

I want to play with you a game of fact or fiction?

There are more trees on Earth than stars in the Milky Way, fact or fiction?

Clouds can weigh hundreds of thousands of pounds?

I have never broken a bone?

Fact or fiction. Is Jesus risen from the dead?

For 10 of the disciples' facts. For 1 fiction.

But even though they knew it was a fact.

Without Jesus, would they do now?

But then, and it is still true today,

Jesus never abandoned them

and he was speaking to them,

and he is still speaking to us.

We are on a journey as we recognize and encounter Jesus

as he appears to his disciples over 50 days.

Asking the question, how does Jesus speak?

Last week...**Jesus appeared to his disciples**

And everyone was there but Thomas.

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas was not with the disciples sitting shivah,

That period of mourning that we talked about last week,

when Jesus first appeared to them.

We don't know why Thomas wasn't with his colleagues.

For whatever reason, Thomas separated himself from the community.

And he missed the moment. He missed the meeting.

But here is the thing ...

When you are in despair and doubt,

the worst thing you can do is separate yourself

from Jesus and your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is my personality type to turn inward

in difficult times and retreat to replenish myself.

But I have learned that you see and hear your way to Jesus

through others and in company with them.

I saw that as we gathered around Mandy's bedside before surgery.

When the disciples told Thomas what happened,

he insisted on believing the impossible only when

he could touch the spear-pierced side and eyeball the wounds.

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Thomas missed out on the experience of the risen Christ.

Their words needed His wounds, Thomas says

Either he was in the wrong place at the wrong time,
or he purposely separated himself from the band of disciples.
(everyone deals with grief and loss differently) always remember that.

But even though he was not there,
the Eleven did not discipline him, or scold him, or expel him.
They held on to him even when he was held in the grip of doubt and disbelief.
(Remember that too)

At the end of the week, when Thomas was back,
sitting Shiva with the disciples, Jesus made a special appearance
and repeated the first Upper Room scenario, as if just for Thomas.

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

And then speaking directly to Thomas...said...

27 “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

We will never know whether Thomas touched Jesus or not. Why? Well, it doesn't say, although it is interesting that at the first appearance, the other disciples did look and didn't get chastised for it. But whether he did or didn't, Jesus invited him to feel free to explore His thorn-pierced brow, nail-scarred hands, spear-thrust side, spike-torn feet. Both Mary Magdalene and Thomas wanted to touch Jesus' body. Mary was told not to hold on to Him too long. Thomas was told it was okay to touch, but once Thomas could, maybe...maybe he no longer needed to.

Thomas was known as Thomas Didymus, meaning the twin
Author Len Sweet, in his book Jesus Speaks
says that Doubt comes with a twin: faith.
Like Thomas Didymus, doubt and faith are twinned, always found together.

The opposite of doubt is not faith but certainty, which banishes faith
Faith without doubt is not a living faith but a dead certainty.

The important thing, anyway, is not knowing how to hear Jesus but actually, hearing Him. You can have your doctrine correct, your orthodoxy right, and know your creeds and still not know Jesus.

But Thomas knew the challenging voice of Jesus.
And when Thomas did come back, he uttered one of the greatest confessions of faith in Jesus in the New Testament:
28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!".

Why did Jesus make it a point to visit Thomas after the resurrection?
After all, the rest of us didn't get to see the risen Savior standing before us; why should he?
Jesus made a special trip just to speak to the one who demanded a sign or proof.
Isn't that what every disciple since the first twelve has secretly wished for at one time or another?
"Give me, just me, a special word, a personal sign, a secret visit."
Prove to me that you exist, God, and I will believe.
There is nothing here in John or anywhere else to lead us to believe that Thomas would have been treated any differently by the disciples had he never seen Christ resurrected.

There is no hint of any exclusion that might have occurred had Thomas not been able to touch the wounds of Christ.
There is no reason to claim that possibility exists but for one thing...
Except for human nature and history.
We fallen human beings have a long and storied history of excluding others because they do not believe as we do.
We like our tribes...Favorite Ice cream? Neapolitan...Neo politician...

We have found some reason to disbelieve the unbeliever.
We have expressed our "us versus them" from our political platforms to the playgrounds, excluding people from our group because they were different or didn't believe as we do.

Why then would it come as any surprise to consider

that Thomas was destined to become the odd man out
for being the one disciple who hadn't witnessed the resurrection?
Would there maybe not intentionally arise
at some point in the decisions and discussions
between the disciples a certain wonder
as to why Jesus never came to see Thomas?
A You just had to be there...

Perhaps they would blame Thomas for not being where
he was supposed to be, and make him a second-class disciple?
Oh Remember, Thomas wasn't there for that.
Maybe he wasn't worthy. Maybe Jesus was telling them something.
Maybe Thomas's quickness to doubt was an indication of his lack of faith.
Then Jesus' visit silences all those voices.
He came back for Thomas. And he comes back for us doubters, too.

It is only when we recognize this human trait of exclusion
that we understand the miracle of Christ's special visitation to Thomas.
What if the purpose of the visitation was not so much for proof as it
was for **restoring Thomas back to the community?**
Thomas eventually would have found his faith in Jesus
even if Jesus had not appeared to him personally.
But would he ever have found his equal standing with his brothers?
And that leaves me asking the question...
Was it the doubt within Thomas that Jesus was addressing?
or what if...ultimately, it was the doubt among others
about Thomas that Jesus set straight?
Have you ever considered that?

So they hear the Master speak to Thomas and
challenge him to touch His wounds.
But what if Jesus turned and looked
at the other disciples and said the last verse **29, Because you have seen me, you have believed;
blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**
What if Jesus wasn't directing these words to Thomas,
but to the rest of the disciples and to us?
Suddenly, it becomes a challenge to the community rather
than a reprimand of Thomas' unbelief.
It becomes a request that His followers
have enough faith to believe that others
may also be disciples without

having to witness actual proof every time.

Alfred Lord Tennyson said **There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.**

But how do we hear and recognize God's voice when we don't have a personal up-close experience like Thomas?

How do I discern when Jesus is speaking to me?

Leonard Sweet says there are four chief ways we can discern the Lord's voice from our own or that of others: What are they?

First the content. When Jesus speaks to you through your thoughts, it doesn't "sound" any different from your own thoughts. What's different, however, is the content of those thoughts. Content from Jesus will always be in harmony with Scripture. It will never contradict it. Jesus' present speaking will always be consistent with what He's said in the past. It will bear the marks of giving and self-sacrifice, which is love—the love that fulfills the Law and the Prophets. In addition, the content will often shed light on the person of Jesus himself. Appearing to Thomas and how he did it showed that.

Second the disposition. When Jesus speaks to us, it will never be out of arrogance, jealousy, anger, or anxiety. Instead, it comes to us with a spirit of peacefulness and goodwill. James gave us a perfect description of the disposition of the Lord's voice,

"But the wisdom from above is first of all pure.

It is also peace-loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. In that connection, Jesus never accuses or condemns his followers. Look at Thomas. Condemnations are the mark of the enemy's voice. By contrast, when Jesus points out something in our lives that he wants us to deal with His correction comes with love and hope.

Third the confidence. When Jesus speaks to us through our thoughts, emotions, or desires, what He says possesses "the ring of truth." that resonates within us.

In other words, we have confidence—or faith—to believe that the Lord is speaking to us.

Jesus voice is then heard by an almost inward knowing.
If you have no faith to believe that a thought, a feeling,
a desire, or an impulse is coming from the Christ, it probably isn't.

Fourth the impression.

There is a certain impression that Jesus' voice makes on us.
His speaking will be accompanied by
life (inspiration) and peace (serenity) in our hearts.
So, when determining whether Jesus is speaking to you
look for a sense of life and peace.
The effect of His speaking into your life will
often be rest, peace, quiet joy, and assurance.
On the other hand, whenever we step out of the will of God,
our spirits will be troubled and disturbed.

These four characteristics will help you
determine whether you are hearing Jesus' voice:
The content of what's said.
The disposition that accompanies it.
The confidence we have that it's the Lord
The impression it makes upon us.

On Saturday night, after our crazy week,
we had tickets to see Michael W Smith in Bowling Green.
It was a worship concert, and he sang everything
from the 1980s to today.
One of my favorite songs is Waymaker.
Written by Sinach, a female worship leader from Nigeria.
Some of the lyrics..

Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
And later in the song, it says
Even when I don't see it, you're working.
You never stop, You never stop working.

There is a lot of doubt and fear in our family
and faith as we await Mandy's brain biopsy results this week.
And in those words
That even when we don't see it

we all have to remember to have faith that God
is with us in our lives and never stops working.
Thomas knew that and lived it.
What about us?