

Brenda Seat: The Rock

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Summary: Focusing on the Gospel text of John 14:5-6, Brenda's sermon explores the reality that Jesus is the one who helps us understand who God is. That is why Jesus told the disciples, I am the way to God, I am the one who can show you God's Truth, and I can give you new life in relationship to God.

Good morning. No matter how many times I do this, it is always a bit scary. But this morning Marian came in and gave me this string bracelet that she had made and said, "Mom, I made this for you with a butterfly stitch so you won't have butterflies in your stomach this morning." So far it's working.

"And Thomas said, 'We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way to get there?' And Jesus answered and said, 'I am the way the truth and the life; No one comes to the Father but by me.'" [John 14:5-6]

I think Deborah Tannen, the linguist and author of You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation should write a new book entitled God Said/People Said. If she did, then this conversation between Jesus and Thomas would probably be included as an example of the lack of communication that goes on between God and people.

Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for his betrayal and death and he is trying to encourage – to build up their courage – for what is coming. And they just don't get it!

Thomas is such a literal person that he is in essence saying

to Jesus we don't know the address of where you are going so we can't follow you. Jesus must have wondered how these disciples could possibly be the ones who God had chosen to spread the Good News!

It is very obvious that the disciples were talking on different levels, or as my daughters would say it went straight over their heads – zip. They were not communicating.

Please shut your eyes.

Imagine that you are blind.

You can feel the floor beneath your feet – that is real.

You can feel the chair against your back – that is real.

You can hear my voice – that is real.

But what is the color of my dress? Is that real?

When I tell you there is something called color, you have to accept that if I say so it must be so, but it is not your reality. (You may open your eyes.)

The disciples like Thomas were spiritually blind and so they did not understand what Jesus was telling them. They didn't believe, they didn't have faith.

Quite a few years ago when we first came to Seekers, Sonya asked to meet with me. Since Marian and Lauren were very little, we arranged to meet at a park. While the girls were playing, Sonya gently asked about my spiritual journey. I told her my parents had great faith, but that I didn't believe the way they did. At the time I thought that what I meant was that I didn't believe in their conservative religious views, but as I look back now I realize that I was saying that they had faith and I didn't.

Keith and I read a book one time about the existence of Jesus. There is much historical proof that like Julius Caesar, Jesus

was a real person. However, the book said, to believe that Jesus was sent by God and was God's Son would take a leap of faith. That phrase bothered me. It always sounded like it was an abandonment of logical thinking. (I pride myself on being a fairly logical person.) Like Thomas, I did not understand. I couldn't see it. I thought it was good enough to see Jesus as a good man, who had good insights about love and compassion.

I saw a movie one time about a blind person who visited the studio of a friend who was an artist. The artist described the various works that were scattered around the room. The blind person interrupted her and asked, "What does the color blue look like?" The artist placed the blind person's hand on a silver tray so that he could feel the smooth cold metal. The blind person then asked, "What does red look like?" The artist lit a candle and placed the blind person's hands near the flame so he could feel the warmth and then placed his hands on a sweater so he could feel the warm scratchiness of the wool.

The blind person believed that color existed even though it had never existed in his reality – but still he believed. He also believed that he had found someone, the artist, who he could trust to explain color in a way that he could understand.

My return to faith mirrors the blind person's journey to color. I began my journey by acknowledging God's existence; I was able to see God's love in my children. I am still awed by the fact that God loves me. But I didn't progress very far in understanding God or in being able to relate to God in any real way. At that time, I confronted death for the second time and I remember telling Sallie, Trish and Jean, "I am clinging to God because there is no other answer." But clinging gets tiring. I knew I needed someone to help me understand who God is. Someone like the artist, who could explain to me – in a way that I could understand – the reality of God. I finally understood who that someone is – Jesus. Who better to help me understand God than God's Son, Jesus?

All along that is what Jesus is telling the disciples, "Believe in God, believe also in me." Thomas says "But we don't know where to go." And Jesus says "I am the way to God, I am the one who can show you God's Truth, and I can give you new life in relationship to God."

Jesus stands between us and God like a rock in the middle of the stream. We only need to step out in faith – just a small step – in order to know God.

This is the core of our faith. This is our foundation.

This is the Rock