

# "Will it affect your life?"

John 20:19-31

April 23, 2006

There was a pastor that seemed to have a very apologetic nature - he was always very careful not to offend. One Sunday morning as he was delivering his sermon he came to realize that it seemed a little too forceful and directive for his comfort zone. So as he was wrapping up the message he concluded by saying, "Of course, if anything I have said will seriously affect your life or offend you in any way - please feel free to disregard everything I have said."

There was a young lady who was ready to go away to college. She had been raised in a Christian home. She was an only child and her parents were very protective of her. She got a scholarship to a large state school. Her parents were afraid of the people she would meet at this school and of how they might influence her. A few days before she was to leave for college, her mother had a talk with her. During this conversation, her mother shared with her a great fear that she had. She told her daughter that she was afraid that others at school would persecute her when they learned that she was a Christian. When the daughter came home for Christmas break, she said to her mother, "You have nothing to worry about. I have been at school since August and no one even suspects that I am a Christian!"

Does it matter that you are a Christian? Will it affect your life? Does anyone know? How would anyone know?

There was a man named Sam who knelt in pray one day to seek God's guidance for his life. As he prayed he said: "God, what do you want me to do with my life?" To his surprise he got an immediate answer - clearly he heard God say: "Oh, I don't know, Sam, surprise me!"

There they were - 10 disciples gathered in a room - hiding in fear - not sure what to do with their lives now. They did not dare tell the world that they were followers of Christ. They could not really understand what was happening. They had been through too much in recent days - from Hosannas to a stone covered tomb .... and then a stone that had been seal shut but mysteriously opened and the unbelievable word of a risen Jesus. Of course they all wanted it to be true ..... We all want it to be true ..... but is it? What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to respond? Will any of it affect our lives? What if it is not true - given the whole story is it easy to doubt.

**They all did? They all were afraid to believe and act on what seemed too unbelievable to be true. But it is only Thomas that gets the bad name - 'good old doubting Thomas'.**

**Every year on the Sunday after Easter we encounter this moment with Thomas. We want to focus on this one persons doubts. But all of the disciples stood together - all, even those who had been given the visual evidence the week before, stood together - not knowing what to make of the whole thing. One thing that really amazes me about the text as I read it again this past week was that Jesus returned to the disciples a second time in that locked room. For some reason Thomas had not been with the rest of the disciples when Jesus had appeared the first time. But now Thomas was there - back among the group. I could almost imagine the conversation that must have taken place between Thomas and the other disciples between the first and second appearance of Jesus - how they must have tried to convince him that Jesus had actually been there - that He was really risen. It must have be frustrating to both sides. How do you convince someone of what you believe to be true? How do you make sense of that Gospel event that seems so impossible? And what are you going to do about what you believe? - - - Now Thomas is there. There is no indication that he is any less accepted by the rest of the fellowship for all of his questions and doubts. And there is no indication of what the other disciples are thinking now. --- But there to that first Christian congregation Jesus comes again. -- Does He come just because of Thomas? Did the rest of the disciples need more encouragement? What ever the reason, Jesus came back to where the disciples were gathered and after pronouncing a greeting of peace to all He specifically addressed the doubts of Thomas.**

**Does it make a difference? In those moments in the presence of the risen Jesus, Thomas makes the boldest - the most direct, the most far reaching proclamation regarding Jesus that we will find in scripture. With the doubts faced head on, Thomas looks at Jesus and says: "You are my Lord and my God!"**

**The poet Alfred Lloyd Tennyson once said: "There lives more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds." So we find ourselves crying out, as did the disciple off old: Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief. Doubt - questions - these are nature. The Easter proclamation goes against everything we see in our world. Our questions push us to honest faith and to a consideration of what we must do in response to what we come to believe. Hopefully, we can come to stand with Thomas in his courageous statement of faith. Hopefully, the celebration of Easter and our continued gathering together will lead us to the conclusion that this risen Jesus is my Lord and my God.**

The early Christians held firmly to that belief. It took some time for the disciples to dare to break out of the room in which they hid - in which they encountered the risen Jesus. But when they did - it was with the powerful presence of God's presence in the Holy Spirit. When they did the lives of people were changed. When they did, the Christian Church was born and began to grow. When the disciples finally acted on their faith, the book of Acts tells us that people began to sell everything they had and give it to the disciples so that all of the believers shared everything in common.

We have no definitive evidence but an ancient legend tells that after Easter, says the story, the disciples divided up the world for their missionary endeavors. Thomas was assigned India. At first, he refused to go. Anywhere else, but not there. According to the legend, the King in India planned to build a palace. Searching for carpenters, his servant came to Jerusalem. Jesus met him. "Would you buy a carpenter?" asked Jesus. "Yes." "I have a slave that is a carpenter, and I desire to sell him," said Jesus, pointing to Thomas in the distance. They agreed on a price, and Thomas was sold. The contract read, "I, Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, acknowledge that I have sold my slave, Thomas." When they came to Thomas, the servant of the king of India pointed to Jesus and asked the disciple, "Is this man your master?" "Indeed he is," replied Thomas. "I have bought you from him," said the Indian. Thomas prayed and he realized that as Jesus' servant he indeed must go. "I will go where you will, Lord Jesus; your will be done." What he actually built in India was not a palace of wood but a church of people.

What will you do with your doubts? What will you do with your faith? Let your faith show. Surprise Jesus with your life.

AMEN