

“Show and Tell”
John 20:19-31
April 23, 2017
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When I was in early elementary school, my favorite part of the school day was Show and Tell. Do they still do that? I have no idea. But I enjoyed it when it was my turn to bring something special from home and show it everyone else and then tell the rest of the kids about why it was important to me. I also liked seeing what it was that the other kids brought because it often was something that I hadn't seen before, or thought about or experienced, and so it was opening up something new to me. And it was more than elementary school too. Whenever my brother would come home with something new and interesting, I'd ask him, “Can I see it?” And he would hold it up and say, “See?” But he used to laugh and not let me hold it in my hands. I hated that, because I loved Show and Tell.

I still do. Over the years some of you have commented how much you enjoy seeing the Children's Sermon each Sunday. More than one of you have said that you get more out of the Children's Sermon than you do out of the regular one. That's ok, because lots of times the Children's Sermon is Show and Tell. It is showing something to the children and telling them something about it as a teaching tool about God. It's Show and Tell. Maybe I've never really grown beyond that joy of Show and Tell in elementary school.

Thomas didn't either. He was all about show and tell. History calls him Doubting Thomas and he is looked down upon because he insisted on being shown evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, he wasn't ready to believe just because his friends told him it was so. They told him they had seen Jesus and he doubted. He claimed this faith was based on seeing and touching. “Unless I see the marks of the nail and touch his hands and side, I won't believe.” So history calls him Doubting Thomas. Shouldn't he have believed just because the others told him it was so? Wouldn't you? Or would you?

Do you need Show and Tell? We criticize Thomas but isn't that what we need also? The other disciples needed Show and Tell also. Did you notice in the text that the very first part of the passage

when Jesus first appears on Easter evening, he “came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced.” They got to see his hands and side and afterwards they rejoiced, believing it was truly him. Thomas only wanted what they had already received, right? Evidence that it was truly Jesus. Jesus came with Show and Tell. And that's what Thomas wanted too. And when Jesus came a week later, that's exactly what he got. And he believed.

Don't we want the same thing? Wouldn't we like to see Jesus? To have the evidence of our eyes, of our senses, that this Christian faith is real? That's what I want. But do we get it? I don't know about you, but unlike the disciples, Jesus has not appeared to me. Probably not to you either. So how do we believe without Show and Tell? The story here seems to say that we should believe because of the message that the disciples tell us, we should believe in Christ because we believe what the apostles preach and teach in the word of the Bible. Is that why you believe?

There's a book that comes down to us from ancient tradition called the Acts of Thomas and it tells the stories about what happens to Thomas after the resurrection. In the very beginning of that book the disciples have a lottery to see where each of them will go and preach the Good News of Jesus. They literally divide the world up among themselves, writing the names of countries on stones and having a blind draw. Thomas, of course draws India, which according to his way of thinking, was literally the end of the world. He immediately says, “I'm not going to India.” But later when he is by himself, Jesus appears to him again and Thomas reiterates “I'm am not going to the Indians.” Unfortunately for Thomas, a merchant by the name of Abban happens by. Abban has been dispatched by a certain Indian king named Gondaphorus to find and suitable carpenter or builder for a new palace. Jesus approaches Abban, slyly introduces himself as “son of the carpenter Joseph,” and tells him that thomas is his slave and a good builder also. Jesus will, he says, sell Thomas to Abban if Abban wishes. Abban agrees to the deal, approaches Thomas, and asks if Jesus is indeed his master. Like he did in our passage from John, Thomas says, “Yes, he is my Lord,” thus stepping into the trap Jesus has laid for him.

Abban takes Thomas to India and eventually he meets Gondaphorus and agrees to build for him a large, splendid palace. Thomas tells Gondaphorus what he needs—wood, ploughs, yokes, balances, and pulls, and ships and oars and masts—and Gondaphorus, impressed, immediately hands him the money to begin work. But Thomas spends all of Gondaphorus's money on the poor and needy in the surrounding villages. When Gondaphorus gets wind of this, he begins to ponder the manner in which he will have Thomas put to death. But before Gondaphorus can act, his brother, God, becomes very sick, falls into a coma, and has a vision of Gondaphorus's palace, which has indeed been built by Thomas, but in Heaven rather than on earth. When God returns from his dream, he tells his brother what he saw. Soon enough, the brother's souls are put “at ease” by Thomas and both are baptized. Of course that is just a legend. Do we know whether the apostle Thomas actually went to India? No, we really don't. We do know that when in the 1490s Portuguese Catholics finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and made their way into the Indian Ocean they eventually made their way to the southwest coast of India where they found a flourishing Christian Church already there, who claimed St. Thomas as their founder all those years ago.

I suppose what this story tells me is that we do need Show and Tell. The Gondaphorus did not just need to be told the Good News. He needed to be shown. The Indians who became Christian didn't do so because they just heard the message of Jesus, they saw it lived out in the person of Thomas, or whoever came to share with them about Jesus Christ. And that's true for me too. Do I believe because as a youth I read this story of doubting Thomas at a time of my own doubt? That may have planted the seed, but I came to faith because I saw people who were living out their faith in Jesus and I wanted what they had. I continue in my faith in Jesus Christ because the women and men I most want to emulate in my life are people of faith. They are people who have not only been clear to me that they are believers in Jesus, but they live it out. And I want to be like that.

Show and Tell. I love Show and Tell. So did Thomas. So, I think, does God. God likes to Show and Tell the Good News of Jesus. But he doesn't send the resurrected Jesus around anymore, he's ascended

into heaven. Instead he has you. You are God's Show and Tell. You are who he uses not just to tell people about Jesus, but to show them. Do people see Christ in you? In me? In us here together? Earlier in John, Jesus tells the disciples “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” That's one of the most important ways that we are to show Jesus to the world, by our love for each other. Do we do that? Do we treat each other better because we are followers of Jesus together. But Jesus also tells us to love our neighbor—whether they are of the same religion or race or group as we are nor not. Do we do that? Have we learned to love because we are Christians, because that is Jesus' commandment for us? Do we welcome the stranger, do we feed the hungry, care for the sick, visit those who are in prison, give hope to the grieving, give shelter to the refugee, just because that is what Jesus asks? Do we gather here in worship, our voices raised in joy, our lives knowing peace, because that is what Jesus gives us? Can someone look at us and say, “HmMMM, they must be Christians”?

Thomas and the rest of the apostles were God's show and tell. So are we.