

**It was a beautiful autumn weekend in south-eastern Ontario, not too hot, nor too cold. The winds were very light, and the sun shone through the partly clouded skies spreading rays of sunlight that streamed down on the land and glistened on the water. As a family, we had traveled to the family cottage, which had been in the family for well over 150 years, for one last gathering of the clan on that Thanksgiving long weekend, before the winter snow would soon come. The main reason for our journey was to prepare the cottage for the long winter ahead. There was always lots to do on this weekend, turning off the water system, putting all the outdoor equipment away, and of course pulling in the dock so the winter ice didn't carry it away next spring. But there was also time for some fun and some excitement to be had.**

**That Saturday morning, my two pre-teen children decided to go out fishing for one last time before the winter freeze-up arrived on the lake. Loading their fishing gear into the aluminum boat, they headed around the point of land on which the cottage stood and into the next bay. All seemed quiet and under control for about the first half hour. Then, the silence of that beautiful day was pierced by the shouts of my two children. They had hooked a fish so large that the rod was bent into a sharp arc with the tip almost in the water. From the shore, I could see the struggle, which was happening, between an adolescent trying to reel this fish in, and that fish, having a different idea, trying to swim away from the boat as quickly as it could travel through the cold water of that beautiful lake.**

**After a few minutes of back and forth, the fish tired and the two young fishermen realized that they were winning this tug-of-war. With one of them reeling in the catch, the other was preparing to net**

the fish as it came alongside the boat. One problem was very apparent to the kids. That fish was so large, when they got it into the net, both its head and tail were extending beyond the brim of the net. It took both of these young people to lift the net over the gunnel and into the boat.

But the story does not end there. The fish had no plans for staying in that boat and was flopping around on the floor of the boat trying to escape back to its watery home. One of the two kids had to sit on top of it, while the other drove the boat back to our dock.

As they came along side, my thought was that they had caught a large northern pike that lived in the weed beds that line the shore of the bay. And, if I had not seen what they had in the boat, I would have never believed it. Much to my surprise, they had not caught a pike, but rather a beautiful fifteen-pound lake trout, a land-locked freshwater salmonoid, which of course was out of season, as it was October. I knew in my mind, that there were supposed to be “lakers” in the lake, but I had only ever seen pictures of ones caught nearly a half a century ago. Now-a-days, no one is ever lucky enough to catch one, at any time of the year, let alone in October.

Of course, the fish was suitably photographed and then released back into the lake to continue its life 's journey. But you can be sure that fish lives on in the memories of my kids and myself.

Now I share this tale with you because it speaks to how I needed to see that fish with my own eyes, before I was able to believe it had really existed.

**Our gospel reading for this Third Sunday of Easter is also about seeing and believing. Journey back with me to that first Easter morning and the women arriving to find the tomb open and empty. Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus and realizing that it is indeed He, runs to tell the other disciples, exclaiming, “I have seen the Lord”. Mary now believed in the power of the resurrection because she had seen it with her own eyes. Later that same Easter day, the disciples encounter the risen Saviour in the locked room, in Jerusalem. Thomas is not present for this first visit with the resurrected Jesus. By the time Thomas arrives, Jesus has departed. The other disciples tell Thomas, “we have seen the lord”. But Thomas has not shared in their experience, and he is shattered. He demands physical proof for himself, by wanting to see Jesus with his own eyes and through touching Jesus’ body.**

**Now, Thomas really should not be labelled as a doubter. Rather, I believe that Thomas only wished to have that same experience that the other disciples had in seeing Jesus, resurrected and being present in their midst. Thomas needed to have his faith affirmed for himself by sharing in the same physical encounter they had had with Jesus. Later, Jesus does return, and Thomas sees and believes.**

**Mary, Peter, John, Thomas and all the disciples, plus many others, witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, first-hand. They saw with their own eyes, the Risen Saviour walk, talk, stand among them, and according to Luke’s version of the gospel, eat fish and break bread with them. The disciples were eyewitnesses to the Risen Jesus, just days after they had witnessed his passion, his death, and his burial. Many details of these encounters are recorded in the New Testament for us to study and to believe in, and many more will probably remain**

unknown to Christians because they were not recorded in the gospels for us to hear.

My sense is that the experience of those first eyewitnesses as believers, and how they were profoundly affected by their encounters with the Risen Messiah, has similarities to how I was affected by witnessing my children catch that lake trout and bring it to the dock, so that I could share in their experience. As Christians today, some two thousand years removed from first century Palestine, we are some of the ones whom Jesus described as those who have never seen the Risen Messiah yet continue to believe in His Resurrection.

We are told that there were many more signs that Jesus did in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in the books of Holy Scripture. Yet we, being God's children, have been given the blessing of having many of the stories written down in the gospels so that we may continue to believe in Jesus Christ, as Messiah and the Son of God. And, because of our relationship with the Resurrected Saviour, we can have eternal life in his holy name.

To me, that means that I don't need to see first-hand the power of God at work in the world so that I can come into relationship with my God. My faith, through the grace of God, is the path that opens the door to salvation. Faith is all I need to have a right relationship with my Creator.

Jesus also shared his peace, his shalom, his blessing with the disciples in that room, in Jerusalem. Jesus shares His peace with us, even in these times of global pandemic. And for some, peace even in the face of death. God has promised that He will never abandoned us. For that, we give thanks to God, our Creator and Sustainer. Amen.

