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March 30, 2008

John 20:19-31

“Just the facts, ma’am.”

Dragnet’s Detective Friday’s famous line tells it like it is. We want facts. We don’t just want them, but in many cases we need them. Our TV is overrun with programs that search out the facts. There are all the Crime Scene Investigation shows: CSI Las Vegas, CSI New York, CSI Miami. There are all the Law & Orders: Law & Order Special Victims Unit, Law & Order Criminal Intent. There is even a show, Mythbusters, that sets out to bust myths through scientific experiments. We live in a culture that demands facts. We don’t just believe things because someone told us about it.

If I told you that the sky was going to be purple tomorrow, I don’t think that any of you would believe I was being serious. After I explain all the facts about atmospheric gas and the position of the sun and why all of those things together will make the sky turn purple tomorrow, you might start to believe me. But most of you still would want to hold out. You would want to wait until tomorrow, when you could actually see for yourself if the sky was purple and then you would believe.

And I don’t blame you. You don’t want to run around telling everyone that the sky is going to be purple when it really isn’t. It is like getting an e-mail about some crazy urban legend that you forward to your whole address book, only to find out later that it is all just a hoax. We don’t want to look dumb. We don’t want to look gullible. We don’t want to end up on the wrong side of the equation.

So, it is easy to look at this story and make Thomas out to be the scapegoat. Oh silly Thomas, he didn’t believe his friends. He didn’t believe that Jesus had really been resurrected. He didn’t want to run around town and spread the news that Jesus was alive and then end up looking like a fool when it wasn’t true.

We look at Thomas and think, I wouldn’t have asked for proof. I am so faithful, I would have just believed immediately. Seriously?... Seriously? Who are you kidding? You know that you would have wanted some proof too, even if you weren’t brave enough to speak up and say it out loud. And why would you believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead? It’s not like it was an everyday occurrence. You haven’t known other people to just miraculously come back to life. Of course it is a little hard to believe.

And if you look at the story closely, it’s not like the other disciples had this tremendous faith that Thomas was lacking. They didn’t know what to think when Mary Magdalene told them that she had seen the Lord. They were all confused as well. They wanted to see for themselves that Jesus was alive and not just take Mary’s word for it. And they got their wish. Jesus appeared to them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he **SHOWED** them his hands and his side!!! They got their proof. They may not have flat out asked for it like Thomas did, but they didn’t have to, because Jesus beat them to the punch and went ahead and showed them.

We look at this story and we want to be better than Thomas. We want to be like those blessed people that have not seen and yet have come to believe. And while that is all fine and good, a little doubt here and there is not always a bad thing. Doubt gets a bad wrap. We think of people who doubt as being “less than” somehow. We see doubt as a lack of faith. But who

among us hasn't doubted at some point in time? Who among us has waltzed through life with nothing bad ever happening that makes us question a little? We tend to hold up this unrealistic ideal of what it means to be faithful. But I would like to contend that being faithful also requires a healthy dose of doubt.

If we never have any doubt, then we aren't really growing and maturing in our faith. Doubt helps us to think critically about something. To wrestle with an issue and come out on the other side stronger for it. Doubt runs deep in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah doubt that they will have a child. Moses doubts his ability to be a public speaker. Esther doubts that she can stand up to the king. Jeremiah doubts his age. Mary doubts she can bear the Son of God. Peter doubts he can walk on water. Doubt, doubt, doubt. All of these faithful people struggled with doubt at some point or another in their life. And God didn't think less of them. God didn't cast them aside and go look for more faithful followers. God uses their doubt to make their belief stronger.

Not having any doubt, ever is NOT a prerequisite for faith. In fact, as theologian Paul Tillich says, "Serious doubt is confirmation of faith." Unquestioned, unexamined, unwavering faith is not realistic and is not a healthy, mature faith. Everyone has periods of doubt and struggle. And that is why being a part of the body of Christ is so important. We help and support one another, especially when one of our members is walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We are there to carry each other through the hard times.

However, periods of doubt also need to be just that, periods. We can't let the doubt and the need for proof so overwhelm us that we cannot see the beauty in the mystery. There will never be enough facts or enough proof to satisfy our curiosity. But at some point, we have to close our eyes, and take that first step off the cliff, trusting that God will be there to catch us. Faith is an exercise in believing in what we cannot see and it is hard. And it takes practice, and work, and discipline. And some days we just want to lie on the couch and skip the exercise. But only through our exercise and discipline will we begin to train ourselves to see the hand of God at work in the world. Only with practice will we be able to see the miracles in the everyday that others walk right by. Only through hard work, we will have enough faith to believe in the ridiculous sounding resurrection. Only through our dedication will we be able to live out our calling to be an Easter people- people that believe in the unseen and run out to share the news with the world, not caring if they look at us like fools or not.

Doubting Thomas. That's what we've nicknamed him. But what if we call him Brave Thomas instead. Brave because he had enough courage to speak up and say to his friends, "Wait a minute. How can this be true? I just saw Jesus die. We buried him. And now you are telling me he is alive. I need some time to digest this. It just doesn't seem possible."

You see, by giving voice to those questions and doubts, we give them less control. If we have the courage to say out loud that we are doubting and struggling with something, than we can start to move forward. Doubt only has control over us when we let it. We need to be more willing to voice our doubts and more accepting of others when they doubt.

We can make Thomas the scapegoat and pretend that we are better than him. That we are more faithful and more pious. Or we can be realistic with ourselves. We can see the Thomas that is within each of us. And we can be proud that we are willing to stand up and give voice to our doubts and move forward. Then, through our doubt, Jesus can show up again, let us put our fingers on him and see his wounds, and then we can be renewed in our faith once again. And knowing that God continues to love us, even through our times of doubt, is something that is worth rejoicing! AMEN.