

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church**

**“A Change of Perception”**

**May 1, 2011**

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***1 Peter 1:3-9***

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,<sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.<sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,<sup>7</sup> so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.<sup>8</sup> Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,<sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

***John 20: 19-31***

*19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*

*24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark 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.’*

*26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’<sup>27</sup> 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.’<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’*

*30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written so 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.*

It can sometimes be dangerous to watch television. I want to share with you something that happened to me several years ago. On nights when I can't sleep I like to sit in front of the

television and channel surf. I watch four or five channel at once, gleaning knowledge from bits and pieces of cooking shows, travelogues, documentaries, and taped sporting events.

One of those nights-long, long ago- I was watching something I certainly would not ordinarily watch-an equestrian show jumping. Please don't tell Colleen Foster anything else about what I am about to say because she knows everything about horses and might be upset with me. I admit that I know only a little bit about horses, and absolutely nothing about equestrian events. I do know that the person who builds the fences that the horses jump over would never get a job on my farm. Those fences are so flimsy! They fall down with just a touch! Anyway, compared to sports like baseball or football or hockey, watching a horse jump over a fence or a shrub or water is just plain boring. But at that hour it was the most interesting thing on.

An expert analyst on the telecast that evening provided me with some rather fascinating information. He said that the riders cannot learn the exact moment when to prepare their horses to jump. Such insight does not come from a textbook or from a video tape. The correct moment to jump is something that just has to be sensed internally. Yet it is not total instinct. All equestrian riders face a common obstacle and that is their own perception. The analyst mentioned some equestrian study guides devote whole sections to the subject of perception. Unless the riders can manage to bring his/her horse to the barrier with some kind of confidence, he or she will never become adept at getting the horse to jump. The expert said that you have to learn how to perceive yourself going over the jump and then transmit the confidence of your perception to your horse. Are any of you confused yet? I was. And I was about to click to another channel that night when something else the analyst said caught my ear. He said that a good philosophy in overcoming the horse's hesitation is this, "Take your heart and throw it over the fence. Then, jump after it."

Wow! I was so taken by that comment. Take your heart and throw it over the fence. Then, jump after it. What a wonderful image! When I heard those words I just knew that I would be able to use them in a sermon someday.

Now to the dangerous part of watching television. A few weeks after I watched the equestrian event, I was working out at the local high school track, I noticed a series of hurdles that were left behind. You know where I am going, don't you? Those hurdles were just pleading for me to try and jump over them all. Now, I was a hurdler in junior high school. Even though many years had passed, I believed if I could jump at hurdle at fourteen, I could do it at forty-four or so. I had the good sense of looking around to make certain no one was watching. And then I recalled the advice I had learned from the equestrian expert on that television show. "Throw your heart over the hurdle and then jump after it."

I ran toward the hurdle. I reached inside my chest, grabbed my heart, and gave it a toss. But the closer I got to that hurdle, the taller the hurdle got. As I went to leap over the hurdle, it jumped up and hit me somewhere between my knee and my ankle. Both the hurdle and the hurdler fell to the track. Except for a few scrapes and bruises, I was fine.

Looking back I reasoned that my heart did not want to end up on the other side. If my heart didn't want to go over the hurdle, the rest of me didn't either. I learned my lesson that day. I will never, ever watch equestrian events again!

This second Sunday of Easter brings us the story of Thomas. Throughout all of history, Thomas has been stuck with a nickname. He is Thomas the Doubter. Anyone, anywhere that is a skeptic is called a Doubting Thomas. It seems to me as if doubting really wasn't Thomas' problem. Unbelief wasn't the issue. No, Thomas simply was a realist. He required evidence before he would believe. He was an empiricist. He had to experience something before he knew something. "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas wanted proof.

Thomas' problem was not his vision. Nor was it terminal doubt. It was more his mistaken perception. He was unable to take his heart of faith and throw it over the fence of

death and human limits into the uncharted territory of the resurrected. He couldn't even get close to jumping over that fence. He couldn't even see a way around it. But when the presence of the resurrected Christ grabbed hold of him, this man who required experience for everything suddenly changed. He offered one of the great confessions of all of Scripture, "My Lord and my God!"

A change in perception. A new angle of vision. This new thing that Thomas brought to bear upon the situation ushered in a new age for the church. With his newfound perception came a fresh blessing for all generations of believers to come. "Blessed are those who have not yet seen and yet believe." Where earlier you needed to see to believe, now you first must believe, and then you will come to see. Belief is something that will provide you with the vision you need to see things differently, and the perception needed to understand a new reality.

I recall receiving my prescription for trifocal glasses for the very first time. It was a difficult adjustment to make. I was told not to look at my feet when going up and down stairs. If you do that, you fall down. I learned it is hard to walk down stairs with you head straight up. I was also told that if I looked at something and it was blurry, that I had to move my head up and down, to get a different angle of vision. I felt like I spent the first few days walking around like a bobble head doll. I must have looked silly. But eventually I learned the proper angles to focus and see clearly.

If you recall the many lessons of Jesus' miracles and teachings, you might remember that blind people received a lot of attention. They were often Jesus' top candidates for healing. Why? If we haven't figured it out by now, the story of Thomas provides us with an answer. Apparently, God's blessings are more favorably received by those who find their way more by faith than by sight. Jesus had no problem working with those who had to first see in order to believe. But he offered something special to those who believed without seeing first. Their faith made them well. And to them he offered a blessing. Thomas unlocked the door for all of us who live the Easter faith. We cannot physically see the Risen Lord. Yet we are called to believe. Through such faith we come to know the peace and forgiveness of the Resurrected Lord.

I have shared before the story about when America's first commercial jet service began with a Boeing 707 flight in 1958. Sometime during the next month, a passenger aboard an old propeller driven DC-6 struck up a conversation with another passenger who happened to be a Boeing engineer. The traveler asked the engineer about the new jet aircraft. The engineer spoke convincingly about the extensive testing the company had done on the jet engines. He explained how the company had long experience with aircraft engines. The passenger then asked, "Have you flown on the new 707 jet yet?" The engineer replied, "I am going to wait until it's been in service awhile." So it is for us. We believe better after we have first seen. We have trouble knowing without experience. But God offers to us the gift of faith and it is through that gift that we come to see and to know and to live with the power of the Risen One in the midst of our life today. We are blessed when we can see Easter even though we were not there!

In the rubble that was the Warsaw ghetto during World War II were written some words on a wall by a young Jew. They said, "I believe in the sun even if it does not shine. I believe in love, even if I do not feel it. I believe in God, even if I do not see him." Whatever persecution and horror that person experienced, one thing is for certain; in faith they also experienced blessing. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

May we find the blessing that is available to us through the example of Thomas. Let us be Easter people, looking at things through different eyes, believing in what can be and not simply in what is; knowing God in faith and mystery as well as through the ordinary experience of our senses. May we come to our belief in the Risen Lord without the certainty of seeing, but through the grace of faith. May we find our way through life, less dependent on our worldly experience, and more reliant upon the change in perception that resurrection brings.

