this is the opening sentence of John’s Gospel, and it is one of the most familiar references to the deity of Christ – the Word - who together with God and the Spirit (Sophia), form a Holy Trinity that has existed since the beginning of Creation.

John’s Gospel was written in Greek, so when he spoke about Christ being one with God, he used, “Logos,” which we translate into “the Word” - with a capital “W.” It was not a new concept. Five hundred years before Jesus was born, the Greek philosopher, Heraclitis, used the word “Logos” in connection with God; whom he described as “a fixed principle in a world of change.”

The Stoics were also ancient philosophers who lived in Greece - and they also used “Logos” to describe “the power that controlled and ordered the world.” But the concept of God as “the Word,” was not exclusive to the Greeks and Gentiles. Philo, a first century Jew from Alexandria, used “Logos” to describe the God of Israel, and when “the Word of God” is used in the Hebrew scriptures, it refers to “God in action” – particularly in reference to creation, revelation and deliverance.

All of this points to the fact that “Logos” was a word that was familiar to both Jews and Gentiles who were living in Greece, and John used it in his Gospel to reveal the deity of Christ. In chapter 20, verse 31 he proclaims: “But these (things) were written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...and that by believing, you may have life in his name.”

We will come back to this, because it is central to our understanding of the story that is found in our Gospel reading for today.

First, I’d like to point out that Luke also tells the story of Christ’s appearance to his disciples in the evening of that first Easter Sunday. At first, “they were startled and terrified, and thought they were seeing a ghost.” But this is a resurrection

story, so Jesus told them to look at his hands and feet. He said, “Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.” Then he asks for a piece of fish and eats it, as a further sign of his resurrection. All of this happens to show the disciples that everything written about the Messiah – in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms – has been fulfilled.

The story in John is very similar, but there is one major difference. When Jesus appeared on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, one of the disciples was missing. Jesus showed his hands and his side to the ten who were there. Then he breathed the Holy Spirit into them and commissioned them to go out and offer forgiveness to the world.

In John’s story, Thomas is missing. We are never told why...just that he was not there...and later, when the other disciples say to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” He replies with the words that have defined him for more than two thousand years. “Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands - and put my finger in the mark of the nails - and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” And in that moment, he was forever branded as “Doubting Thomas.”

Even as a child, I remember hearing the phrase, “Don’t be a Doubting Thomas.” The implication was that we shouldn’t ask questions, or express any doubts, we should just have faith and believe. But as I got older and read the story about Thomas for myself, I came to a realization. I really liked Thomas. I could relate to him because I had questions too. And I wondered...“Has Thomas been given a bad rap for all these years?” I think so...but I also think that John had a reason for telling the story in that way.

Jesus actually gave Thomas what he needed. In John’s version of the story, Jesus appeared to the disciples twice. The second appearance happened a week later, and this time Thomas was in the room. The story began in the same way: Jesus stood among them, even though the doors were closed and said, “Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believed.”

That last line is the reason Thomas has been given a bad rap for all these years. “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believed.” The ancient church used that line to criticize doubters. They held up *believers* as shining examples of faith...and if *they* are blessed...what does that say about those who have doubts?

But is that the point John was trying to make? I don’t think so.

To begin with, Thomas was not the only one who had doubts. In Luke’s account, Jesus appeared to all of the disciples at once, and he said to them, “Why are you frightened, and *why do doubts arise in your hearts?*” Even after Jesus shows them his hands and his feet to prove he is not a ghost, Luke says that the disciples, “While in their joy...were still disbelieving and wondering.” So, they still had doubts even though the risen Christ was standing right in front of them.

In John’s version of the story, *as soon* as Jesus shows his hands and feet to Thomas, Thomas proclaims, “My Lord and my God.”

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,
and the Word *was* God.”

“These things were written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and that through believing, you may have life in his name.”

This is the purpose of John’s Gospel. He wanted to prove to Gentile and Jewish converts alike, that Jesus and God were one, and through *God’s living Word – Logos – Jesus the Christ* - all of the law and all of the prophets had been fulfilled.

As for “Doubting Thomas,” his faith led to a life of action and it is believed that he carried God’s Word all the way to India.

Was Thomas a doubter? Yes. But his doubt did not stop him from responding to the Word of God. And Jesus did not reprimand him (like the church has reprimanded so many doubters who followed him.) Jesus gave Thomas what he needed to believe. He also shared a piece of wisdom that all of the disciples were going to need if they were going to answer his call.

“Do you believe because you have seen? It is better not to have seen and yet believed.” This is the essence of faith.

From the very beginning, people have tried to define faith in the presence of doubt:

In the Book of Hebrews, St. Paul said that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.”

Albert Einstein defined God as “That deep emotional conviction in the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe.”

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

Voltaire said, “Faith consists in believing, when it is beyond the power of reason to believe.”

D. Elton Trueblood said that “Faith is not belief without truth, but trust without reservation.”

Karl Barth addressed trust amid doubt, saying that “Faith is not absolute certainty, but rather, trust in God within the tension between belief and unbelief”.

He acknowledged that “it involves wrestling with God...responding to grace...and trusting in spite of contradictions.”

Scott Hafemann said that faith allows us to trust in God in the present, because God’s actions in the past, enable us to have hope in God’s promises for the future.

For me, doubts are not problematic to faith...in fact...I believe that for us to grow as individuals and as a church, doubt and faith must walk hand in hand. This is what allows us to continue on our journey when there is no path before us. This is what enables us to step into the unknown and challenge long-held beliefs, in the name of justice, love and truth.

All of the great advancements in faith have happened because someone questioned what everyone else believed. Doubts lead to questions. Questions lead to answers.

Faith trusts that God is in the process, and belief is what gets us there.

I'm not sure why our Council chose this particular date for our Annual Congregational Meeting, but I have to say that when I saw the reading in John, I thought that it was a perfect match.

As we look over the past year, and beyond, there have been worries, doubts and fears...but what defines Rideau Park United Church, is a faith that may be described as "God's Word in action." When the road has been uncertain, there has been a willingness to trust that God is in the process, and this has allowed our congregation to thrive and to grow, when many churches are losing hope.

Just yesterday, Val and I were talking about how much time, energy, and financial resources this congregation dedicates to people and causes outside of this church. This too is evidence that God's presence is alive and well in this place, and for those who are searching, *God's Word...Logos...the hands and feet of Jesus the Christ...* can be seen in this congregation.

Our Annual Congregational Meeting gives us an opportunity to reflect on the past year, to celebrate the contributions of so many people to the life and work of our church, and to consider where the path is taking us...even dream a little about what might happen if we allow ourselves to believe...

...may our doubts only serve to push us further than we've ever been before...and may our faith in Christ be the very thing that turns our doubts into belief, so that by believing we may have life in his name. Amen