

We have friends who spent a few days in Las Vegas last month. One of their experiences was attending the Penn and Teller show. Donna wrote that they were seated in the second row and that she was called up on the stage to observe one of the tricks. I responded by asking if she had it figured out. Her response was, "No! And I was right there!" Even seeing it so close she could not figure out how they accomplished the illusion. Seeing is not always seeing!

Thomas was not there. He had heard the rumors, the others had told him. The others had seen and witnessed the risen Christ but the story was so incredible. He needed to see Jesus with his own eyes and touch his wounds. Unless I see...

Questions and doubting are not always bad. It is sometimes good to doubt. One of my favorite sayings is, "Without doubt there can be no faith". The favorite question of pre-schoolers is "why". How are we to learn and understand if we don't ask questions, raise doubts? The disciples were asking that about Good Friday. Do you remember the two men on the road to Emmaus? Their words to Jesus were, "We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Their hopes and dreams had been on Jesus. And, now there was this rumor brought by the women, of resurrection. This story was too hard for them to comprehend. They needed a heart/eyes to see. It was only as Jesus broke the bread that their eyes were opened and they saw who was with them.

The disciples were behind locked doors, afraid. Why? Why? What are they going to do now? Jesus appeared and no explanations were given. Jesus just empowered them to tell the story. But, Thomas was not there. We wish we knew why. Maybe he was too far away. Too afraid to make the journey to where they were gathered. Maybe he didn't get the message. Maybe it was just too much for him to take in. There are too many "whys". Why the cross? Why the suffering? And now, resurrection. I am not sure if he was doubting or just trying to get a handle on everything that had happened those past few days. He needed time alone to contemplate. What was he to do now? He had given up everything to follow Jesus.

The others have seen him. They may have tried to convince Thomas. They were meeting again. This time Thomas was there also. Jesus comes as he did before. Jesus understands how hard this has been for them, for Thomas. He showed Thomas his hands and his side (remember he had also done this for the rest, v. 20). They too, did not believe without seeing. They had seen what Thomas wanted to see. Jesus understands how difficult this is for Thomas and knows it will be even more difficult for those who will never see. Jesus makes an acknowledgement that faith is not easy.

What would you long to see? A question that is often asked in parlor/Quaker meeting games, "Who from the past would you like to have dinner with?" I am sure our list would be interesting. I am not sure who I would choose. My list changes from time to time. If I say Jesus, would it change my faith? Would it add anything to my faith? Would it make any difference in my life? Would it make Jesus any more real to others?

What would we talk about? A review of my shortcomings? What I should or should not have done? What I should do now? Would it change how I direct my life? Would it change me?

I wonder if it really changed Thomas? He was a follower. He had committed himself to Jesus and the ministry of Jesus. He had acknowledged Christ as Lord and Savior. He had affirmed his faith and hope in Jesus. Now, he joins the others in having seen the resurrected

Christ. He had witnessed resurrection. Yet, there will be others, millions of others who will come to faith without being witnesses. They will come simply by faith. How blessed are we?

No one can understand the experience of faith until they have experienced it. A poor example; it is hard to understand parenting until you have become a parent. We may think we understand what it means to be a parent, to raise children. We know that our kids would never act the way we just witnessed those kids acting. Never will ours have a temper tantrum in the grocery store when they can't have the cereal they just saw advertised on cartoon this morning. Then we become parents and our whole world view changes. Now we understand.

It is the same with faith. Until, like Thomas, we believe what we cannot see. Until our eyes are opened we cannot truly understand those who walk by faith. But, when our eyes are opened, when we too say, "My Lord and my God" - then we begin to understand what others have been sharing and trying to tell us. There is a hope, a promise, a peace even in the middle of the storms — all is well. Maybe not in the way we want but our faith sustains us through the dark valleys of life.

This table, Christ's table, opens our eyes to the depth of God's love and grace. May our eyes be opened and our faith strengthened as we take bread and cup.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989