

Have you ever had something happen to you that colored the way you see things? It could be something either good or bad; an event or even something someone said to you. I heard a famous actress say that she was driven to take on new and more challenging parts because when she was growing up, her mother always said, “Go on, try it. Don’t worry about whether you can do it or not – they’ll think you are cute!” And so she always had the courage to sing and dance and act because of her mother’s words – “try it; they’ll think you’re cute.”

Other events color the way we see things. Once a friend dropped by when my young sons were climbing a tree. He became very agitated and said, “You need to get them down and not allow them to climb trees.” When He was a child, his brother had fallen out of a tree and become paralyzed. That event colored my friend’s view, and affected his decisions.

People who have had cancer or survived major traumas understand what I mean. Sometimes it takes a long while not to “live” in the illness, or let the trauma define your life. And, sometimes people never get over a major traumatic life event.

The disciples experienced a major trauma when Jesus was crucified. Their beloved leader had died. They reacted to this event in the normal human way. Today we have a name for it: acute stress disorder. Acute stress disorder is what happens when someone either experiences a life-threatening injury or witnesses someone else suffering serious injury or death. People respond with intense fear and helplessness. Three days after Jesus died the disciples were in that exact state. I think we can understand. Let’s read the story: READ John 20:19-23.

The disciples all had acute stress disorder. They felt threatened themselves. They experienced intense fear. They gathered behind locked doors. I would certainly define their mood as “feeling helpless.” Mary even told them *she had seen Jesus*, but they did not believe it. Only Peter and John went out to the tomb to investigate, but they did not hang out there. They quickly returned to familiar territory – home; and all the disciples stayed huddled together.

I think we can all identify, when bad things happen we tend to retreat in fear. It colors our outlook.

And this scripture tells us that Jesus shows up right in the middle of all their trauma and distress and says, “Peace.” Jesus had a different perspective on the event.

Do you believe that Jesus is present with you in the midst of your fears? Do you sense His peace? No matter how bad your circumstance is, Jesus has His own perspective, a perspective of help and comfort.

Now let’s shift gears to the Exodus story which was read earlier (Exodus 14:9-16, 21-22, 30-31). As we know, the children of Israel had been freed from Egypt and had left with great haste. But then Pharaoh began thinking of all that free labor he lost and decided to pursue them. His army was highly trained and well organized. It was a formation of three-man chariots under his direct command, supported by larger units of independently commanded chariot forces. We know this from Egyptian wall paintings from that period.

In contrast, Israel was completely unarmed and vulnerable. And so this powerful machine of weaponry thundered toward them. And when the children of Israel saw Pharaoh's army bearing down, they cried out in great fear to Moses and to God.

This was not lack of faith; this unexpected turn of events caused sheer terror, with no means of defense. They were pushed against the sea with nowhere to escape. But Moses assured them, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. Those enemies you see will never be seen again!"

So Israel would see God's deliverance; they would see God's victory and no longer see the enemy. God would do their fighting for them. God brought a different perspective.

It was a massive victory. Here is what they saw: the most powerful, well-organized military force on earth decimated in the sea, with absolutely no effort on Israel's part. The threat was completely wiped out, and Israel was protected and saved.

Jesus stood in the room of those petrified disciples and said, "Peace be with you. The enemy who sought to take my life has been completely defeated." And then He said, "See the wounds in my hands and feet." He says "*look here – It is I. See, I fought a war and the enemy lost because here I am. Ain't no grave gonna hold my body down!*"

Do life's circumstances overwhelm you? Are you afraid of what the future holds? Do you doubt? Does that color your life? Let Jesus show you a different perspective. Believing Him means you win; the enemy is overcome by life!

After seeing Jesus, the disciples were exuberant. This is good news – great news! Jesus is alive! And so they were filled with joy.

All except Thomas. He wasn't there, and he didn't get back until Jesus had left. He still had the perspective of the crucifixion. READ John 20:24-25.

Ever feel like that? Ever feel like the enemy wins? Death wins? Is your perspective that knowing God doesn't help? You can't make it through the battle?

Let's see how Jesus handled Thomas. READ John 20:26-29.

Jesus was patient with Thomas. But, He wasn't willing to let Thomas off the hook. If you doubt, you will be troubled by it. The reason is that Jesus will not let you rest without dealing with your doubt.

"Here's the evidence, Thomas." And then Jesus simply said, "Don't be faithless any longer; believe." Don't live in the perspective of defeat. Rather, see the truth. And Thomas believed.

He said, "My Lord and my God." He moved forward out of defeat.

Jesus said *don't be faithless; believe*. Do you believe? Or are you stuck in the defeat of faithlessness? That is the single, most important question you are required to answer in life. Jesus admonishes us to do something about it. Move forward.

Have you noticed that in the past few years the church has fallen out of favor? Are you aware of the negative press given the church?

But the church is a place for people to gather to deal with this question of faith. Here each week we explore these stories about God so we can know God's perspective. Here we gather to support and love one another, to struggle with our questions about God and learn how to move forward out of defeat and into faith.

Church is a place to be honest. The children of Israel standing before the Red Sea with nowhere to go and an enemy bearing down on them cried out and it was okay. The disciples huddled in a room after their beloved Jesus has been killed and wondered if there is any light at all beyond this very dark event.

But there is light in both cases, because God was there. And it's the same God who loves and rescues us through Jesus Christ. Jesus is God with skin on; God who stands with us.

When the children of Israel called out to Moses and Moses called out to God, God said, "Tell them to get moving." They were to move forward in faith. And the waters were opened and they walked through safely.

Do you know that's why we are baptized? It's an expression of faith. Because God is able to bring us through deep waters into new life and we are safe. We are alive.

This is the testimony of all the words in this Book (Bible). John, the youngest disciple, wrote it down for us so that we can be a part of the story and we too can experience eternal life:

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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." John 20:30-31

See? You don't have to be afraid. Be faithless no longer. Jesus is here! Simply believe.

AMEN