

An old man went to the Doctor complaining that his wife could barely hear. The Doctor suggested a test to find out the extent of the problem. “Stand far behind her and ask her a question, and then slowly move up and see how far away you are when she first responds.” The old man, excited to finally be working on a solution for the problem, ran home and saw his wife preparing supper. “Honey” the man asks standing around 20 feet away “what’s for supper?” After hearing no reply he tried it again 15 feet away, and again nothing. Then again, at 10 feet away and again he heard no response. Finally he was 5 feet away, “Honey what’s for supper?” She turned around and stared him down, saying, “For the fourth time it’s lasagna!”

A couple of few ago, there was a special on the History Channel about Jesus’ early life. It was advertised as a show that would let you in on some little-known information. I knew that it would do no such thing. But I watched. And it didn’t really talk about Jesus as much as it talked about what it would have been like to be a Nazarene peasant who worked with his hands. Which is really all they could do because Scripture is silent about Jesus’ life during that time. Programs such as that are part of a scholarship movement that started decades ago and seeks to understand, “the Historical Jesus,” that is, the *man* Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter from Nazareth.

Now there is absolutely nothing wrong with any program about the Historical Jesus, *if* you know what you are watching – someone’s theory – and as long as you keep

in mind what the old radio commentator, Paul Harvey used to talk about as, “The *rest* of the story.”

Thomas the twin, wasn't in the locked room when Jesus first appeared to the Disciples – that's what John tells us. We don't know where Thomas was. And this must have been a strange time for the Disciples. They all wanted desperately to see Jesus again and to find out that He had, in fact been resurrected. And yet, if they were honest with themselves, the *last* person they wanted to see was Jesus. Judas betrayed Him. Peter denied that he knew Jesus, three times! *All* the men had run away when He needed them. They must have sat in that room and said, “So what happens if He *does* come back? Will he tell us that whatever happens to us now is what we deserve? At the very least, he'll blow up at us, the way He blew up in the Temple, and tell us how we are hypocrites for letting Him down the way we did.”

But instead of being angry or hurt, Jesus came through the locked door and greeted them with, “Shalom,” “Peace be with you.” Not once did He say anything to them about their shortcomings. Instead, He told them that they had work to do. And He breathed the Holy Spirit on them to empower them for mission. When Thomas met up with the disciples again, they were all relieved and elated, and they wanted to tell him about the Lord appearing to them. Thomas though, would have none of it. He said, “Unless I see him, unless I put my fingers in the nail holes and my hand in His side, I will not believe.”

This is what the Church used to refer to as “Doubting Thomas Sunday” and on this day we often talk about Thomas as if he's significantly less than the other Disciples

because of this particular incident. Isn't that interesting? We never talk about Peter as less than the other disciples and he denied Jesus. Not only that, Jesus once referred to Peter as, "Satan," because Peter didn't understand Jesus' mission. We don't refer to James and John as lower than everyone else, even though they got in trouble with Jesus for wanting to be exalted above the other disciples. No. It's Thomas that we pick on. We even call each other "doubting Thomas" when we have questions about things.

Well ... here is the *rest of the story*. Here's the part that is not available to those who only want to know "historically" about Thomas. You see, he *wasn't* less faithful than the other Disciples. Thomas was simply in a different place, both literally and spiritually, than were the other Disciples on that first evening when Jesus appeared. His personal faith included his doubt, just as ours does. Thomas' faith had to be formed by his working with and through that doubt in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the same is true of us. We must examine our doubts and work through them in prayer before we can recognize our own true faith.

Isn't it fascinating that after Thomas demanded to see and touch the wounds, when Jesus made that very offer to him, the disciple did *not* reach out and touch Him, instead he gasped, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas needed Jesus to reaffirm for him that all that he believed was still true, and that is exactly what Jesus did, and continues to do today.

The theologian, Paul Tillich said that doubt is not the opposite of faith, "it is one element of faith." If a person does not doubt, that person can never really have faith. You

see, certainty – not doubt – is the opposite of faith. Those who are certain, have no need of faith. They know what they know and that is that. Faith – believing in something *not* seen – doesn't enter into the picture, *because* they have certainty.

I have certainty that the world is round – I've seen the pictures from space. I no longer need to have faith that this is true, in order not to worry about falling off the edge. Therefore, in my certainty, faith that the world is not flat, is now obsolete for me.

The Historical Jesus movement is about certainty. In the 21st Century it only makes sense that people would want to objectively prove the veracity of the Gospel story. In this age of scientific certainty, we *want* to read that an archeologist dug up something that shows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus was the Son of God, who became human to live among us and then died on a cross, only to be resurrected three days later, so that we might also conquer death.

But that is not possible. That is not the way God works.

God knows that in an odd, paradoxical sort of way, if we found undeniable proof that Jesus was the resurrected Christ, it would probably be the end of Christianity (and if not all of Christianity, at least the Church as we know it). We would no longer have need of belief. Just as you no longer hear anyone seriously talking about the shape of the earth – is it really flat or is it round – so you would possibly not hear anyone talking about Jesus if we had irrefutable proof that the Gospel accounts were true.

Jesus said, “blessed are those who have *not* seen, and yet believe.” That is US! Jesus blessed all the disciples who were in the room that day. He breathed on them and

put the Holy Spirit into their midst so that they would receive that blessing and use its power to go into the world to do the work He gave them to do. But He has blessed *us* in that way as well. We believe in what we cannot see, and in that belief we too have been given the blessing of the Holy Spirit in *our* lives – the power of the Resurrected Christ with us on the journey.

The Greek writer, Nikos Katzantzakis tells the story of an old monk who, all his life had wanted desperately to see the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built on the spot where Jesus was buried. He saved his money and told everyone, “I’m going to the Holy Sepulcher and I’m going to march around it three times and pray.” As he left to begin the trip to Jerusalem, he passed an emaciated man, digging roots in a field. The man asked where he was going and the monk replied, “To Jerusalem to see the Holy Sepulcher. I’m going to march around it three times and pray.” The man said, “that trip must cost a lot of money.” When the monk acknowledged that it would cost his life savings, the man said, “Father, why not march around me three times and give me the money so that my wife and children might have food.” And the monk did. That monk never *saw* where Christ was *buried*. Instead, he saw where Christ was alive and living – in other people.

All of the historical, archeological, and sociological studies of first century Palestine and this quest to find out who the man, Jesus really was, are interesting endeavors. But I don’t believe that they bring anyone closer to the risen Christ. Our faith is *not* about knowing *who* Jesus is. Instead, it is about **KNOWING JESUS**. Thomas said that if he could see, he would believe.

We believe and therefore we see!

Go into the world to love and serve the Lord and you will, through your belief in Him, meet the risen Christ in those you love and serve!

In the name of that same risen Christ, Amen.