

## Easter 2, April 12, 2015, Youth Sunday

Sermon by Henry Kraft

St. John's Church, Cold Spring Harbor

Good Morning.

Raise your hand if you believe in ghosts; keep your hand up if you've ever seen a ghost. Raise your hand if you believe in Heaven; keep your hand up if you've ever seen a Heaven. We don't always believe what we see and more importantly, we don't always have to see to believe. Children believe in the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, but they are discouraged to see them or look for them. Also, there are adults that know the reality but continue to believe anyway. Children's belief in these three magical beings is a stepping stone to the belief in God and in Heaven. There is a letter that Martha Brockenbrough writes to her daughter, Lucy. She says, "What Santa does is simple, but powerful. He teaches children how to have belief in something they can't see or touch. Throughout your life you will need this capacity to believe: in yourself, in your friends, in your talents and in your family. You will also need to believe in things you can't measure or hold in your hand. Here, I am talking about love, that great power that will light your life from the inside out, even during its darkest, coldest moments." As we grow older we begin to question what we've believed for years, but still want to continue believing. As we grow, we are taught to believe in God—but do we need proof? Do we need to see God in order to believe that he exists? Do we really need to see what we believe in our hearts?

Back in January, I went to a friend's funeral. There was an open casket. When I walked into the room I had no idea what to expect, as I had not experienced a funeral before. Even my little sister had to ask me who was in "the box?" and when I told her, she replied "That's not his nose." As we sat there I began to wonder where his spirit had gone. Where was the part that mattered? His body was in front of us but it didn't have the light that had always accompanied it. His death was hard to believe, but seeing him in the casket solidified reality in my mind. Perhaps that is the reason for open casket funerals. It is proof that our loved one is really gone. At times, we all need proof for something that may be hard to believe. On television, characters often say, "I was so close to death that I saw Heaven." Is it really so, or do we just want to believe in our heart that we have a soft place to land when we leave the material world?

Thomas did not believe that Jesus had risen until he had touched the wounds from the cross. He was told by the disciples that Jesus rose from the dead but he needed proof. When Jesus appeared in front of Thomas and the other disciples, he told Thomas to put his hand on his

side. That was the evidence that Thomas needed. Jesus emphasizes the idea that proof is not needed for belief, and it is blessed simply to believe in some things, even in the absence of proof.

Teresa Caputo, the Long Island Medium, has made a living communicating with people's loved ones and relaying messages from the beyond. While the things she may say sound astounding, even unbelievable, she never mentions a Heaven. She only says that someone is stepping forward, not coming down. She speaks like there is a beyond, but does not take the leap and say that they are coming down from Heaven. It is entirely up to the viewer or to the family she is speaking with to determine if there is a Heaven from which their loved one is coming from.

The truth is that nobody will ever truly know if there is a Heaven, because those able to vouch for it are unable to communicate with us. We will find the answer for ourselves one day, but until then we are left wondering. Human nature has us wondering about everything we see and everything we can't see. What do you believe in your head? What do you believe in your heart? Are they the same?

We carry on through hard times, because we believe that things will always get better. We can't always see that will be the case, but we have to remind ourselves and believe that things will improve. Even in our darkest, coldest moments, we have to believe that God is there for us and that in the end both He and Heaven will be waiting for us. In his search for the perfect light bulb, Thomas Edison found 9,999 ways that didn't work, not ways that he had failed. He never gave up and always believed that he would come to an answer, even though he did not know when he would get there.

In my mother's pre-school class, the children don't believe that their mothers will return. In the development of believing, this is an essential step. 'Mommies get coffee, mommies come back' is the mantra of pre-nursery. By the end of the year, most all of them have learned that their parents will in fact return, and usually not holding coffee, but wearing gym clothes. At all points in our lives, we all have to believe in something. Whether it is as material as a light bulb, or as divine as God and Heaven, it all starts with something as simple as the Easter Bunny early on in our lives. Blessed are those who have not seen but have come to believe.

Amen.