

WHAT A TALE!!!

One of the challenging coaching that I see on Bull Street is usually an adult teaching a blind person to use the cane. And anytime I read or hear today's gospel about Thomas, I begin to wonder what his statement means to the blind. Any time I hear or read the gospel, I begin to wonder that if our faith was dependent on what we see, how can the blind ever be a part of salvation's story? I believe we all want to see. We value sight and our ability to see. To see is to be able to connect you with whatever you may be looking at.

To many, Thomas is a clear representation of those of us who not only believe in the power of sight but also believe that the life of faith thrives on what we see. For good or for bad, what we see is what we see, and more often than not, what we see does not deceive us. If we see red or green or yellow at the stop light, that's what we see. We may have a different language in describing what we see but it does not mean that we are oblivious to what we see.

There is a story of two men who shared a hospital room together. One was Joe and the other was John. John's bed was closer to the door and so he could only see the hallway when someone opens the door. Joe's bed on the other hand was by the window, and by virtue of that, he could "see" the world beyond the walls of the hospital room. And as you know, in many hospitals where rooms are shared, there is always a curtain that separates patients, and so a curtain separated John and Joe. John could not see Joe, and Joe could not see John. But in spite of the fact that they could not see each other, they developed some kind of friendship and kept each other company by talking every now and then.

Every morning, John will call out to Joe "Good morning Joe, how is the weather outside?" Joe will provide John with an elaborate description of the weather, by telling John that the sun is up, the weather is so beautiful and I can see people sitting or lying on the grass, kids running around, people walking or running. He usually ended his description with; the weather is so beautiful outside. John and Joe went through this routine every morning and it was as if Joe worked for the Time Warner Cable Weather Channel.

But one morning, when John called out to Joe, there was no response. He called again and again and there was still no response and so out of frustration, he paged the nurse. When the nurse came, he asked where Joe was and what had happened to him.

The nurse broke the sad news to John that Joe passed away in the night. The nurse noticed that John was sad and appeared to be grieving and so she asked if there was anything that she could do for him. John then told the nurse that because Joe's bed was by the window, he had been giving him the weather update every morning.

The nurse appeared very surprised and so she asked, "You mean Joe gave you the weather update every morning? John answered yes. And the nurse said, but Joe was blind. How could someone who was blind be giving you a weather update every morning? Did you not know he was blind? John replied, no I did not know he was blind. What a tale!!!

Oftentimes, what we hear and read about our Christian faith and especially of pivotal events like the resurrection, make the faith sounds more like the revelation John made to the nurse. And for some of us, there is always the temptation to regard the resurrection event upon which our faith depends as a tale.

This is because in our minds, there is no greater tale than a story that defies conventional wisdom. But one thing we must also recognize is that the whole Jesus event falls into that category.

And so for me, the legitimate question is and should be, how can those of us who are far removed from the original event still find meaning and purpose in it? How can we hold up and hold on to a story about an event which we did not witness and whose relevance is esoteric at best?

If Thomas, who was part of the disciples, if he ministered with Jesus, bore witness to the goodnews with Jesus, broke bread with Jesus, saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead and also witnessed the countless miracles that Jesus performed, if Thomas did not believe what his friends told him about the risen Christ, what makes me think that you should believe what I tell you about Jesus Christ?

But if my witness or any other person's witness about the risen Christ can gain any traction with you, that person must first experience the risen Christ. I must not only find a greater meaning and relevance in my witness but I must have also experienced the risen Christ in a way that both affirms me and challenges what I think I know about myself, my neighbor and the world.

Remember, what the disciples told Thomas was, "We have seen the Lord" and not something like, someone told us that he/she has seen the Lord. And so, not only must I have seen the risen Christ, but we must continue to be open to the possibility of experiencing the risen Christ in a way that defies conventional wisdom.

That will mean that we can no longer situate the resurrection in the first century, neither can we confine it to that century, because for the resurrection of Jesus to be accessible and beneficial to all, it must transcend time, and it must be as present a reality to you and me as it was to the first witnesses.

As a matter of fact, we can not demand to see the mark of the nails and the wounds, to do so will suggest the rejection of the presence of Christ in communal structures and actions that evoke a new way of being in the world, a new way of faithfulness, liberation and love.

But worse than that, it will mean that either you or I or any blind person you know will have to see in order to believe. But thanks be to God that we do not have to see in order to believe. Thanks be to God that we do not have to see Christ in order to believe he is risen from the dead. Thanks be to God that our walk with Him is made possible and strengthened not by our sight but by our faith in Him. Amen.