

No Doubt About It
Grace Johnson, Lay Speaker
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Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations in all of our hearts, be pleasing in your sight, O God. . . . Amen

A first grade teacher was reading the story of the Three Little Pigs. She came to the part of the story where the first little pig is trying to find building materials for his home. She said, "and so the pig went up to the man with a wheelbarrow full of straw and said, "Pardon Me Sir, but might I have some of that straw to build my house?" then the teacher asked the class, "and what do you think the man said?" A little boy raised his hand and said. "I know, I know!" He said "Holy Smokes! A talking pig!"

Depending on your own point of view, a talking pig might very well be a *miracle*.

An Oklahoma man was on trial for murder. There was strong evidence that he was guilty, but there was no body. In the defenses closing statement the lawyer, knowing that his client would probably be convicted, resorted to a trick. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, I have a surprise for you all," the lawyer said as he looked at his watch. "Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into this courtroom." He looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly. A minute passed. Nothing happened. Finally the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement. But all of you looked with anticipation. I therefore, put it to you that there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed and insist that you return a verdict of not guilty." The jury clearly confused, retired to deliberate. A few minutes later the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of Guilty. "But how?" inquired the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt; I saw all of you stare at the door." The jury foreman answered: "Oh, we did look sir. But your client didn't."

Doubt!

What a couple of strange weeks it had been. One week the people are welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem with laughter and joy, songs and cheers waving palm fronds in the street so Jesus can be honored. A couple of days later he is arrested, the next day he dies on the cross. The disciples were so shell-shocked they didn't know what to do next.

They all knew what Mary had told them. She had been to the tomb and seen the stone rolled away and the body gone. She came back and told the men that she had seen the Lord and what he had said to her. But did they really *know*? After all she was just a woman. Was she seeing things? Was it just wishful thinking on her part? We know Peter and John had some *doubt*

because they ran to the tomb to check out Mary's story. Sure enough the tomb was empty, so maybe she did see what she said she saw, but really?

You see, you have to be very careful about what you perceive as miracles. There was a hospital where everyone was waiting for a visit from Pope John Paul II. A busy doctor with a handful of paperwork sat down in a wheelchair near the nurse's station, to work on his notes. The Pope swept in and blessed the Doctor as he sat in that chair; he immediately stood up and walked forward. At that, devout believers in the Pope's entourage instantly crossed themselves and rolled their eyes upward. Surely an act of God had occurred in their midst. Surely they had seen a *miracle!*

So the next day they were all sitting in a closed and locked room, shaking in their sandals and wringing their hands, for fear the Jews and the Roman's, the ones that had killed their Lord, would find them and put them to the sword too. They didn't know what to do or where to go. There they were in that room with the doors locked and suddenly there is this guy standing in their midst and he says "Peace be with you." When he first appeared they were afraid but when he said "Peace be with you," and showed them his hands and his side they were convinced it was their beloved teacher. Jesus said to them again "Peace be with you. As my Father sent me, even so I send you."

Remember only when they saw him, heard him and saw the wounds did they believed. Well if that doesn't sound like they also had some *doubt* I don't know what does. But none of them were called Doubting Peter or Doubting James.

No there was no doubt, there was joy in the room Jesus was alive! *Mary had told the truth* they could see with their own eyes. What wonderful news and then Jesus gave them their commission. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." They were to become the voice and hands of Jesus. He breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit!" Then he was gone! That seems like a *miracle* to me.

Can you imagine the conversation? They believed it was him. They celebrated. They were excited, they would be. All of their *doubts* had been dispelled.

Now we have poor "Doubting Thomas". This guy has caught everyone's grief for 2000 years. . . and that will probably go on. . . . for the next however many years. . . . this earth has left until the Lord returns. I personally think that was a bum rap. After all there are two other times that this man played a prominent role. In John 11 when they were on the way to Bethany, . . . the disciples were afraid of the Pharisees. They knew there was a very real possibility that Jesus would be killed. They are afraid. . . . not only for Jesus but for themselves as well. It is this man Thomas (called Didymus) who speaks up and says "Let us also go, . . . that we might die with him." Perhaps Thomas loved him so much that if Jesus were to be stoned to death he

would not want to go on living. So why not "Ready to Die with the Lord, Thomas?" In John 14, Jesus tells the group that he is going to prepare a place for them. He tells them "Where I am going you know and the way you know." Thomas says "Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?" So why not "Thomas the Questioner?" Reverend Thomas Barclay in the 18th century said that, "Thomas was a man who could not live with an unasked question." However, what is even worse than being called Doubter, is that the name "Thomas" his name, was not really a name. No, it is an Aramaic word for "twin." And Didymus, which is a Greek word, also means "twin." It is a bit like calling him "twin, twin." It has of course become a legitimate name so if your name is Thomas we won't call you twin. There is a lot of speculation in a lot of different commentaries about who his twin was, but no one could say for certain. To be sure, we really don't know much about Thomas. For instance we don't know why he was absent from the room, . . . perhaps he had to arrange for food and drink for the rest of them. He might have left because he needed air; to gather his thoughts; to try and make sense of this horrible thing that had happened. Maybe. . . he just needed to be alone in his grief, who knows. We do know he missed a lot by being absent. He missed things that could never be duplicated. Oh yes, the others told him about it but there are some things that you just have to see for yourself.

This is a good picture of why being faithful to your church is so important. You just never know what you might miss when you fail to come to church.

Thomas missed a lot by being absent that day. Now imagine he comes back to the room and he is greeted with "Thomas, Thomas we have seen the Lord, Yes Thomas, we have." I can just hear him "Oh sure, well I'm from Missouri, when I can see and touch the wounds in his hands side, I will believe you." He was only asking for the same proof the rest of the disciples had already seen.

How many of you have doubts? I am sure if we are honest with ourselves we all have doubts, about a lot of things. There are lots of people out there who want to take advantage of us. We all have to be skeptical about things, so doubt is not a bad thing. Doubt comes from the Latin and means "to be of two minds, to stand at the crossroad, to look in two directions." So while we have some doubt we also need to believe.

It is important to remember that doubt is different than non-belief. Doubt is a problem of intellect, the person wants to believe, but has questions. A person who has non-belief will not believe no matter what it sees.

The very next week they are once again together in the upper room with the doors locked and Jesus appears. Once again he says "Peace be with you." This time he goes to Thomas and invites him to touch the wounds. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand

out, put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe. "Now Thomas didn't actually touch the wounds, he looked and then he said "My Lord and My God!" Jesus asked him "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Then he said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe." That is a real miracle . . . We, the believers of today believe even though we have never seen.

"My Lord and my God!" those words are the most powerful confession of Jesus' identity in the Gospel! Thomas sees God fully revealed in Jesus. It is important to remember that Thomas does not touch Jesus; it is Jesus' offer of himself that brings Thomas to faith. All he needed was to see him, pretty much the same as the rest of the disciples.

Verses 30 and 31 tell us that Jesus did many other signs (another word for Miracles) in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name. Here then is the reason for writing Gospel of John. It was so the readers, you and I, may believe that Jesus is the true Messiah and the Son of God. And by Believing, we will have eternal life in His name.

Apparently Thomas never doubted again. After Pentecost, the bible never mentions him again. History does tell us the Thomas traveled east, preaching the Gospel through Persia. He went on to India where he had a fruitful ministry. There are several churches in India today that can trace their roots back to the time of Thomas. Eventually, enemies of the Lord took Thomas and killed him with a spear. He died for his Lord, bringing converts to him. Probably just the way he would have wanted to go. He is revered as a saint in both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Today millions of people stubbornly want to witness miracles or see Jesus in person before they will believe in him. God asks us to come to him in faith. To be the blessed, who have not seen, yet have believed.

Glenn Ludwig tells the story about a Pastor who saw a miracle happen in the life of a 15 year-old girl, during a weekend retreat. Quite, reserved, shy, brilliant and troubled: that's how he described her. All weekend her hollow, lifeless eyes searched for answers to gnawing questions that eroded her life and spirit and made her dark and despondent. But something happened: Her eyes became more restless and alert. She was searching and somehow she knew she was close to something.

The group had spent the weekend on the theme "Discovery" and had talked about discovery of self, of others, and of God. And as another 15 year-old shared the pain of her older sister's recent suicide, the dam broke and water, like baptism, washed a face that hadn't cried in a very long time.

Later on that evening, the group did a Bible study around Luke 9 where Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?" And later in the chapter where Jesus lays out the conditions for discipleship: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." When the Pastor asked the group what that sounded like --they answered, . . . a commercial,.. a Sunday school lesson,.. a parent laying down another rule-- the young girl with the tear-stained face responded: "It sounds to me like something worth giving my life to."

The Pastor said "I sat with Thomas that night in the form of a 15-year-old girl and we shared some bread and juice in the presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

Do you see? Out of the struggle with honest doubt, a faith can be born, and new life can begin. Now *that* is a miracle. No doubt about it.

Let all God's People say.....

Amen