

**“You Do Not See Him Now”**

1st Pres San Bernardino

**John 20:19-31, 1Peter 1:3-9**

**3/30/08** 2Easter

Rev. Dr. Sandra R. Tice

*By God’s great mercy we are given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading....*

It is this inheritance that we remember, and that we seek to pass on in baptism. Today **we will baptize Brandon James as a sign of that inheritance, of something that belongs to him before he can understand it** or earn it: a living hope. This is a gift of God, and no one can take it away from him.

But this great gift, this living hope, is **not a vaccination against doubt or disbelief**. It does not mean that he will grow up to be a disciple or even a believer. Teaching him how to do that, showing him what discipleship looks like is our responsibility. And choosing it one day, when he is old enough to understand it, will be his responsibility. **Baptism is a great gift and a living hope, but it does not prevent doubt.**

This should not surprise us, since every single year, during the most joyful season in the church’s life, we are reminded that those who knew Jesus best of all— who saw the miracles firsthand and who heard the teaching from his own lips— became full of doubt and fear when things got tough.

**Someday, Brandon will doubt, as we all do,** and he will wonder what it is he believes. He will ‘suffer various trials’ and life will be confusing, and he will wonder where God is, **just as the disciples did.**

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Doubt and confusion come in various forms.

Duke Cox, who usually sings in our choir, goes to an elementary school each week to help students who are struggling with their reading. He works with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. A few weeks ago, he was sitting with his two 7-year olds. In response to something the little girl said, the little boy turned to Duke and said, “I just don’t understand girls!” Duke said, conspiratorially, “Neither do I.” Upon hearing this, the little girl said to Duke, “Just what is it you don’t understand?” “Well,” said Duke, “I don’t understand why girls do the things they do.” “Ah.” She replied sagely. “Life will teach you.”

Life will teach you. Life teaches us all.

**And sometimes what life teaches us is to doubt.**

I remember that **I was just about in 7<sup>th</sup> grade when I realized, with alarm, that my parents were not nearly as competent as they had previously appeared.** It began with my mother pointing to things in the Sears catalog (the only catalog there was, Back In The Day), and saying, now *that’s* a cute outfit!!

I looked at this appalling fashion *faux pas* and then at her face, and she *wasn't kidding!* And I made an instant mental note: Do NOT, under any circumstances, allow mother to purchase clothing articles unaccompanied.

This obvious display of incompetence made me begin to wonder about her judgment about all kinds of things. I wondered if it was wise to continue to allow her to dress *herself*. After a while, **I began to doubt that she knew anything at all.**

Many of us have this experience as we enter adolescence- in fact, recently, I have glimpsed that look of horror and dismay on my daughter's face, when I point out a perfectly cute outfit in a catalog.

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**Life will teach us all. Things become confusing, and it becomes hard to see Jesus. And that is why we invented Confirmation Class!**

Next week, Jenn and I will begin a class for kids that age and older who want to explore what they believe, and whether they can choose the faith they were baptized into as their own. These kids are old enough to ask hard questions. They are old enough to see that there are problems in the world. They are old enough to doubt. And so it is up to us to offer them the answers that have been helpful to us, and **see if they feel ready to claim their inheritance.**

Life will teach us, and will show us what we don't understand, and that's OK. We don't *want* to raise kids who never ask questions, who never struggle, who never doubt. **Real faith, I think, is something we have in SPITE of our doubts, something we COME to believe as we face questions.**

We want to be a community where all of us, no matter what our age, can ask our questions and struggle with our doubts, *“so that [we] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name”*

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I need to tell you that I am so proud that more than a dozen of our kids learned the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and were able to recite it from memory. In fact, I actually **ran out of rabbits**, and had to take one kid on an expedition to find a rabbit on Easter day, at around noon. (I am here to tell you that the closest thing to a rabbit you can find at that time is a Snicker's.)

On the way he said to me, “Pastor Sandy, do you know what my best wish is, my biggest wish?”

I said that, no, I did not have the faintest idea what his biggest and best wish might be.

“Well,” he said, “Do you want to know what it is?”

“Of course I do!” I said

“My best wish,” he said, **“is that I will grow up to be who God wants me to be. I wished it when I blew out the candles on my birthday.”**

“Wow,” I said. “That is a very fine wish. And you know what I think? I think that wish comes from God, and God will help it come true.”

**What I did not say was that his wish is exactly what we wish for Brandon, and for all the children we baptize and love-**

Not that they will never notice our outdated fashion sense, or our other faults and failings, not that they will never doubt, But that they will **come to believe**, and claim their inheritance.

**That when they are old enough to wish, year by year, they will blow out their candles wishing that in the year ahead they might be everything God dreams they can be.**

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**Baptism is a gift from God. But it does not prevent doubt.**

**It does not protect us from what life will teach us.**

Here is the good news: When the disciples feared and doubted, and when they locked God out and locked themselves in, **Jesus found them anyway**. He came to them anyway.

And he offered them peace, and showed them his scars.

Now why does he still have scars? I mean, if God could raise him from the *dead*, couldn't he take care of those pesky little *scars*? I mean, if you're going to get him UP, why not make him look good?

I'll tell you what I think: life puts scars on us all. **And resurrection does not remove scars, because scars show two things:** that there has been pain and that there has been healing. They remind us of the pain of being wounded, and the possibility of being made whole. They remind us of the difficulty of doubt, and the miracle of **coming to believe in a living hope** in SPITE of that doubt, in spite of what life will teach you.

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*“Although you have not seen him,” says Peter, “you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice...”*

that is my prayer for Brandon, for the kids who will do the confirmation class, and for each of you: *that you may come to believe...and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

Peace be with you. Amen.