

Quite a few years ago, Danville beat Plainfield in a high school football game. **It was a big upset and the people on the Danville side of the field were elated.** I lived in Danville, but worked in Plainfield, and had a fondness for both sides, so I stood in the middle, at the fence, near the goalpost. Dead-center. **The *Hendricks County Flyer* had sent a reporter to cover the game.** The reporter was from Plainfield and when I read his account of the game the next day—if I hadn't been there and seen it with my own eyes—I'd have thought Plainfield had won.

Rivalries.

It is sixty or so years after the death of Jesus. There are, within the early church, different factions, each attached to prominent disciples. One group follows John. **They've written a gospel, the Gospel of John, in which their hero, John, comes off looking wise and heroic.** Another group follows the disciple Thomas. They too have written a gospel—the Gospel of Thomas. It didn't make the final cut when the church decided which books would be in the Bible, but it was nevertheless very popular and widely circulated in the early church. **It won't surprise you to learn that Thomas fared well in that gospel.**

Our gospel reading this morning is from John's gospel, because that is the gospel that won and the winners write the history. It casts Thomas in a poor light, revealing him to be a man of little faith, a doubting Thomas. **His cynicism has become so well-known his name is now associated with distrust and faithlessness.** When I consulted the thesaurus for synonyms for the word *doubt*, the phrase *doubting Thomas* appeared. You know your reputation is well-established when your name appears in the thesaurus.

But this Easter morning, when the belief in resurrection comes easily and naturally, I would like to believe a man's reputation could also be resurrected, that we might look at a man we've always viewed unfavorably and perhaps see him in a new light. **And what better person to start with than Thomas.**

Jesus has been put to death. All the disciples except Thomas are hiding, fearful of further reprisals, worried the leaders aren't done crucifying people, when the resurrected Jesus appears to them. **He wishes them peace, then tells them he is sending them out to tell others about his resurrection.** Just as God sent him, he is sending them. He leaves. Thomas appears. The disciples tell Thomas about the resurrection of Jesus, and that Jesus has commissioned them to go out and tell others the news of his resurrection.

The disciples are excited, they are eager to start. Their fears have been replaced with great enthusiasm. **They begin to make plans.**

“Peter, you go to this city, and James and John, you go to that one. Thomas, you go to that region and tell people what you’ve seen.”

Thomas said, “Hold on. I didn’t see anything. I wasn’t here. And until I see the nail wounds in his hands and touch them with my own fingers, I’m not going to tell anyone anything.”

Now is that doubt? Or is that integrity? Is Thomas a cynic? **Or is Thomas an honest man who will not tell others they must believe something until he knows it for himself to be true?**

You probably have guessed by now that I admire Thomas. **I admire anyone who, in the midst of great pressure to conform, to play the game, to go along, refuses to say something he isn’t sure is true.** Eight days pass. Thomas is sticking to his guns. The disciples are unable to sway him. Geez, I bet they’ve been piling it on. **It’s been an eight-day altar call for Thomas.** A thousand verses of *Just As I Am* and they’re all watching Thomas to see if he’ll come down front. **Maybe they’re even starting to get really mad at him for not going along.** They keep saying, “Let’s go.” And he keeps saying, “Not until I see it for myself.” It is a testament to Thomas that they are unwilling to go without him.

I can imagine what Thomas is thinking. **He is imagining himself out there on the road, telling people Jesus had been killed, but that he'd been raised from the dead.** And the first thing people are going to ask him, when he tells them this, the first thing they're going to ask is, "Did you see him after he'd been raised from the dead?" **And Thomas doesn't want to have to avert his gaze, shuffle his feet, hem and haw, and say, "Well, uh, not exactly. But I know someone who did."** I think Thomas wants to be able to look people square in the face and say, "I did indeed."

I don't think Thomas was a doubter. **I think Thomas was an honest man.** Honest Thomas. And I think Jesus honored his integrity by returning to his disciples once again, this time when Thomas was present, and letting Thomas touch his wounds. **Now Thomas was honest, but that didn't mean he was unreasonably stubborn.** He wasn't worried about saving face. He wasn't concerned that someone might say, "I told you so." He wasn't bent on making his point no matter what. When he was presented with the evidence, he changed his mind. "My Lord and my God," he said. **And he believed.**

There will be times when people will demand you make statements about God, say this thing or that thing about Him, believe this thing or that thing, but it will be something you've not yet experienced. They will want you to testify of something you've not seen, heard, or known.

The shadow of doubt, the flicker of hesitation, will cross your face, and they will pounce, wanting you to believe as fervently as they.

“I thought you were a Christian?”

“Don't you believe in God?”

“I thought you believed in the power of prayer?”

“Don't you believe in miracles?”

When that happens, and it will happen, remember Honest Thomas. Remember the importance of spiritual integrity. **Remember that God never expects us to violate our conscience.** Remember that Jesus visited Thomas not to reprimand him for his faithlessness, but to honor his integrity by letting him see for himself what others had seen.

For our highest obligation to God is not to parrot what others have said about Her, but to speak truthfully and share honestly what we ourselves have seen and known.